



**Female Voice:** You are now listening to the IELTS podcast. Learn from tutors and ex-examiners who are masters of IELTS preparation. Your host, Ben Worthington.

## INTRODUCTION

**Ben:** Speaking: Band 9 pronunciation features. Hello, there. My name is Ben Worthington. In this tutorial, **we will look at what it means to display a full range of [pronunciation features](#) with precision and subtlety in a band 9 answer.** This will help you to learn what the **pronunciation features** are and **how to use them effectively** and we're also going to look at some successful examples of [sentence stress](#) and [intonation](#) in a band 9 answer.

## THREE FEATURES TO SCORE HIGHER

Now, getting a band 9 is quite a challenge and to help you get there, what we're going to do is we're going to **break down some of the features especially three features that you will need to develop an understanding of in order to score higher.** So, we're going to look at the [pronunciation](#) of individual sounds, [words and sentence stress](#), and [intonation](#).



Now, you can understand me pretty much perfectly, I hope, and I think the reason is because nowadays I'm speaking much clearer. As you probably know, I'm from Yorkshire. Sometimes I say Manchester because people are familiar with Manchester and less so with Huddersfield which is my home town.

Anyway, people from my region we have a Yorkshire accent and when I went to Australia the first time, like really going abroad and living there people would not understand me especially if I spoke at the same pace. So, I had to slow down the way I was talking especially to non-British people. There are a bunch of Israelis that just couldn't understand a word. Even sometimes the Australians struggled.

I remember once I was on a telephone call trying to get my phone sorted out and I had to tell her my number and I said it was something like zero four... I said **naught** four three four one and she didn't understand what **naught** was and **naught** in Britain and in America is an old way to say **zero**, but in some parts of Britain and America, we still use it quite commonly.

Not only was I using an uncommon word with this Australian customer service representative, but also I was saying it in my Yorkshire accent. I was saying naught like that and I was dropping the 't' and this went on for about five minutes-- no, for about three minutes. She was like what is naught? I was like **naught**, you know, it comes before one and she's like I have no idea until the penny dropped and I realized I should be saying **naught** or **zero**. **Nowadays, I just say zero because everybody understands zero.**



## PROBLEM AREAS AND SOLUTION

Anyway, what I'm saying is that you need to **be aware of certain problem areas and then try and modify them**. So, we are going to jump into the individual sound. We are going to look at word and sentence stress and intonation and I'll tell you a funny story in a few minutes about something I read online.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT THE INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS

Anyway, we're going to look at-- first, we're going to look at the individual sounds and these are the **sound elements of the words we pronounce**. So, we've got **pronounced vowels such as man, men, ship, and sheep**. We've got deep things when two vowels are said together to produce one sound. For example, post paste, sure and sour and then we've got consonants which will sound like pin, the 'n' there in the pin, van, at the beginning and fan, the f at the beginning.



Now, if there are any errors in the way you form English sounds or they are too familiar to the sounds of your native language, you're not going to get the band 9. So, you really need to make sure that the sounds that you are pronouncing are articulated accurately and most importantly, you need to be aware that they do not cause confusion.

### TWO TIPS TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE

Just two tips here to get over this issue.

One is to **record yourself and play it back and then review it**. I've said this a million times. Second way to improve or to really check is to **jump on a call**. Make some phone calls and just start talking with the person and asking questions ideally in Britain and this is a real test because when you are speaking on the phone, all visual clues are taken away. It's just you and your voice and sometimes the connection might not even be-- it's not going to be as optimum as when you are speaking face to face.

### NEXT LEVEL PRACTICE



So, it's a real challenge, but if you want to take your speaking to the next level, **ring up a hotel in the UK or ring up a butcher's in the UK** or wherever and just ask questions. Ask them when their opening times are. Ask them how much products cost. Ask them the advantages-- this works especially well when you're talking with somebody who wants to sell you because they'll talk with you forever. So, that's a real test and it will probably cost you much less than having a tutor.

Now then, let's just have a look at this one sentence. In this sentence, there are lots of sounds that could be challenging. We've got-- I'll say the sentence. Being bilingual or multilingual will help extend your networking opportunities worldwide.

### MORE WORDS

Now, the words **being, bilingual, help, and worldwide** might be challenging to pronounce for some speakers.

So, make sure that being doesn't sound like been. Make sure you pronounce the 'g' and likewise with help. Make sure it's not pronounced elp or as some in Spain say ghelph. Make sure it's just a soft breathing sound like help. That's a bit of an exaggeration. Help. And also probably for the Slavic, German, and Hungarian listeners worldwide, I've often heard pronounced worldvide. So, be really careful about this.



## A FUNNY STORY ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PRONUNCIATION

Now, just to share some importance about pronunciation. I read online about this girl that went into the shop to buy a can of Irn-Bru, which is a famous Scottish drink and she said-- she asked the Chinese man what was the price and the guy said it depends and she was like hey, what does that mean? What's the price? And the guy said **“it depends”**.

And she kept on saying this and she was like getting frustrated, so she said hey, do I have to buy something first? Is there a special sales price? And the guy just kept on saying no, no, no, **“it depends”**. And then after a couple of minutes, it turns out the guy was saying **“80 pence”**. She was getting really frustrated and all he wanted to say was **“80 pence”**, but it sounded like **“it depends”**. So, this is really important why the pronunciation is especially important.

I mean for her it was just a little bit uncomfortable and she was obviously embarrassed. With him, he was probably frustrated. This crazy Scottish lass coming in. She kept arguing over the price. For you, it's a matter of taking the test again or not getting your target score. So, pay special attention to the pronunciation.



## WORD AND SENTENCE STRESS

Now, another very important component is **word and sentence stress**. So, **stress is the emphasis placed on a syllable in a word** or a specific word in a sentence. Now, I've kind of touched on this before, but I'll just mention it again. We've got words like **protest** and **protest**. So, **if I say protest**, I'm protesting against a new law in the UK, for example. However, if I say **there was a protest**, that probably means like a demonstration maybe by some environmental group and it's a completely different word. Not completely different. Obviously, they are related, but just by changing where the stress is, we can change the meaning but don't worry about this.

I remember a lot of students used to struggle with the verb **read**. It's the same word if you say read or you can say read. And there are some clues especially-- there are some clues because on how the word is used and the words that are around the word will help you understand whether the speaker is saying protest or protest.

You wouldn't exaggerate it as much as I do, but as you can see if we're going to use the noun, we're going to probably have an article in front of it. There was a protest in the morning or I protest that I don't want to speak German in my class, whatever. So, as I said, it depends not only on the pronunciation, but the words used around it and obviously the context.



## ACCURACY IN YOUR WORD STRESS

Now, **accuracy in your [word stress](#) is compulsory if you want to get a band 9**. There cannot be confusion. Now, this is another reason why a telephone call can really be a good test of your level. You can really get some valuable feedback if the person doesn't understand what you're saying, then you really need to go back and work on the areas that-- work on the areas that were causing the confusion. So, if you ring somebody up and you're making I don't know, inquiries and they're asking you to repeat certain parts those are the parts that you really need to work on and to improve.

Also, **[sentence stress](#)** is really used-- is also really important for placing importance or to indicate the important part of the sentence, okay? And you can also convey emphasis or highlighting the right idea in your argument or explanation. So, I'll give you an example sentence and I'm going to stress the important words and this can be really useful in your exam. So, here's the phrase.

If you speak a language like English or Mandarin, you'll be able to work for not only local but global businesses as well with the perk of quite a decent salary. Can you see? This example of sentence stress would fulfill the band 9 pronunciation criteria of using a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety. This means that a **skillful use of**



**phonological aspects in your speech greatly contributes to the best expression of the message you intend to convey and leaves no ambiguity, okay?**

As you've probably heard in previous podcasts, there's one where a student-- a very successful student she wrote out sample answers for the speaking. She actually wrote them out and I assume she got feedback for them. It would be wise if she did, but you can write out your answers and then you can review them and you can look for opportunities to improve the vocabulary and you can even probably highlight some of the words that you want to emphasize to help you get that band 9 score which basically as I said before, it's using a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety.

So, as you just heard in that example, you could hear, hopefully, the stress on words like English, Mandarin, and then you could hear the stress on the not only local but global business as well with a perk of quite a decent salary. You see? And this is what you should be aiming for.

So, I **strongly recommend you write out your answers then you go review it and you [upgrade the vocabulary](#)** and you can also just quickly go through or maybe highlight or embolden if you are doing it on the computer the certain phrases or the important points in the sentence and this will improve comprehension for the listener.

You can even possibly do this before you have a call. **Just maybe write out what you expect to say and highlight--** you see I'm doing it now, I emphasized the words that I want you to pay special attention to, but you can go back to the call. You can write out what you want to say



and then highlight the specific words and then when you come to the call, you can apply the extra attention and the extra effort on those words to make sure that you are understood.

## INTONATION

Okay, moving on to the final point; [intonation](#) and this is really interesting. In practically all the languages in the world, we use intonation. We use it for a question. We use it when we want to be absolutely sure of something. We will go down at the end of the sentence to make sure there is no ambiguity there and the opposite for a question. As I just said, we'll go up the end.

I remember actually when I used to be a teacher in Spain, we used to have this drilling method. It was really scary at first the first time we saw it. We would go through all the tenses and the students would have to sit there and they would be going, "Is he playing football? He is playing football. He isn't playing football." And then we would do it with the present simple. "Does he play football? He plays football. He doesn't play football."

And you'd have like eleven kids all singing at the same time. They go through all the tenses, like about ten different verbs. It was really scary the first time I saw it, but it was effective because then when the student asked questions, they would naturally go up at the end. Anyway, let's get back to it.



So, intonation is quite a complex pronunciation feature. All right and English is considered to be somewhat challenging by language learners because sometimes you can feel ridiculous like or maybe you'll be worried about sounding rude because of the-- because you might be using it incorrectly.

So, **we can also not also use the intonation for questions affirmative or negative**, but we can also **convey mood**. We can also support meaning and we can also indicate new information. If we are aware of these three extra features that we can convey with intonation, it's going to help the listener understand-- it's going to help the listener's comprehension.

## PRECISION AND SUBTLETY

Now, **precision and subtlety** in this case as we've mentioned before which is a band 9 feature, **refers to modulating your intonation in order to make sure that you cover all these functions: the mood, the meaning, and the new information**. And also, it's going to make your speaking more interesting. If I spoke monotone all the time, you'd probably switch off or you'd probably use it to go to sleep, okay? Hopefully, you're not going to do either of those.



## BE NATURAL

Now, another piece of advice to make sure that you get a 7 or above, is **to be natural**, okay? This kind of goes against what I was saying before, but if you're really struggling then you really need to pay attention and you need to work on it and then once you've put in that foundation, you can start moving towards staying natural. To stay natural, a very good point is to **be relaxed and also speak in your mind** and letting your speech convey this natural melody. This is why being over-prepared can actually or could actually stifle your score, can actually stifle your progression, okay? So, just remember though, when you are speaking naturally, you're probably going to emphasize instinctively important facts, examples and also you're going to mark your opinion there. So, just be careful.

## DO NOT GO OVER FOR SPEAKING PART 3

This is why it's important **not to go over -- not to prepare too much for speaking part 3**. Like memorizing answers is crazy. This is definitely **going to make your answer sound unnatural** whereas preparing for the answers, preparing for all the recent questions, for example, and



writing out sample answers and improving the vocabulary will definitely help because it's going to make that vocabulary more readily available in your mind when you come to speaking.

Overall, the best advice is to [get as much speaking practice](#) as possible. I know this sounds dry and boring. **Practice, practice, practice**, but get as much speaking practice as possible in order to reach that natural state and you don't even need a speaking partner. You can do this on your own. You can record yourself. You can ring up businesses in England. You can also practice with a friend.

There are lots of different ways to do this. You can also speak with yourself. You've probably heard me mention before about my Spanish friend who used to wheel his grandma around in a wheelchair speaking English to her. She didn't have a clue what he was saying, but he just needed to get this practice. When you are in a supermarket, make your list in English. Plan your day in English and just small steps and you will eventually get there.

Right then, **if you want to listen to [some part 3 examples or band 9 answers](#)-- question and answers, we've got plenty in the podcast archives.** Just scroll backwards and you'll be able to find them there. There's different ones. Ones with Scottish people, Welsh people, English people. Obviously, they are all speaking grammatically perfect and they are offering just sample answers for you to follow.

Now, that is everything. If you are still struggling with your IELTS, then remember you can go to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com) and you can **join the [Speaking Confidence Course](#) if you want to improve your fluency.** You can join the [Writing Course](#) where we offer feedback and students improve



so much faster when they [get the feedback](#). We're also hopefully going to start offering speaking feedback again. So, if you're interested in that, please send us an email and we might be able to set you up with some trial tests sort of-- until we get the program perfect. Also, remember if you've got any friends that are struggling with IELTS, please tell them to **download and join us on [IELTS podcast](#)** and just one last thing, sign up for the email list. We're getting a ton of value. We even get emails from students saying, "Hey, I followed all the tips on your email series. Thank you so much. They helped us. They helped me pass the exam." So, yes. A ton of value in the email series.

#### FINAL TIPS

Right then. That's everything from me. Remember to **keep trying**. Remember **consistency** is better than blitzing it for five hours on one weekend. It's probably much better **to do 30 minutes daily for a month than doing two hours two days of ten hours each**. So, it's **consistency**, turning up, getting in the right frame of mind, getting it done the first thing, first part of the day and lots of tips like this are in the email series. **YOU CAN DO THIS! You just have to keep on practicing and keep on improving and you will get there**. Have a great day and thank you for listening. All the best. [music]

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