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TEXAN



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by

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I. History and Social Context

Texas fell under a number of governing bodies throughout its history, including Spain, France, Mexico, the Texas Republic, the Confederacy, and the United States of America. (Actually, Texas was twice under Spanish rule, and twice under U.S. rule—pre- and post-Civil War.) Texas independence lasted a relatively brief period, from 1835 to 1845, but its mark is still very present in Texan pride and in the sheer number of “Lone Stars” and state outlines that dot the advertising landscape.



The classic Texan accent was caused largely by the influx of settlers before and during Texas independence, especially people from Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi who settled in East Texas, and others from Tennessee and Kentucky who settled primarily in West Texas. These have resulted in the two major dialect families in Texas: the classic West Texas drawl and the East Texas twang. These materials focus on the classic West Texas drawl and also discuss the adjustments necessary for exemplifying the East Texas twang which is also present in parts of western Arkansas and Louisiana, and the Texas-Oklahoma sound of North Texas, which is very similar to the West Texas sound.

(There are additional Texas accents that are covered in other AccentHelp materials, including the Cajun sounds of far Southeast Texas, variants of African-American Vernacular English, and the border Mexican-Texas Latin American accent spoken by an enormous percentage of the population.)

II. Sound Placement

Where the sound “lives” in the mouth.

The sound placement is quite different for East and West Texas, and this is the major difference between them. The West Texas placement is in the far back of the mouth, but if it’s too far into

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the throat, your voice won't carry well. The East Texas twang places the sound forward in the mouth near the nose. Both will have a sense of being wide—in the case of East Texas, this will probably feel like a very “flat” sound.

III. Intonation Pattern

Musicality, lilt, inflection and stress.

West Texas has a slow “drawl” that draws out sounds. There is not a lot of pitch variation, especially for men. The East Texas “twang” will take the same play of sounds, speed the speech up and raise the median pitch. The North Texas dialect tends to be a blend of the other two, or it may be helpful to think of it as a light version of West Texas.



Texas Longhorn Cattle

There is also a lot of linking of sounds, from one word into the next. There is also a great deal of elision or elimination of syllables due to this linking. Words like *of* will usually become simply *uh* as in the phrase “*one of these*” which may sound like “*one uh these*” instead; “*I am going to*” will become “*ah mo.*”

The stressed and unstressed syllables of words may be reversed from what many Americans are used to: week-END, INsurance, theAter, TEE-vee.

IV. Helpful Hints

One stereotype that is often attached to a Texas dialect (really, all Southern dialects) is the assumption of a lack of intelligence. Often when people, even Texans, wish to spontaneously sound stupid, they will slip into a deeper accent, with a heavy drawl. What can be useful about giving in to this stereotype (temporarily) is the release of tension in the face, encouraging the jaw to drop, a slower rate of speech and increased chest resonance. All of these can help you to find the West Texas accent, which is also necessary for developing the East and North Texas variations.

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Start by working on the extreme stereotype, and by beginning with West Texas before moving onto North or East Texas.

Similarly, it is also often helpful to imagine that it is incredibly hot outside, slowing your speech and movement to match the heat exhaustion. Once you have a stronger handle on the dialect in this relaxed state, step up your energy and pacing and try to hold onto the accent. It does not have to be slow—in fact the East Texas dialect can be rather fast—but giving into that stereotype may help you to find the accent in the beginning of your work.



Another stereotype that may help to bring out the West Texas dialect is manifesting the sense of a hard life in your sound—being used to “toughing it out.” Perseverance is a Texas stereotype that will help you to find the fairly flat intonation pattern and the placement far back in the mouth.

V. Sound Substitutions

Changes in individual speech sounds (from a Neutral American dialect). Listen carefully to the recordings that will guide you through this section. The phonetic symbols are decoded in the shaded boxes.

Consonants:

- [ɹ] and [ʁ] may sound harder and become retroflexed to [ɻ] or pulled back to [ɹ̠]. There may also be an extra [j] or [w] between a vowel and the R-sound that follows it:

*red, rules, drink, bring, very, around;
hard, parson, sure, tourist, burger, fire, flowers;
fear, cheered, fair, theirs, lure, chores, north*

[ɹ]	= red
[ʁ]	= letter
[j]	= yes
[w]	= well

It's a pretty crazy year if you're a rancher.

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2. A final [ŋ] as the –ing ending of a verb may become [n]:
doing, running, playing, driving, meeting

[ŋ] = ring

He was saying something about going to town.

3. When [t] precedes a vowel and follows an [n] that finishes a stressed syllable, the [t] may be dropped:
twenty, intimate, plenty, bounty, sentence, winter, entertain, introduce

He's just entered the center of the ring.

4. The [l] after a vowel (in the same syllable) becomes [ə] because the tip of the tongue may not actually reach the gum ridge behind the upper teeth:
full, cool, jail, real, felt, milk, avail, help, yourself

[ə] = comma

The whole drawer's full of belt buckles.



Rio Grande River and Mexican Border Big Bend National Park West Texas

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Vowels:

1. A number of vowels move toward [ə], or become like diphthongs with a [ə] when the word is more heavily stressed. This change can be very subtle, but it's an essential part of the Texas drawl. These “blending” vowel sounds include [i] to [əi], [ɪ] to [ɪə], [ɛ] to [ɛə]; [æ] to [æə], [ʊ] to [ʊə], [u] to [əu], and [ʌ] to [ə]:

*eat, need, grieving, me, tree, street;
fish, mill, until, children, win, which;
web, well, said, bread, dead, heck;
hand, branch, stand, clap, match, lap;
book, could, good, butch, stood, would;
room, who, two, school, boots, mood;
up, supper, love, above, abrupt, lunch*

[ə] = comma
[i] = fleeece
[ɪ] = kit
[ɛ] = dress
[æ] = trap
[ʊ] = foot
[u] = goose
[ʌ] = strut

He's had these cows for weeks.
I wish you'd get it finished.
Kevin's already headed to bed.
Pat didn't ask until afterwards.
I could've put in a good word.
I've been cooped up too long with you.
She was bucking a bunch on Monday.

2. The vowels [ɔ], [ɒ] and [ɑ] all move toward [ɒ]:
*saw, awful, loss, all, ought, call, stores, before, horse;
father, palm, mom, park, architect, marble*

[ɔ] = thought
[ɒ] = cloth, lot
[ɑ] = father

There's a form for farmers that's got all that on it.

3. [ɜ] moves toward [ʌ]:
her, fur, murmur, hurt, mirth, burger, person

[ɜ] = nurse
[ʌ] = strut

Seems like they were burned on purpose.

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4. [ɛ] may become [ɪ], especially when followed by [m] or [n]:
when, men, memory, any, twenty, entertain, generous, get

[ɛ] = dress
 [ɪ] = kit

I remember when you went to Denver.

5. An unstressed vowel may become [ə], or be dropped altogether:
*yourself, individual, family, damaging,
 figure, yellow, jewels*

[ə] = comma

History'll probably tell it differently.

Diphthongs:

1. [aɪ] changes to [aː]:
my, try, pride, slight, crime, fire, tired, admires

[aɪ] = price

I was finally able to ride that night.

2. [aʊ] changes to [æʊ]:
now, blouse, trout, plow, towel, cow

[aʊ] = mouth
 [æ] = trap

They're all crowded around the house.

3. [ɔɪ] changes to [ɔə]:
*boy, choice, destroy,
 toy, employed*

[ɔɪ] = choice
 [ɔ] = thought
 [ə] = comma

There's no moisture in the soil, boys.

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4. The [ou] changes to [əʊ]:

oh, go, window, old, obey, poem, don't go, so-so

[ou] = goat
[ə] = comma

He got throun out of the rodeo.

5. [eɪ] moves toward [əɪ]:

ache, chafe, pay, aid, weigh, amaze, aim

[eɪ] = face
[ə] = comma

I've got to wait for eight days.

VI. Alternate Pronunciations

anything	[ˈɛnəθəŋ] or [ˈɪnəθəŋ]	hundred	[ˈhʌndrəd]
ask	[ˈæsk] or [ˈæks]	important	[ɪmˈpɔːtnt]
because	[ˈkɒz] or [kəz]	insurance	[ˈɪnʃəns]
desperate	[ˈdɛspəɪt]	isn't	[ˈɪdn̩]
different	[ˈdɪfəɪnt]	something	[ˈsʌmpɪŋ] or [ˈsʌmpθəŋ]
everybody	[ˈɛvəɪbɒdi]	than	[d̩n̩] or [n̩]
everything	[ˈɛvəɪθɪŋ]	thing	[θɪŋ]
favorite	[ˈfævəɪt]	TV	[ˈtɪvi]
finger	[ˈfæŋ.gɪŋ]	umbrella	[ˈʌmbɪɹələ]
going to	[ˈɡoʊnə] or [ˈɡɒnə]	wasn't	[ˈwɒdn̩]
I'm going to	[ˈamɪŋ]		

VII. Additional Practice Material

Scripts:

Bad Dates by Theresa Rebeck

The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas by Larry King, Peter Masterson, & Carol Hall

The Harvest by David Crawford

Killer Joe by Tracy Letts

Ladies at the Alamo by Paul Zindel

Laundry & Bourbon by James

McLure

Laura Dennis by Horton Foote

Lone Star by James McLure

Period of Adjustment by Tennessee

Williams

Skyrker by Caryl Churchill

Sordid Lives by Del Shores

Texas Trilogy by Preston Jones

Trip to Bountiful by Horton Foote

Vanities by Jack Helfner



Cactus in the Hill Country

Film, Television, Links:

Lonesome Dove miniseries

No Country for Old Men

many of the smaller roles are native Texans in *The Alamo* (2004), *Second Hand Lions*, and

Friday Night Lights

The Last Picture Show

Fandango

Dallas Buyers Club

Lone Star

Bernie—lots of locals in smaller roles

Hell or High Water

Friday Night Lights—film shot in Texas

“King of the Hill” TV series has wonderfully accurate stereotypes



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Sam Elliott does an excellent West Texas accent in *The Golden Compass*, *Tombstone*, and most of his films

Interview with George Jones—Colmsneil

Interview with TX Senator Craig Estes—Wichita Falls

Interview with Lyndon B Johnson—Stonewall

Interview with Willie Nelson—Abbott

Presidential Candidate H Ross Perot—Texarkana

Anita Howard Talks about Katherine Anne Porter—Austin

Interview with Red Adair—Houston

Tex Ritter Talks about Politics & Cowboy Movies—Carthage & Beaumont

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor—El Paso

Golfer Ben Hogan—Dublin & Ft Worth

TX Rep Dan Flynn—Van

TX Rep Scott Sanford—McKinney

TX Rep Bryan Hughes—Mineola

Interview with Gary Busey—Goose Creek TX & Oklahoma

Interview with Dennis Quaid—Houston

Interview with Tommy Lee Jones—Midland

Interview with Kris Kristofferson—Brownsville

Interview with Matthew McConaughey—Uvalde & Longview

Interview with Ann Nicole Smith—Mexia

Midland TX—Tunnels & Crime

Texas Oilfield Truckers

Odessa City Council Honors Vet

Amarillo City Council Announces Sweet 16 Logo Finalists

Pet Registration Ordinance Moves on to the Amarillo City Council

Steve Savage Campaign—Abilene

This Week in Lubbock—City Council Planning

San Angelo City Council 9/19/17

Corpus Christi City Council Candidates

Richmond City Council Candidates Night

International Dialects of English Archive: Texas

VIII. Practice Monologue

I've never asked you to say or do anything that would compromise your relationship with your folks, so don't you go trying to put words in my mouth. I invited you here to spend some time with your cousins, cause they miss getting to see you and the rest of your family. I figure we could both just let sleeping dogs lie. We ain't going to solve nothing today. Listen, I'm fixing to head inside. I hope you'll come in, too, but I ain't going to make a fuss if you don't join us. You're a grown boy, near enough a man now, so make your choice. But you make damn sure you respect my home and all my family.

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Dallas by night