

American accents



Many English learners and teachers often refer to an “American accent”. The problem here is that there really isn’t one single American accent but many. Researchers don’t agree on exactly how many different accents there are but it could be anywhere from 20 to over 100!

The dialect spoken by American TV announcers and actors is often called “General American English”. People who speak general American English pronounce words like “hot” and “not” with what is called an unrounded vowel. So these words sound like “haht” and “naht”.

On the east coast of America, in places like New England, there is a small difference here. The “r” in some words is often not pronounced. The first syllable in words like “parking” are often pronounced as “pah-king” with a strong “a” sound like “cat” or “man”.

New York City has a unique dialect by itself. Much like the New England accent, the “r” is sometimes not pronounced but the “a” sounds are not as strong. A word like “carnival” would probably sound like “caw-na-val”.

As we move down into the southern states, the American accent becomes quite different. The final “r” on words is usually dropped. So when someone says “summer day” in the south, it can often come out as “summah day”. In some words, a vowel can be said with two or even three different sounds. For example, in General American English, the “a” in “cat” is pronounced with only one sound. Southerners, however, might pronounce the “a” in cat as “kei-yat”.

There are many many other accents and dialects in American English. One accent is not any better or worse than the others. However, it’s useful for tourists who visit America to understand the accent where they are planning to visit. Don’t be surprised if you hear more than one of these accents or even a combination of them during your stay.



1. How many different American accents are there?
 - a) anywhere from 2 to over 10
 - b) anywhere from 20 to over 100
 - c) anywhere from 200 to over 1000
2. In General American English a word like “hot” sounds like “haht”.
 - a) True
 - b) False
3. Where is the final “r” on words usually dropped?
 - a) in New York City
 - b) in the southern states
 - c) on the east coast of America
4. The southern American accent is better than the others.
 - a) True
 - b) False

Answers: 1. (b) 2. (a) 3. (b) 4. (b)

