SPEAKING CLEARLY
The Basics of Voice and Articulation

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How fortunate it would be if we were all able to follow easily Hamlet’s advice to the players. Unfortunately, instead of speaking “trippingly,” we sometimes trip or stumble and fall over our words. Listeners may say, “Speak up,” “Repeat that, please,” or maybe even, “Huh?” Some of our voices are too soft, too loud, too rough, or too breathy; articulation may be incomplete or indistinct. For many reasons, some of us may need help to improve our speaking ability.

This text is designed for just that purpose: to help you to understand how speech is produced and to guide you in the improvement of your speech production. Specifically, it provides instruction in the processes of respiration, phonation, resonation, and articulation and their coordination in pronunciation and effective vocal expression.

Based on professional users’ reviews, the organization of this fifth edition remains the same as the previous ones. The artwork and charts have been completely redone and two new appendices have been added.

In the first chapter, the dialects of American speech are presented. This discussion is followed by basic information about speech production.

In Chapter 2, the process of respiration is described, with emphasis on breathing for speech. Updated terminology is introduced in our discussions of phonation and resonation in Chapters 3 and 4. Vocal production is explained behaviorally.

Chapters 5 through 8, on articulation, present both diacritic and phonetic symbols for each of the sounds of Standard American English. The International Phonetic System used is from the Longman Advanced American Dictionary. In the articulation chapters, each sound is defined and described on a single page. Its facing page contains practice material (single words, contrasting word pairs, sentences, and a tongue twister). New word pairs and word lists are introduced and arranged in consistent order. Word pairs for consonants emphasize the more troublesome contrasts and likely substitutions.

Chapter 9, on pronunciation, demonstrates common pronunciation faults and gives exercises to correct them. Chapter 10, on vocal variety and expression, illustrates different pitch, time, and loudness patterns. The use of “stair step” sentences is particularly effective for the visualization of pitch changes. Chapter 11, as before, contains a wide selection of readings.
Appendix A provides worksheets for voice and articulation analysis. Frequently mispronounced words are listed in Appendix B to provide pronunciation practice and vocabulary development in conjunction with Chapter 9. The Appendix C provides instruction and practice for students wishing to learn different dialects and accents for acting. Appendix D is written for students coming to English from other languages, particularly Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. Appendix E describes consonant blends, and Appendix F presents the relationships between spelling and pronunciation.

The exercises throughout this text have been selected from those used successfully in a large college voice and articulation program (900 students per year). An Instructor’s Manual is available with this edition. It contains diagnostic tests for vowels and selected consonants and sample test questions. Especially useful is the transparency master section which contains eighteen anatomical line drawings, as well as the complete pronunciation lists from Appendix B, prepared for easy duplication.

We are indebted to James E. Hansen, M.D. for his review of the respiration chapter and to our students and colleagues at LACC for their insightful suggestions. We would also like to give special thanks to the following reviewers: Dwight Freshly, University of Georgia; Douglas Harris, Illinois State University; and Elaine Klein, Westchester Community College.

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James G. Luter, Jr.
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You are unique.

Unlike the nonhuman inhabitants of our planet, you can speak. Like other humans, you do so in your own personal way. Your speech has been influenced by those around you—your family, friends, and teachers. Nevertheless, your voice, pronunciation, vocabulary, and manner of speaking are, like your fingerprints, original. This uniqueness makes you special.

At some point you have probably heard yourself talk on an audio and/or video recording. More than likely, you heard some characteristics in your speech that you did not like. Perhaps you mumbled or ran words together. You may have found that you kept your mouth nearly closed while speaking, hardly moving your lips. Or, you spoke in a controlled manner, allowing only short bursts of words to come to the surface. Perhaps your speech came out in a rush. Your thoughts may have come so fast that you interrupted yourself in the middle of one thought and jumped to another. Maybe your voice sounded too high, too low, too loud or too soft. You may have noticed errors in pronunciation and word choice. Of course, you also may have heard no problems in your speech.

In any case your speech now reveals you as you are at this moment. It is the product of your inheritance, environment, and learning experiences. Your speech abilities are closely related to your personality. If you have a good self-image and are generally an outgoing person, your speech will reflect these characteristics. If your self-image is poor and you tend to be fearful in speaking situations, this too will be expressed.

The close relationship between speech and personality provides an effective self-teaching tool. As you learn and practice ways of improving your manner of speaking, your self-confidence will improve and your self-image will strengthen. Conversely, as you improve your self-image, your speech, will show gains. These two human attributes are so interrelated that they mutually assist each other in the speech improvement process.
As a college student, you may be planning a career that will involve social and professional contact with others. Your speech, therefore, should be as clear as possible. The better you can be understood, the more effective you will be in meeting and influencing others.

What Will a Course Like This One Do for You?

You are probably enrolled in this course because it is required, but we believe there are excellent reasons for you to be here, anyway. Taking this course will improve your chances of reaching your personal, social, and professional goals.

Your current friends probably speak the same way you do. Your future friends likely will, too. One way a person becomes accepted by a particular group of people is by possessing and using the speech of that group.

Your professional success and advancement may depend on your speaking skills. Many jobs require clear, understandable speech. You have probably seen help-wanted ads that say, “good communication skills required.” This phrase can be translated as: “applicant must speak clearly and accurately and have an appropriate vocabulary.” In fact, studies indicate a direct relationship between the size of an individual’s vocabulary and probable lifetime earnings.

For these reasons you are smart to be enrolled in this course—even if it may be required.

What Will Happen in This Course?

First you will need to learn how speech is produced. With the guidance of your professor, you will analyze your own speaking habits and, more than likely, discover one or more that need improvement. When you have devoted enough time and effort to study and practice, you will accomplish the following:

1. Acquire the sounds and stress patterns of the Standard American English dialect, the most easily understood dialect in the United States. This does not necessarily mean that you must give up your present dialect; you can have both, if you wish.

2. Increase the strength of your voice; that is, you will be able to control its volume to suit any speaking situation. You will master breathing skills to reduce fatigue when talking for long periods.

3. Improve the resonance of your voice; that is, you will develop a richer, fuller tone quality.

4. Develop clear, articulate speech. As you learn to articulate each sound accurately and completely, you will develop the skill of pronouncing each word exactly. No more mumbling or garbling for you.

As you integrate these talents with vocal expression based on your thoughts and inner feelings, you will accomplish the purpose of this course. You will be speaking clearly.
What Will You Need to Do to Make All These Changes?

A puzzled tourist standing on a street corner in Manhattan stopped a New York pedestrian carrying a violin case and asked, “How do I get to Carnegie Hall?” The musician replied, “Practice, man, practice!” A similar answer might be given to the question, How do I improve my speaking skills? Practice, practice, and more practice.

This book and your professor will show you what you need to do, but you are the one who needs to do it. To succeed, you should try to practice aloud each day at least a page of exercises of sounds, words, and sentences. Practice in front of a mirror and observe your movements. Record a minute of each practice period. Listen to your recording, re-record and listen again. Learn to recognize your errors and your correct production. Ask your professor for advice and instruction on any exercise you do not understand, but do not expect lectures and books to improve your speech skills. Practice, they say, is what makes perfect.