

PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

A practical guide to learning the American
accent.

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First Edition 2010

Cover designed by Justin Richardson
Printed by RAH Creations
P.O. Box 626, The Gap, QLD 4061, Australia
Edited by Brian Gilbertson - www.briangilbertson.com.au

National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication data ++
Mackinder, Troy 1971 -
Practically Speaking: A practical guide to learning the American accent.
ISBN - 978-0-646-49050-2 paperback
I. THE BIG PICTURE 1. Getting Started 2. Consonants 3. American Resonance 4. Emphasis and Stresses 5. Finding Vowels 6. The Dreaded Rs 7. Script Writing II. THE BARE NECESSITIES 8. Practical Example
428.130973

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FOREWORD

I worked with Troy on a feature film called *Daybreakers*, filmed on the Gold Coast. Until then, I thought I had done sufficient work on my accent and I had little more work to do. I wasn't prepared for Troy. After one session I began to fully understand how much more I had to learn and how many pitfalls I had tripped into.

I imagined I was getting the American, downward inflection. I was uniformly hitting every 'r' sound. And I was replicating the polite, accent-coach's melody, that I had heard on various American dialect CD's.

As is with everyone, this is not a welcome realisation. Privately I had mutinous thoughts. What you do with your voice is so linked up with yourself it is easy to get defensive and exasperated. I also recognised that I had a natural antipathy towards the American accent and I was apprehensive about betraying by own background.

Troy's friendly, enthusiastic manner hides a fastidious, nit-picking beast, whose ear is so tuned into un-American sounds, he should have been a customs official. Some called him the accent Nazi. He was an inexhaustible perfectionist.

On our various walks around the studio lot conversing using the American accent, Troy gave me so many fundamental, practical tips and so many firm parameters to work within, that soon I was actually looking forward to our sessions and found they opened up possibilities, rather than having a restrictive nature on performance. And surprisingly, the emphasis and resonance work, has I think, complimented my own Australian work. It has altered some of my approaches.

Troy tuned my ear. He's given me a new level of awareness. I now know what to listen for and how to keep listening and learning.

He has created a very clear, helpful book, which concentrates on tangible necessities and is perfectly customised to our sounds.

Thanks Troy, all is forgiven.
Claudia Karvan

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK AND EXTRAS

This book has two main sections written to meet the needs of two specific situations. The first section, called THE BIG PICTURE, is for the actor wanting to learn the entire breakdown of the American accent. This actor is studying the American accent so that when an audition or performance comes up, they have a full understanding of it as well as the ability to put it into practice in a moments notice. This actor will most likely be a current student or a working actor taking the time to add to their repertoire of talents.

The second section, THE BARE NECESSITIES, is for the actor with a need for speed. You know an audition is coming up and need fast information that will help you quickly get the accent. This section is also good for the actor who has studied the American accent in the past and just needs a quick refresher. This section takes a script through the entire process from the first reading through to the performance.

The DVD is more for the BIG PICTURE users. It takes you through the entire learning process. The DVD will also be useful to THE BARE NECESSITIES users but you may wish to fast forward to find what you are specifically seeking.

The CD will benefit both users as it contains monologues to practice the American vowels whenever you get the chance. It focuses on problems facing Australian actors as well as occasionally paying attention to the New Zealand sound.

IN CLOSING sums up the skills you will have learned using this book.

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To the New Zealand actor: This book was created specifically for Australians. However, vowel differences for New Zealand actors are distinguished in parts. During the last seven years, I have worked with several New Zealand actors, including Sam Neill, Jay Laga'aia and Joel Tobeck. I have found that the emphasis and stress work applies similarly for both nationalities, with only slight differences. New Zealanders using the exercises in this book will get the results they are looking for.

NOTE: As your aim is to learn the American accent I have opted to use American spellings and phrases in this book. (e.g. realised = Australian will be spelt as realized = American. Practise = Australian verb practice = American verb). It makes sense to start looking at all things American as the scripts you will be using will most likely be written with American spelling.

INTRODUCTION

The American accent is constantly changing. Recently I realized that I needed an up-to-date revision of the American accent with consideration of new techniques that have been developed, even over the past five years. I started this book to create a reference for my teaching. The more I wrote, the more it became obvious that it could be used as a reference for any actor needing to learn the American accent.

There are several references available in America such as Lessac, Skinner, as well as references in Australia. Each are great academic references and full of useful information. This book is not meant to replace any academic book. In fact, if I were to classify this book, I would not call it an academic book.

THIS BOOK IS QUITE SIMPLY A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ACTORS.

The detail and explanation has been stripped down to the bare essentials to keep things simple. Actors usually need to get a swift breakdown of "what do I need to do to speak American?" They do not need to know what certain sounds should be, but rather how to get themselves to pronounce those sounds. You will come across several practical instances where as Australians you will feel as if you are attempting an incorrect sound to produce an American sound.

Having coached actors for many years, the biggest challenge when writing this book has been to create a reference that would be as easy as possible to use without needing a coach. You will need to become your own coach, to be able to listen to yourself and

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effectively coach yourself. This is possible if you are patient. So take your time and enjoy!

Other references that may be of use to you:

Practically Speaking: www.practicallyspeaking.com.au

- Purchase Practically Speaking.
- Lists of currently scheduled workshops.

Merriam Webster Online: www.merriam-webster.com

- Re-write your script with the correct sounds for your rehearsal reference using this dictionary as a guide.

SPECIAL THANKS:

To Brian Gilbertson for editing this book. Brian sold his legal practice in the 80's to study voice and drama in Vienna and has since enjoyed an international career in opera as a principal artist, as a producer and director of major events and as a voice teacher.

www.briangilbertson.com.au

To the very talented NY, USA actress Lindsay Roth for being the female voice for the vowel practice CD.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would like to thank the people who have greatly influenced me and made this book possible. Firstly, I would like to thank Lyn Kidd from The Actors Workshop, who has given me the opportunity to teach and develop this technique and encouraged the writing of this book. Rowena Balos, who first allowed me to teach her technique ten years ago, which laid the foundation on which I could develop my technique.

I am also thankful to the many actors who I have had the privilege of teaching at schools such as The Actors Workshop, The Acting Academy and ACPA.

Thank you to directors Michael and Peter Spierig, Andrew Lancaster, Alister Grierson producers Chris Brown, Todd Fellman, Heather Ogilvie, Anthony Anderson, Lionsgate and the many others who have hired me as an accent coach. I'd like to thank the many actors I have been privileged to work with through the years. Some of special mention are Claudia Karvan, Sam Neill, Isabel Lucas, Michael Dorman, Vince Colosimo, Jay Laga'aia, Mark Finden, John Gibson, Damien Garvey, Todd Levi, Mungo McKay, Emma Randall, Robyn Moore, Joel Spreadborough, Sahaj Duplepton, Carl Rush, Harrison Gilbertson, Harry Cook, Sebastian Gregory, Sarah Woods, Erik Thomson, Rebecca Massey, Troy Planet and Alice Parkinson.

Thank you to those invaluable people who helped me with the large learning curve that goes with writing a book. These include Bob Johnson, Claudia Karvan, Jay Laga'aia, Brian Gilbertson, Tiffany Johnson, Hamish Williamson, Lindsay Roth, Doug Goodrich, Mark Finden and my wife Simone Mackinder. You all ROCK!!!

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Acknowledgements