

Learn Connected Speech with Matt Purland

Believe in the power of connected speech!

A new 8-part pronunciation course

by Matt Purland

Lesson 1: Introduction

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This course may be adapted and used with students at any level.

This document is a slightly updated version of Lesson 1 of the online course.

The online course features **downloadable PowerPoint slides**, **interactive quizzes**, and **audio recordings** of each unit, as well as **discussion questions**, **practice activities**, and **links** to relevant additional information.

It is free and in the public domain.

You can access it [here](#).

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Unit 1.1: Sound connections

The aim of this course is to teach you how to use **connected speech** in English, so that you can **sound** more natural and **communicate** more effectively in English.

It will improve your **listening** skills too, because knowing how native speakers use connected speech every day will also help you to understand more quickly what they are saying when they speak.

Native speakers of English speak by **connecting syllables**, rather than words.

We must accept that **spoken English** is totally different to **written English**. When we speak, we mould and distort the words in a way that we do not when we write.

English is not a **phonetic language**. As we will see on this course, we do not speak words faithfully as they are written in the dictionary, but carelessly force them to fit the stress patterns of our speech.

There are four **sound connections** between syllables:

Sound Connections:

- VC – vowel sound to consonant sound
- CV – consonant sound to vowel sound
- VV – vowel sound to vowel sound
- CC – consonant sound to consonant sound

The aim is to speak with **easy connections** between syllables.

To find out which sounds are vowel sounds and which are consonant sounds, [click here](#).

Quiz

#1. What is the aim of this course?

- a) To teach you how to use sentence stress in English.
- b) To teach you how to use connected speech in English.
- c) To give you in-depth knowledge of pronunciation in English.
- d) To show you how to use glottal stops.

#2. This course will also improve your _____ skills.

- a) reading
- b) spelling
- c) grammar
- d) listening

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#3. Native speakers of English speak by connecting _____.

- a) words
- b) vowels
- c) syllables
- d) sentences

#4. Spoken English is _____ written English.

- a) the same as
- b) totally different to
- c) quite similar to
- d) fairly different to

#5. The four sound connections are:

- a) VV, CV, VV, CC
- b) VC, CV, VV, CC
- c) VC, CV, VC, CC
- d) VC, CC, VV, CC

Discussion

1. What do the words 'connected speech' mean to you?
2. What do you know about connected speech? Have you ever learned about connected speech during an English course? What do you remember? If not, why not?
3. How important is connected speech to you in terms of being able to communicate in English?
4. Why have you decided to do this course? What are your aims/goals? What would you like to achieve by the end of the course?
5. How would you rate your speaking and listening skills in English at the moment?
6. In what ways are spoken English and written English different?
7. Is your L1 a phonetic language? Is it easier to learn a phonetic language than a non-phonetic language?

Practice

1. Write ten words which are phonetic in English [spoken as they are spelled], e.g. 'pan' and 'long'.

Material for further study

- [The 48 Sounds of English](#)
- [Sound Connections](#)

Unit 1.2: VC and friendly connections

VC connections are easy to pronounce. For example:

hi there
more time
go with
new day

They are good connections.

The other sound connections – CV (consonant to vowel), VV (vowel to vowel), and CC (consonant to consonant) – are not easy for us to pronounce.

They are bad connections.

Some CC connections have friendly consonant sounds at the end of the first syllable:

4 Friendly Consonant Sounds:

| | |
|----|------------|
| m | foam party |
| n | bin day |
| ng | long day |
| l | tall guy |

These connections are also easy to pronounce.

VC and friendly connections make up about 60% of connections in spoken English.

However, that leaves 40% bad connections, which are difficult for us to pronounce.

We need to be active in transforming them into good connections: VC or friendly.

Native speakers do this automatically – it is how we speak – while you have to learn how to do it.

It is preferable to use contractions when you speak English, for example:

| | | |
|---------|---|-------|
| She is | > | She's |
| It will | > | It'll |

The function words in contractions are not normally stressed, so it does not matter if they get squashed together.

Quiz

#1. This is an example of a VC connection:

- a) a cake
- b) two eggs
- c) hot cakes
- d) an egg

#2. Which sound connections are not easy for us to pronounce?

- a) CV, VV, VC
- b) CV, VV, CC
- c) CC, VV, VC
- d) VC, VV, CC

#3. True or false. Friendly consonant sounds are easy to pronounce.

- a) True.
- b) False.

#4. _____ are friendly consonant sounds.

- a) m, n, ng, d
- b) m, k, ng, l
- c) m, n, g, l
- d) m, n, ng, l

#5. We use connected speech to change bad connections into _____ and _____ connections.

- a) VC, sound
- b) good, friendly
- c) VC, friendly
- d) VC, good

Discussion

1. What are content words and function words? [Find out more here.](#)
2. Do you regularly use contractions in spoken English, e.g., 'he's' instead of 'he is'? If not, why not?
3. Have you ever learned about VC and friendly connections before? If not, why not?
4. Sometimes connected speech feels like a 'best-kept secret' in English. Why do you think that is?

Practice

1. Write down 10 new phrases with VC connections, e.g. 'go with'. Practice saying them out loud. Do you find them easy to pronounce?

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2. Write down 10 new phrases with friendly connections, e.g. 'tall guy'. Practice saying them out loud. Do you find them easy to pronounce?
3. Practice reading this [list of contractions](#) out loud. What other English contractions do you know?
4. Find a short text in a magazine or online and identify 5 phrases with VC connections and 5 with friendly connections.
5. What are 'function words' and 'content words' in English? Write down ten of each. What is their significance in English pronunciation?

Further Study

- [Content Words and Function Words](#)
- [Contractions](#)
- [List of contractions](#)

Unit 1.3: Four actions

We use **four actions** to get good connections every time:

Move forward

Delete

Add

Change

a) We **move forward** a consonant sound at the end of the first syllable in CV and CC connections to get a VC or friendly connection. For example:

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| look at >> | loo kat |
| CV | VC |
| look for >> | loo kfor |
| CC | VC |

b) Here are a few more examples:

| | | | | |
|----|-------------------|-------------------|---|----|
| CV | had a | ha da | = | VC |
| CV | get in | ge tin | = | VC |
| CC | this pen | thi spen | = | VC |
| CC | book store | boo kstore | = | VC |

c) We **delete** a consonant sound – usually **d** or **t** – at the end of the first syllable in a pair to get a VC or friendly connection. For example:

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| good time >> | goo time |
| CC | VC |

d) We **add** a consonant sound – **w**, **y**, or **r** – when there is a VV (vowel to vowel) connection. This always immediately gives us a **VC connection**. For example:

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| play ing >> | play [y] ing |
| VV | VC |

e) Here are a few more examples:

| | | | | |
|---|----------------|--------------------|---|----|
| w | few of | few [w] of | = | VC |
| y | say it | say [y] it | = | VC |
| r | four of | four [r] of | = | VC |

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f) We **change** a **voiced** consonant sound into an **unvoiced** consonant sound when it moves forward in a CC connection. For example:

| | | | | |
|------------------|----|------------------|----|------------------|
| have time | >> | ha v time | >> | ha f time |
| CC | | VC (voiced) | | VC (unvoiced) |

v and f are a **consonant pair**: v is **voiced** – we hear sound from the **vocal cords** when we say it – while f is **unvoiced** – we do not hear sound from the vocal cords, only sound from air passing through our teeth and lips.

Quiz

#1. The four actions we use to get good connections are:

- a) move forward, delete, add, change
- b) move back, delete, add, change
- c) move again, delete, add, change
- d) move forward, delete, remove, change

#2. look at >> loo kat. This is an example of:

- a) deleting a consonant sound
- b) moving back a consonant sound
- c) adding a consonant sound
- d) moving forward a consonant sound

#3. The consonant sounds we usually delete are:

- a) d and t
- b) d and k
- c) f and t
- d) m, n, ng, l

#4. We can add one of these consonant sounds in a VV connection:

- a) m, y, r
- b) w, y, r
- c) w, y, s
- d) w, g, r

#5. We change a _____ consonant sound into an _____ consonant sound when it moves forward in a CC connection.

- a) friendly, unvoiced
- b) unvoiced, voiced
- c) voiced, voiced
- d) voiced, unvoiced

Discussion

1. How aware were you that we use four actions in connected speech? Do you do anything similar in your L1?
2. Do you think that connected speech is necessary to be understood in English, or is it enough to pronounce each word clearly?
3. How aware were you of the concepts introduced in this unit before taking this course? Is connected speech taught where you go/went to school? If not, why not?

Practice

1. Practice saying the phrases in parts a) and b) – first the bad connection then the good connection. How do they feel to you? Are the VC connections easier to pronounce?
2. Practice the bad and then good connection in part c). Which one is easier for you to pronounce?
3. Practice the bad and then good connection in part d). What is the difference between them?
4. Practice the VV connections in part e). Write down at least three more phrases which connect with w, y, r and practice saying them.
5. Practice moving forward and changing the consonant sound in part f). Do you think it makes a big difference, whether we say 'ha vtime' or 'ha ftime'?

Further Study

- [How to move forward consonant sounds](#)
- [How to delete consonant sounds](#)
- [How to add consonant sounds](#)
- [How to change consonant sounds](#)

Unit 1.4: The sound spine

Why do we do what we do?

The aim of speech is effective communication. In English we achieve this by focusing on the **sound spine**.

The sound spine is the sequence of **stressed vowel sounds** in a sentence. For example:

e ei uu

My friend's been playing football.

The sound spine is: e ei uu

Native speakers gain a lot of the **meaning** of the sentence from these stressed vowel sounds. We do not listen to every sound when somebody speaks to us, but rather try to identify the **sound spine** and pay attention to the **context**.

Our brain puts it together in an instant, and the meaning is clear.

If the sound spine contains the wrong stressed syllables and the wrong stressed vowel sounds, as it often does when many non-native speakers speak English, it can be difficult to understand the message and we may ask:

'Sorry, can you repeat that, please?'

Similarly, if the sentence is cluttered with unnecessary pauses, 'ums' and 'ahs', gaps, and redundant consonant sounds, the stressed vowel sounds can be very difficult to identify.

This also leads to confusion, frustration, and **miscommunication**.

Connected speech helps by **isolating** the stressed vowel sounds and making them easier to hear.

The aims of connected speech, then, are:

1. to reduce the **gaps** when we speak and increase **fluency** by speaking in a continuous way, with syllable flowing into syllable, rather than one individual word at a time, as many people learn to speak English
2. to emphasise the **sound spine** – to make it louder and clearer in the sentence

Quiz

#1. What is the aim of speech?

- a) To say something.
- b) To communicate important information.
- c) Effective communication.
- d) Miscommunication.

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#2. What is the sound spine?

- a) Part of the lower back.
- b) The sequence of stressed vowel sounds in a sentence.
- c) One of the main tools for speaking.
- d) Words that connect sentences together.

#3. Why is the sound spine so important?

- a) It helps to connect words together.
- b) It connects our ideas as we use connected speech.
- c) We get a lot of the meaning of the sentence from the stressed consonant sounds.
- d) We get a lot of the meaning of the sentence from the stressed vowel sounds.

#4. The wrong sound spine can cause:

- a) Good communication.
- b) Miscommunication.
- c) A positive response from the listener.
- d) Faster speech.

#5. The aims of connected speech are:

- a) To reduce the gaps when we speak.
- b) To emphasise the sound spine.
- c) To reduce the gaps when we speak and reduce the sound spine.
- d) To reduce the gaps when we speak and emphasise the sound spine.

Discussion

1. What did you know about the sound spine before this course?
2. Give examples of when you have tried to communicate in English but ended up with miscommunication.
3. Why do non-native speakers speak English with gaps between words?
4. Do you have word stress and sentence stress in your L1? Is it a stress-timed or syllable-timed language? How similar is it to English in terms of pronunciation?
5. Do you tend to add a lot of 'um's and 'er's when you speak... a) your L1, b) English? Why do you do that? How can you cut down or stop doing it?

Practice

1. Write five sentences. Mark the stressed syllables in each one. Identify the vowel sound on each stressed syllable. This is the sound spine. Read each sentence emphasising the sound spine.

Further Study

- [The Sound Spine](#)

Unit 1.5: How the four actions help

How do the four actions of connected speech emphasise the sound spine?

Moving forward removes the consonant sound from the preceding vowel sound, giving it room to breathe:

| | |
|------------|---------|
| look at >> | loo kat |
| CV | VC |

Instead of 'look at', with the focus on **k**, the emphasis remains a little longer on the vowel sound **oo**.

Deleting a consonant sound does the same thing, removing the focus from the consonant sound and giving the vowel sound space to be heard:

| | |
|--------------|----------|
| good time >> | goo time |
| CC | VC |

Deleting and then adding a **glottal stop** is even more effective in giving emphasis and space to the vowel sound, because it replaces **t** or **d** – the hardest-sounding consonant sounds – with half a second of silence after the vowel sound. For example:

| | |
|------------|---------|
| hot dog >> | ho_ dog |
| CC | VC |

Adding a vowel sound – **w**, **y**, or **r** – extends the vowel sound, making it longer. Although they are consonant sounds, **w**, **y**, and **r** act as extensions of the vowel sounds that they follow:

| | | | | |
|---|---------|-------------|---|----|
| w | few of | few [w] of | = | VC |
| y | say it | say [y] it | = | VC |
| r | four of | four [r] of | = | VC |

Changing voiced consonant sounds into unvoiced helps the sound spine by suppressing loud and brash consonant sounds, like **g** and transforming them into quiet weak sounds that are barely heard, like **k**:

| | | |
|------------|-------------|---------------|
| big day >> | bi gday >> | bi kday |
| CC | VC (voiced) | VC (unvoiced) |

The unvoiced consonant sound **k** is barely heard, which makes the stressed vowel sound **i** even louder and stronger.

It almost has the effect of *removing* the consonant sound. Certainly, a loud **g** in 'big day' only draws attention to itself, and away from the stressed vowel sound **i**.

When we speak English, everything we do is to emphasise the **sound spine**: from word stress, sentence stress, use of glottal stops, weak forms, schwa sounds, word order, to using **connected speech**.

This course will show you how to use **connected speech** when you speak English and allow you plenty of opportunities to **practice** the techniques of connected speech.

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Quiz

#1. Moving forward puts more emphasis on the _____, by removing a consonant sound.

- a) word
- b) vowel sound
- c) sentence
- d) consonant sound

#2. Deleting a consonant sound does _____.

- a) something different
- b) something else
- c) the opposite
- d) the same thing

#3. We increase the emphasis on a vowel sound further by adding a _____.

- a) stressed syllable
- b) vowel sound
- c) glottal stop
- d) schwa sound

#4. Adding a consonant sound – w, y, or r – _____ the vowel sound.

- a) removes
- b) extends
- c) deletes
- d) reduces

#5. A loud voiced consonant sound, e.g. g draws attention to _____.

- a) the vowel sound
- b) the stressed syllable
- c) the glottal stop
- d) itself

Discussion

1. Do you use glottal stops in your L1? Have you ever tried using them in English? Are you willing to learn to make glottal stops, e.g. by studying the process on YouTube or asking your teacher?
2. Does your L1 feature a lot of strong, loud consonant sounds, or do they get reduced, as in English?
3. What do you know about the schwa sound in English? Do you have it in your L1? Did you know there is probably at least one schwa sound in every sentence in English?

Practice

1. Practice all the phrases in this unit, from the bad connections (in red) to the good connections (in green). Which type of connection feels easier for you?
2. Write five more phrases with 'look + word beginning with a vowel sound', e.g., 'look at'. Read them out loud and practice moving forward the **k** to join the vowel sound.
3. Write five more phrases with 'good + word beginning with **t**', e.g., 'good time'. Read them out loud and practice deleting **d**. Don't slow down your pace as you say them, and we won't notice the missing **d**.
4. Write five more phrases with 'hot + word beginning with a consonant sound', e.g., 'hot dog'. Read them out loud and practice deleting the **t** and adding a glottal stop.
5. Write five more phrases with 'few + word beginning with a vowel sound', e.g., 'few of'. Read them out loud and practice adding the **w** sound between the two syllables.
6. Write five more phrases with 'say + word beginning with a vowel sound', e.g., 'say it'. Read them out loud and practice adding the **y** sound between the two syllables.
7. Write five more phrases with 'four + word beginning with a vowel sound', e.g., 'four of'. Read them out loud and practice adding the **r** sound between the two syllables.
8. Write five more phrases with 'big + word beginning with a consonant sound', e.g., 'big day'. Read them out loud and practice changing the hard, brash **g** sound to a light, gentle **k**.

Further Study

- [Glottal Stops](#)
- [The Schwa Sound](#)
- [Weak Forms](#)

Answers to quizzes:

| | | |
|------|----------|-------------------------------|
| P. 2 | Unit 1.1 | 1. b) 2. d) 3. c) 4. b) 5. b) |
| P.5 | Unit 1.2 | 1. a) 2. b) 3. a) 4.d) 5. c) |
| P.9 | Unit 1.3 | 1. a) 2. d) 3. a) 4. b) 5. d) |
| P.11 | Unit 1.4 | 1. c) 2. b) 3. d) 4. b) 5. d) |
| P.15 | Unit 1.5 | 1. b) 2. d) 3. c) 4. b) 5. d) |