CLARIQUENCE

COMMUNICATION & EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

FREE RESOURCE

My Training Guide

A Guide to Speaking Right

Intonation · Pronunciation · Vowels & Consonants
Idioms · Silent Letters · Correct Expressions · Word Stress

WRITTEN BY

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WELCOME

About This Guide

My Training Guide is a free resource from CLARIQUENCE, written to help you speak English clearly, correctly and with confidence. Whether you are preparing for a presentation, leading a meeting or simply want to sound more polished in everyday conversation, this guide gives you the foundations.

It covers intonation, the pronunciation of commonly mispronounced words, the English sound system (vowels and consonants), idiomatic expressions, silent letters, correct English expressions and word stress. Work through it at your own pace, and come back to it whenever you need a refresher.

> HOW TO USE THE AUDIO
>
> Every word printed in blue and underlined is tappable. Tap it and it will open on **Cambridge Dictionary**. Then tap the speaker icon next to **UK** to hear the correct British English pronunciation. Listen, repeat it aloud, and listen again.
>
> The symbols between slashes, such as /ˈkjuːkʌmbə/, are the phonetic transcription (International Phonetic Alphabet). Chapters 3 and 4 explain what each symbol means.

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CHAPTER 1

Intonation

Every day, we communicate with different people, and most of the time we do so in English. The way we speak matters a great deal: it decides whether we bore our listener or hold their attention.

Our intonation says a lot about our emotions and our mood. It can show that we are happy, sad or stern, so it is important to use the right intonation as we speak.

Is intonation about speaking through the nose or putting on a fake accent? **No.**

What, then, is intonation?

Intonation is the **rise and fall of the voice** while speaking. Whenever we speak, our voice rises and falls. How, then, do we know when to use each tone? That brings us to the functions of the rising and falling tones.

Functions of the rising tone (↗)

A rising tone is an upward movement in the pitch of the voice. We often use it when asking questions, especially questions to which we expect a yes or no answer. The rise can be a jump in pitch or a gradual glide upwards. In most English textbooks, it is marked with an arrow rising from left to right (↗).

We use the rising tone:

1. When asking yes/no questions:
   Do you like your new ↗ teacher?
   Have you finished ↗ already?
   May I borrow your ↗ dictionary?
   Do you have any ↗ magazines?
2. When listing items. For example: *"I would like some eggs, cheese, toast and milk."* Each item takes a rising tone, and a falling tone ends the list.
3. When making polite requests: *"Could you please pass me the coffee?"*
4. When opening a greeting: *"Good morning, Sir."*
5. With question tags that show uncertainty and expect an answer:
   We've met before, ↗ haven't we?
   You like fish, ↗ don't you?
   You're new here, ↗ aren't you?

Functions of the falling tone (↘)

A falling tone is a downward movement in the pitch of the voice. We use it for statements of certainty, commands, exclamations and at the end of most sentences. In textbooks, it is marked with a downward arrow (↘).

We use the falling tone:

1. **Commands:** Put that ↘ down. Close the ↘ door. Sit over ↘ there.
2. **Exclamations:** That's ↘ beautiful! This is ↘ wonderful!

3. **Answering a greeting:** Good afternoon, ↘ Sir. Good morning, ↘ Madam.
4. **Statements**, and at the end of a sentence when we have finished what we want to say.
5. **Wh- questions** (what, where, when, who, why, how): Where do you ↘ live?

LISTEN & PRACTISE

Read every example in this chapter aloud. Exaggerate the rise and the fall at first, then soften it until it sounds natural. Record yourself on your phone and play it back.

Test yourself: Write a short passage about yourself (who you are, what you do and what you enjoy) and read it aloud with the correct intonation.

CHAPTER 2

Pronunciation of Basic English Words

Tap any word to hear it on Cambridge Dictionary. Choose the **UK** recording.

Days of the week

Monday	/ˈmʌndeɪ/	Tuesday	/ˈtjuːzdeɪ/
Wednesday	/ˈwenzdeɪ/	Thursday	/ˈθɜːzdeɪ/
Friday	/ˈfraɪdeɪ/	Saturday	/ˈsætədeɪ/
Sunday	/ˈsʌndeɪ/		

Months of the year

January	/ˈdʒænjuəri/	February	/ˈfebruəri/
March	/mɑːtʃ/	April	/ˈeɪprəl/
May	/meɪ/	June	/dʒuːn/
July	/dʒuˈlaɪ/	August	/ˈɔːgəst/
September	/sepˈtembə/	October	/ɒkˈtəʊbə/
November	/nəʊˈvembə/	December	/dɪˈsembə/

100 commonly mispronounced words

These words are frequently mispronounced, even by fluent speakers. Practise a few each day: say each word aloud before you tap it, compare yourself with the recording, and mark the ones to revisit tomorrow.

1. Pizza	/ˈpiːtsə/	2. Souvenir	/ˌsuːvəˈnɪə/
3. Assume	/əˈsjuːm/	4. Stipend	/ˈstaɪpend/
5. Obesity	/əʊˈbiːsəti/	6. Supermarket	/ˈsuːpəmɑːkɪt/
7. Mistake	/mɪˈsteɪk/	8. Basin	/ˈbeɪsn/
9. Basic	/ˈbeɪsɪk/	10. Hemisphere	/ˈhemɪsfɪə/
11. Equator	/ɪˈkweɪtə/	12. Axis	/ˈæksɪs/
13. Muscle	/ˈmʌsl/	14. Scissors	/ˈsɪzəz/
15. Scene	/siːn/	16. Scenario	/sɪˈnɑːriəʊ/
17. Epitome	/ɪˈpɪtəmi/	18. Ewe	/juː/
19. Expatiate	/ɪkˈspeɪʃieɪt/	20. Owl	/aʊl/
21. Finance	/ˈfaɪnæns, faɪˈnæns/	22. Schedule	/ˈʃedjuːl/
23. Divorce	/dɪˈvɔːs/	24. Funnel	/ˈfʌnl/
25. Sewage	/ˈsuːɪdʒ/	26. Atheist	/ˈeɪθiɪst/
27. Poem	/ˈpəʊɪm/	28. Blaspheme	/blæsˈfiːm/

29. Blasphemy	/ˈblæsfəmi/	30. Decease	/dɪˈsiːs/
31. Disease	/dɪˈziːz/	32. Education	/ˌedʒuˈkeɪʃn/
33. Accessory	/əkˈsesəri/	34. Façade	/fəˈsɑːd/
35. Orchid	/ˈɔːkɪd/	36. Accent	/ˈæksənt/
37. Archbishop	/ˌɑːtʃˈbɪʃəp/	38. Bona fide	/ˌbəʊnə ˈfaɪdi/
39. Biblical	/ˈbɪblɪkl/	40. Biscuit	/ˈbɪskɪt/
41. Chef	/ʃef/	42. Champagne	/ʃæmˈpeɪn/
43. Crèche	/kreʃ/	44. Colonel	/ˈkɜːnl/
45. Chastity	/ˈtʃæstəti/	46. Cache	/kæʃ/
47. Sword	/sɔːd/	48. Almond	/ˈɑːmənd/
49. Psalm	/sɑːm/	50. Chalk	/tʃɔːk/
51. Coup	/kuː/	52. Corps	/kɔː/
53. Crescent	/ˈkresnt/	54. Nursery	/ˈnɜːsəri/
55. Build	/bɪld/	56. Academy	/əˈkædəmi/
57. Comedian	/kəˈmiːdiən/	58. Cucumber	/ˈkjuːkʌmbə/
59. Cleanse	/klenz/	60. Cleanliness	/ˈklenlinəs/
61. Debt	/det/	62. Debtor	/ˈdetə/
63. Lettuce	/ˈletɪs/	64. Salon	/ˈsælɒn/
65. Foetus	/ˈfiːtəs/	66. Quarantine	/ˈkwɒrənti:n/
67. Inflammable	/ɪnˈflæməbl/	68. Lieutenant	/lefˈtenənt/
69. Listen	/ˈlɪsn/	70. Luxury	/ˈlʌkʃəri/
71. Laud	/lɔːd/	72. Machete	/məˈʃeti/
73. Lilac	/ˈlaɪlək/	74. Pleasant	/ˈpleznt/
75. Dwarf	/dwɔːf/	76. Recipe	/ˈresəpi/
77. Swallow	/ˈswɒləʊ/	78. Wand	/wɒnd/
79. Bald	/bɔːld/	80. Shovel	/ˈʃʌvl/
81. Tuition	/tjuˈɪʃn/	82. Trophy	/ˈtrəʊfi/
83. Tomb	/tuːm/	84. Tortoise	/ˈtɔːtəs/
85. Yacht	/jɒt/	86. Chameleon	/kəˈmiːliən/
87. Question	/ˈkwestʃən/	88. Digestion	/daɪˈdʒestʃən/
89. Equation	/ɪˈkweɪʒn/	90. Pressure	/ˈpreʃə/
91. Medicine	/ˈmedsn, ˈmedɪsn/	92. Sing	/sɪŋ/
93. Magician	/məˈdʒɪʃn/	94. Shepherd	/ˈʃepəd/
95. Fuel	/ˈfjuːəl/	96. Tyranny	/ˈtɪrəni/
97. Tissue	/ˈtɪʃuː/	98. Genre	/ˈʒɒnrə/
99. Plumber	/ˈplʌmə/	100. Hyperbole	/haɪˈpɜːbəli/

CHAPTER 3

Vowels

Vowels are speech sounds produced **without any obstruction** to the flow of air as it leaves the lungs. The speech organs include the lungs, the larynx (voice box) with the vocal cords, the pharynx, the soft palate (velum) and the mouth. In the mouth there are *active articulators* (the tongue, lower lip and lower jaw) and *passive articulators* (the upper teeth, upper lip, alveolar ridge and hard palate). When we produce a vowel, none of these blocks the air.

There are five vowel letters in English: A, E, I, O and U. Yet these letters produce **twenty vowel sounds**, divided into monophthongs and diphthongs. All vowel sounds are voiced.

The monophthongs

Monophthongs are single or "pure" vowel sounds. There are **twelve**: seven short sounds and five long sounds. We write phonetic symbols between slashes / / to show that they are sounds, not ordinary letters, and we use the length mark ː to show that a sound is long.

Sound	Length	As in (tap to listen)
/iː/	long	feet, greet, teeth, suite, quay, machine, amoeba
/ɪ/	short	sit, build, estate, biscuit, pit, bin
/e/	short	elbow, elephant, dead, get, egg, leopard
/æ/	short	apple, antelope, plait, gigantic, transparent
/ɑː/	long	father, cart, class, clerk, aunt, glass, market
/ɒ/	short	cot, hot, swallow, wand, orange, what, sausage
/ɔː/	long	daughter, court, talk, chalk, sword, horse, bald, dwarf
/ʊ/	short	woman, should, sugar, pull, full, cook, look
/uː/	long	tomb, womb, school, fool, pool, spoon
/ʌ/	short	oven, onion, funnel, shovel, dove, fun, cup
/ɜː/	long	colonel, shirt, skirt, earth, curtain, nursery, prefer
/ə/	short	teacher, doctor, among, ago, mother, brother, again

The diphthongs

Diphthongs are double vowel sounds: two monophthongs gliding together to make one sound. They are all long. There are **eight** diphthongs in English.

Sound	As in (tap to listen)
/eɪ/	play, gate, apron, tray, sachet
/əʊ/	go, slow, show, boat, home
/aɪ/	light, tight, bridle, shine, irony, island
/ɔɪ/	oil, buoy, coil, voice, buoyant, coin
/aʊ/	out, house, cow, town, mouth, pound
/ɪə/	peer, beer, atmosphere, clear, cheer
/eə/	pear, bear, share, air, chair
/ʊə/	pure, cure, tour, sure, poor

Note: many British speakers today pronounce *sure*, *poor* and *tour* with /ɔː/ instead of /ʊə/. Both are acceptable.

SUMMARY

- A monophthong is a single vowel sound; a diphthong is two vowel sounds gliding together.
- Monophthongs are written with one phonetic symbol; diphthongs with two.
- Monophthongs are divided into long and short sounds; all diphthongs are long.
- There are twelve monophthongs and eight diphthongs.
- There are five vowel letters but twenty vowel sounds.

CHAPTER 4

Consonants

Consonants are speech sounds produced when the flow of air is **partly or completely blocked** somewhere in the mouth or throat. There are twenty-one consonant letters (B, C, D, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, N, P, Q, R, S, T, V, W, X, Y, Z), and they produce **twenty-four consonant sounds**.

Consonant sounds are either **voiced** or **voiceless**. This depends on the vocal cords in the voice box: if they vibrate, the sound is voiced; if they do not, it is voiceless. Try it: place your fingers on your throat and say /zzzz/ and then /ssss/. You will feel a buzz on the first but not the second.

Place of articulation

This is where in the mouth the air is blocked or narrowed.

Place	Organs used	Sounds
Bilabial	both lips	/p, b, m, w/
Labio-dental	lower lip and upper teeth	/f, v/
Dental	tongue and upper front teeth	/θ, ð/
Alveolar	tongue and the ridge behind the upper teeth	/t, d, s, z, n, l/
Post-alveolar	tongue just behind the alveolar ridge	/ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ, r/
Palatal	tongue and hard palate	/j/
Velar	back of the tongue and soft palate	/k, g, ŋ/
Glottal	the vocal cords themselves	/h/

Manner of articulation

This is *how* the airstream is affected as it flows from the lungs and out through the mouth or nose.

1. **Nasals:** the mouth is completely blocked and air passes out through the nose: /m, n, ŋ/.
2. **Plosives (stops):** the air is completely blocked, pressure builds up behind the blockage and is then released in a small burst: /p, b, t, d, k, g/.
3. **Fricatives:** the air is only partly blocked and is forced through a narrow gap, causing friction. There are nine: voiced /v, ð, z, ʒ/ and voiceless /f, θ, s, ʃ, h/.
4. **Affricates:** start like a plosive and are released like a fricative: /tʃ, dʒ/.
5. **Lateral:** the tongue blocks the middle of the mouth and air passes around the sides: /l/.
6. **Approximants (glides, semi-vowels):** two articulators come close together, but not close enough to create friction: /r, w, j/.

The 24 consonant sounds

Sound	As in	Sound	As in
/p/	Peter, paper, pastor, rapport	/s/	sandal, sunny, cylinder, fence
/b/	bicycle, basket, rob, rubber	/z/	zebra, scissors, jazz, Zion
/t/	television, tennis, tomb, cart	/ʃ/	shower, show, pressure, tissue
/d/	address, doctor, dog, advertisement	/ʒ/	television, occasion, equation, rouge
/k/	cat, kangaroo, choir, chemistry	/h/	house, hat, who, whose
/g/	grow, gutter, big, beggar	/m/	manner, mango, summer, manager
/tʃ/	chocolate, church, question, nature	/n/	nurse, knife, kneel, nasal
/dʒ/	education, jury, image, giant	/ŋ/	sing, Singapore, thing, bank
/f/	fish, fanatic, photography, rough	/l/	lullaby, long, fell, look
/v/	vulture, vegetable, of, Stephen	/r/	rainbow, runner, wrinkle, tomorrow
/θ/	thought, think, thank, Ruth	/j/	yellow, yacht, uniform, ewe
/ð/	father, mother, those, that	/w/	when, watch, one, what

SUMMARY

- There are twenty-one consonant letters and twenty-four consonant sounds.
- Consonant sounds are either voiced (the vocal cords vibrate) or voiceless (they do not).
- Consonants are classified by their **place** of articulation (where the air is blocked) and their **manner** of articulation (how the air is blocked or released).

CHAPTER 5

Idiomatic Expressions

An idiom (or idiomatic expression) is a phrase whose meaning is different from the literal meaning of its individual words. For example, *"it rained cats and dogs"* does not mean that cats and dogs fell from the sky; it simply means it rained heavily.

English has thousands of idioms. In this chapter, we look at idioms that are commonly distorted, and at the standard form you should use instead.

#	Commonly heard	Say this instead
1	× A beggar has no choice.	✓ Beggars can't be choosers.
2	× The devil you know is better than the angel you don't know.	✓ Better the devil you know (than the devil you don't).
3	× Cut your coat according to your size.	✓ Cut your coat according to your cloth.
4	× More grease to your elbow.	✓ More power to your elbow.
5	× A problem shared is a problem solved.	✓ A problem shared is a problem halved.
6	× Let bygone be bygone.	✓ Let bygones be bygones.
7	× Half bread is better than none.	✓ Half a loaf is better than no bread.
8	× An idle hand is the devil's workshop.	✓ Idle hands are the devil's workshop. / The devil makes work for idle hands.
9	× Two good heads are better than one.	✓ Two heads are better than one.
10	× I know fully well I'll be successful.	✓ I know full well I'll be successful.
11	× We need to meet and rub minds together.	✓ We need to put our heads together.
12	× Never bite the finger that feeds you.	✓ Never bite the hand that feeds you.
13	× That word is not in my dictionary.	✓ That word is not in my vocabulary.
14	× To be forewarned is to be forearmed.	✓ Forewarned is forearmed.
15	× Familiarity brings insult.	✓ Familiarity breeds contempt.
16	× Funny enough, I don't like him.	✓ Funnily enough, I don't like him.
17	× Jokes apart, I enjoyed the party.	✓ Joking apart, I enjoyed the party.
18	× You can't eat your cake and have it.	✓ You can't have your cake and eat it.
19	× Make haste while the sun shines.	✓ Make hay while the sun shines.
20	× You are fighting a lost battle.	✓ You are fighting a losing battle.
21	× A word is enough for the wise.	✓ A word to the wise (is enough).
22	× He who pays the piper dictates the tune.	✓ He who pays the piper calls the tune.
23	× She is in hot soup for what she did.	✓ She is in hot water (or in the soup) for what she did.

CHAPTER 6

Silent Letters

Silent letters are letters that appear in the spelling of a word but are not pronounced. In English, the letters B, C, D, E, G, H, K, L, M, N, P, S, T and W can all be silent in different words. Tap each word to hear how it is really said.

Silent	Words (tap to listen)
B	bomb, climb, comb, debt, doubt, dumb, lamb, limb, numb, plumber, subtle, succumb, thumb, tomb, womb
C	crescent, descend, descent, disciple, fascinate, fluorescent, muscle, scissors
D	bridge, edge, handkerchief, handsome, grandson, ledger, sandwich, Wednesday
E	hate, name, like, breathe, clothes, vegetable, plague
G	align, assign, benign, champagne, cologne, design, foreign
H	hour, honest, heir, ghost, rhythm, exhaust, when
K	knack, knee, kneel, knife, knock, knowledge
L	would, should, could, calf, half, salmon, talk, walk
M	mnemonic
N	autumn, column, condemn, hymn, solemn
P	psychology, pneumonia, receipt, corps, coup, cupboard, psalm, raspberry
S	aisle, island, debris, isle, viscount
T	apostle, bristle, bustle, castle, fasten, glisten, hustle, listen, moisten
W	sword, write, wrist, wrap, wrath, answer, two

LISTEN & PRACTISE

Read each row aloud, then tap three words you are unsure of and check yourself against the recording.

CHAPTER 7

Correct English Expressions

In everyday conversation, we all make grammatical slips. This chapter shows some common errors and the correct expressions to use instead.

#	Wrong	Right
1	× Night vigil	✓ Vigil
2	× As at when due	✓ As and when due
3	× I'm hearing you	✓ I can hear you
4	× My names are …	✓ My name is …
5	× Lacking behind	✓ Lagging behind
6	× Return it back	✓ Return it / Give it back
7	× I need a feedback from you	✓ I need feedback from you
8	× Wake keeping / Wake keep	✓ Wake
9	× I cracked my brain during the test	✓ I racked my brain during the test
10	× Barbing salon	✓ Barber's / Barbershop
11	× I'll be there irregardless of what she says	✓ I'll be there regardless of what she says
12	× I forgot my phone at home	✓ I left my phone at home
13	× Borrow me your pen	✓ Lend me your pen / May I borrow your pen?
14	× My body is scratching me	✓ My body itches / I'm itching
15	× You're mannerless	✓ You're ill-mannered / rude
16	× Horn at the car in front	✓ Hoot (or honk) at the car in front
17	× Happy birthday in arrears	✓ Belated happy birthday / Happy belated birthday
18	× I will sleep at 9.30 p.m.	✓ I will go to bed at 9.30 p.m.
19	× Contact a disease	✓ Contract a disease
20	× Working experience	✓ Work experience
21	× He is a godsent	✓ He is a godsend
22	× She has a running nose	✓ She has a runny nose
23	× We will fight fire for fire	✓ We will fight fire with fire
24	× Please expantiate on the point	✓ Please expatiate on the point
25	× Off your shoes	✓ Take off your shoes
26	× He had the mind to disrespect his father	✓ He had the nerve (or the gall) to disrespect his father
27	× I will pay installmentally	✓ I will pay in instalments
28	× Do not jump into conclusions	✓ Do not jump to conclusions
29	× Stop looking for my trouble	✓ Stop troubling me / Leave me alone

#	Wrong	Right
30	× I am in a bus	✓ I am on a bus
31	× My house is a stone throw from here	✓ My house is a stone's throw from here
32	× I have known her for donkey years	✓ I have known her for donkey's years
33	× That man is a tout (meaning rude and rough)	✓ That man is a lout*
34	× He is double dating (meaning dating two people at once)	✓ He is two-timing*
35	× She is a staff	✓ She is a member of staff / a staff member
36	× Hello, my fellow colleagues	✓ Hello, colleagues / Hello, my fellow students*
37	× He is an upcoming artiste	✓ He is an up-and-coming artiste
38	× I am a goal getter	✓ I am a go-getter

Notes

- **Lout or tout?** A *lout* is a rude, aggressive or badly behaved person. A *tout* is someone who aggressively sells tickets or tries to win customers, such as a ticket tout.
- **Double dating:** a *double date* is when two couples go out together. Someone dating two people secretly at the same time is *two-timing*.
- **Fellow colleagues:** "fellow" and "colleague" mean the same thing, so together they repeat themselves. Also, students are classmates or fellow students rather than colleagues, because they are not co-workers.

CHAPTER 8

Syllables and Word Stress

A **syllable** is a word, or part of a word, that contains one vowel sound. It is a single unit of speech, and a word can contain one or more syllables. There are three types:

- **Monosyllables:** words with one syllable: phone, bird, come, me, man, we, chair, cream.
- **Disyllables:** words with two syllables: mir-ror, gut-ter, cur-tain, ta-ble, ho-tel.
- **Polysyllables:** words with three or more syllables: um-brel-la, com-pu-ter, Sep-tem-ber, pho-net-ic, cu-cum-ber, cha-me-le-on.

Word stress

Stress is the extra emphasis given to one syllable in a word. In English, a stressed syllable is **louder, longer and higher in pitch** than the syllables around it. The stressed syllable is also called the *accented* syllable ("accent" here simply means emphasis). Without the right stress, speech sounds unnatural and can even be misunderstood.

Here are some words with the correct stress. The **BOLD BLUE** syllable is the one to stress. Tap the word to hear it.

Word	Stress	Word	Stress
goggle	**GOG** · gle	begin	be · **GIN**
water	**WA** · ter	biscuit	**BIS** · cuit
market	**MAR** · ket	groundnut	**GROUND** · nut
umbrella	um · **BREL** · la	hotel	ho · **TEL**
mistake	mis · **TAKE**	event	e · **VENT**
people	**PEO** · ple	career	ca · **REER**
estate	e · **STATE**	develop	de · **VEL** · op
television	**TEL** · e · vi · sion	colleague	**COL** · league
together	to · **GETH** · er	success	suc · **CESS**
potato	po · **TA** · to	comfortable	**COM** · fort · a · ble
before	be · **FORE**	photographer	pho · **TOG** · ra · pher

LISTEN & PRACTISE

Clap once for each syllable as you say the word, and clap louder on the stressed one. Then say it without clapping, keeping the same rhythm.

THE AUTHOR

About the Author

Ruth Iboro Ekiko is the Founder, Director and Lead Coach of CLARIQUENCE, a communication and executive presence organisation. A passionate English diction and public speaking coach, she works online and in person with professionals, executives, corporate organisations and schools, helping them speak with clarity, confidence and polish.

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TALK TO US

Work with CLARIQUENCE

This guide is a starting point. At CLARIQUENCE, we offer personalised, one-to-one and group coaching for individuals and organisations that want to communicate with clarity, confidence and presence.

Our services include:

- Executive presence coaching, including *The Polished Executive: Presence, Protocol & Poise*
- British English speaking, diction and pronunciation
- Public speaking and presentation skills
- Corporate communication training for organisations and teams
- Personal and group communication coaching for adults and young people
- Mentorship programmes
- IELTS (English proficiency) exam preparation
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