

## Assimilation: The Blending of Sounds

“Gahead”	VS.	“Go ahead”
“I dunno”	VS.	“I don’t know.”
“Proibly”	VS.	“Probably.”
“Havta”	VS.	“Have to.”
“Woulda/coulda/shoulda”	VS.	“Would have”/“could have”/“should have”
“Uzshly”	VS.	“Usually.”
“Gonna”	VS.	“Going to.”
“Wanna”	VS.	“Want to.”
“Cancha”	VS.	“Can’t you.”

Interestingly, most of these are heard on television. Imagine how confusing this can be to the international individual who is just learning our language! Most native speakers are unaware that this is how they sound in natural conversation. Actors on TV are just mimicking real life.

To correct this, you’ll first need to become aware of how you sound. Try recording yourself during regular household conversations. If you have more than three or four jumbled words in a five-minute conversation, you’ve got a problem.

Sometimes the fix is just a matter of slowing down, while other times you’ll need to undo a bad habit. Listen to your recording, write a list of your problem phrases, and then practice saying them correctly. Try to focus on the phrases you use the most.

## Practice Plosives

For many North Americans, plosive sounds like /d/, /t/, /b/, and /p/ are another common enunciation problem. You need to be sure you say them so that they end with a small burst of air and there is a very brief stop in the flow of speech. Most people do OK when plosives start a word like “cheese” or “please.” The problem comes when those sounds are in the middle or at the end of the word.

Some people are guilty of swallowing the /t/ sound in the middle of a word, e.g. “senence” instead of “sentence.” When you have several plosives in one word, usually the biggest problem is with the sounds at the end. For example, try this sentence:

“**Project Gutenberg** is the **producer** of the **first** and **biggest** collection of online **books**.”

Try it yourself. Hold your hand in front of your mouth. You should feel a slight burst of air for each of the highlighted letters in the sentence above. But be careful not to overdo it, like this...

*“Project Gutenberg is the producer of the first and biggest collection of online books.”*

Even among broadcasters there is variation. Some prefer tight, crisp speech, while others prefer a more relaxed approach with some blending of sounds. Bottom line is that you don't want to draw attention. You just want to say it correctly; otherwise, you'll sound pedantic. How many plosives does the word “pedantic” have?

## Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

Practicing **tongue twisters** is another good way to improve.

For **plosives** try these:

“Good blood, bad blood. Good blood, bad blood.”

“A big black bug bit a big black bear and made the big black bear bleed blood.”

For **sibilants** (which are s's and f's), try this one:

“Susan Simpson strolled sedately, stifling sobs, suppressing sighs.”

Another way to practice is to repeat the speech of someone who has good enunciation. Directly repeat whatever the host is saying. Don't repeat after the host finishes; Repeat directly on top of him or her.

This helps not only with enunciation but also with accent and intonation. You can even make a game of it. It's something you can do in the car as you listen to podcasts or the radio.

## Other Articulation Exercises

### 1. Concentrate on Your Tongue.

- Talk to yourself while you are alone or read aloud for greater flexibility and agility.

### 2. Strengthen your Articulation Muscles.

- Run your tongue along the walls of your mouth and stretch your jaws.
- Chew gum and suck through straws.
- Practice tongue twisters as often as possible.
- When speaking publicly, speak slowly and carefully, placing desired emphasis on each word as clearly as possible.

3. **Listen to yourself.** Read a poem of a story narration and record it. Jot down errors and re-record again and again, comparing with each previous result.
4. **Try Meditation and Deep Breathing Exercises. (From the diaphragm!)**
5. **Use a Mirror.** Choose a piece of dialogue from one of your favorite movies and try to imitate the style in which it was delivered.
6. **Listen to the Speeches of Great Orators and Imitate.** Listen to them again and again. Pay attention to when and where they paused, what phrases or words did they emphasize or punch?

**A Practice Reading** (*from Aesop's Fable, "The Lion and the Mouse."*)

A mouse went into a lion's cave by mistake, and before he knew what he was doing, he ran over the nose of the sleeping lion. The lion reached out his paw and caught the mouse and was about to eat him when the mouse said, "Forgive me, King of the Beasts, I did not know where I was. I should never have been so proud as to come into this cave if I had known it was yours.

The lion smiled at the poor frightened little mouse and let him go. Not long after this, the lion fell into a rope net left for him by some hunters, and his roars filled the forest. The mouse recognized him and ran to see if he could help. He set to work nibbling the ropes, and soon the lion was free.

*(The above excerpt is helpful because it uses "all of the American-English speech sounds in all positions." If there are any basic sounds or pronunciations you are doing incorrectly without realizing it, they will show up in this selection.)*