



THE AMERICAN ACCENT GUIDE

For Brazilian Portuguese Speakers

By Hadar Shemesh

[Watch the video](#)

In this guide, you will learn about the most common pronunciation challenges Brazilian Portuguese speakers face, how to overcome them, and how to PRACTICE effectively in order to become clearer in English. Daily practice and repetition of sounds will help you create awareness, and help you develop the muscle memory needed to pronounce the sounds and words with little effort!

Here are the 10 most common challenges Brazilian Portuguese speakers face:

CHALLENGE #1:

Different vowels are pronounced the same

Brazilian Portuguese lacks the vowel pairs /u/-/ʊ/ and /i/-/ɪ/ that exist in English. Since those similar vowel pairs don't exist in Brazilian Portuguese, speakers of that language tend to merge them into the closest vowel sound that does exist in BP. For example, 'ship' and 'sheep' would sound the same, and so will 'pool' and 'pull'.

Distinguish between similar vowel pairs

Sheep - Ship

Read - Rid

Least - List

Sleep - Slip

Heat - Hit

Beach - Bitch

Pool - Pull

Luke - Look

Who'd - Hood

Fool - Full

Shoed - Should

Stewed - Stood

[Click here for a video tutorial about the sheep-ship](#)

[Click here for a video tutorial about the Pool-pull](#)



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CHALLENGE #2:**Adding a vowel at the end of the word**

Brazilian Portuguese doesn't have a lot of closed syllables (syllables that end in one consonant or more). When BP speakers come across a word with such a syllable, especially when it's at the end of the word, they may add the vowel /i/ and create a new syllable. So words like "work" and "like" may be pronounced "wer-ki" and "lai-ki".

Practice the following words, make sure you don't add /i/ at the end of the word:

Have

Knife

Nap

Glove

Big

Poke

Laugh

Tub

Make

Bark

Escape

Pancake

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CHALLENGE #3:**/d/ and /t/ are replaced with /dʒ/ and /tʃ/**

In Brazilian Portuguese /t/ and /d/ tend to become /tʃ/ and /dʒ/, especially at the end of words. So when a word in English ends in a /t/ or /d/, BP speakers may change the /d/ to /dʒ/, and /t/ to /tʃ/. For example, a word like “coat” might sound like “coach”, and a word like “bad” might sound like “badge”.

Sometimes they would also add the /i/ at the end, because of the rule discussed in the previous example (even though it may be very subtle).

Practice the following words, make sure you pronounce all words correctly

Ed - Edge

Kit - Kitsch

Paid - Page

Wrote - Roach

Weighed - Wage

Cat - Catch

Raid - Rage

Pit - Pitch

led - Ledge

Rent - Wretch


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CHALLENGE #4:**Replacing M with N or NG**

The M sound exists in Brazilian Portuguese, but never at the end of words. Whenever a word in BP ends in M, speakers don't pronounce it. They nasalize the vowel before it and don't close their lips when getting to the M so it sounds as if they pronounce an N sound or even NG.

Therefore, when a word in English ends with M, BP speakers may unintentionally substitute it with the closest sound available that does show up at the end of words in Brazilian Portuguese - a nasal vowel, and it would sound like an N sound. For example, the word "cam" is pronounced as "can", and the word "game" is pronounced as "gain".

Practice: First, pronounce the M clearly at the end of each of the following words, make sure your lips are closed and that you are not pronouncing a nasal vowel (or /n/) instead of /m/

Sam	Rum
Room	Slam
Some	Same
Cream	Home

[Click here for a video tutorial about NG](#)



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Now, pronounce the following pairs, making sure they don't sound the same

Home- hone

Sum- Son

Foam - Phone

Gum- Gun

Mam- Man

Seem- Seen

Game- Gain

Team- Teen

Term- Turn

Skim- Skin

CHALLENGE #5:

Mispronouncing the TH

For the TH, the tongue has to stick out from between the teeth.

Since Brazilian Portuguese speakers don't have the TH sounds in their language, they tend to keep the tongue inside for words with TH and place the upper teeth on the lower lip.

It is a common mispronunciation which sometimes results in pronouncing different words the same.

So the /th/ in "three" (soft, voiceless TH) may be replaced with /f/ or /t/ so such a word would sound like "free" or "tree" . The /th/ in "than" (voiced) is usually replaced with a /v/ or /d/ so such a word would sound like "van" or "Dan".



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Practice: Stick the tongue out and release air when pronouncing the TH in the following words

Theory	They	Bath
Theatre	Them	Bathe
Authentic	Another	Faith
Something	Father	Seventh
Breath	Breathing	Either

[Simplifying the TH: video lesson](#)



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CHALLENGE #6:**The L is replaced with a /w/ at the end of words**

In Brazilian Portuguese, the letter L is pronounced as a W sound at the end of syllables. We can hear it in the name of the country, Brazil - [bra. 'ziw].

Many BP speakers apply this rule when they speak English so a word like “ball” would be pronounced like “bow” and “Cal” like “cow”.

Practice: Make sure the tip of the tongue touches the roof of the mouth for the L. Hold out the sound if needed.

Until	Tool
Personal	Bill
Special	Alcohol
Successful	feel
Sell	Usual

[The L in American English](#)



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CHALLENGE #7:**Misplacing the primary stress**

The primary stress in Brazilian Portuguese is on one of the last three syllables in a word. Usually, it's on the syllable that is second to last. BP speakers tend to apply this stress pattern in English words, which results in the following mispronunciations:

comfor**T**able instead of **COM**fortable

vege**T**ables instead of **VEG**etables

inte**R**esting instead of **IN**teresting

▮ Pronounce the following words, and make sure that the stress falls on the bold syllable

Fortunately

Memorable

Accuracy

Fascinating

Characterize

Manipulative

Calculator

Categorize

Sophisticated

Subsequently

Supervisor

Particularly

Organizer

Difficulty

Administrator



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CHALLENGE #8:**Mispronouncing the American R**

To make the American R you need to curl back the tip of your tongue a bit, and round your lips. Your tongue should not touch the upper palate (click to watch a video tutorial about the R).

The Brazilian Portuguese R is much more varied, depending on its position in the word and the dialect of the speaker. It can be a rolling R as in Spanish, but It can also be a voiceless guttural sound like [h] or [χ]. For example, a word like 'red' might be pronounced like the word 'head' [hed], and "wreck" and "write" might be pronounced like "heck" and "height".

Practice: Make sure the tip of your tongue is curled back and doesn't touch the upper palate when pronouncing the R

Rat	Credit
Right	Three
Real	World
Around	Care
Area	Stars

[Watch video tutorial: The American R](#)



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CHALLENGE #9:**The Schwa**

The [schwa](#) is a very neutral vowel sound in American English. Since there is no schwa in Brazilian Portuguese, BP speakers tend to pronounce a pure vowel sound for the vowel letters in English words.

To make the schwa, open your mouth just a bit, slightly drop your jaw, and place your tongue in the center of the mouth.

Find the stressed syllable in the following words and reduce the unstressed syllables to a short and relaxed schwa

About	Production
Complete	Specific
Husband	Focus
President	Prison
Ability	Recently



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CHALLENGE #10:**Using the intonation of Brazilian Portuguese**

In Brazilian Portuguese there are frequent shifts in pitch from high to low. But in English a high pitch is generally used to stress the important words in a sentence, so when Brazilian Portuguese use the melody of their own language in English, the result is too many stressed words in a sentence, and the message becomes unclear. Sometimes they might even stress function words (like 'if' or 'and', which are usually not stressed in English).

Practice: Read the following sentences out loud and make sure you're only stressing the words marked in bold

My **car** has been in the **garage** all day.

I can't **tell** if he wants me to **go**

Don't let your dog stay outside in the pouring **rain**

We **all know** what you **did** yesterday

There's some **vegetables** in the fridge

And remember...

Speak up!

(perfection is overrated)



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