

THE 44 ACADEMY

British Pronunciation Mastery for the Nigerian Educator

31 TRICKS · 44 PHONEMES · 6 PHASES · MASTER PRACTITIONER CERTIFICATION

A TERM-LONG TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM

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AT A GLANCE

- 31 foundation tricks + 44 phonemes — the complete British RP sound system
- 75 total lessons organised into 8 progressive modules
- 6-phase phoneme structure: short vowels, long vowels, diphthongs, plosives, fricatives, nasals/approximants
- A six-element lesson structure for every phoneme (anatomy, spellings, drills, passage, minimal pairs, dialogue and tongue twister)
- Term-long cohort delivery via private Telegram Academy
- Weekly voice-note submissions with personal feedback from Jonathan Onah
- A dedicated Discussion Group for teacher-to-teacher practice and peer learning
- Anatomy videos illustrating tongue, lip, and jaw position for every sound
- Teacher-facing content — how to teach each sound, not just how to produce it
- Master Practitioner Certification on successful completion
- Post-graduation access — the Academy remains open for reference

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By successful completion of The 44 Academy, every graduate will demonstrably be able to:

PRODUCER-LEVEL PHONEME MASTERY

- Produce all 7 short vowels of British RP: /ɪ/, /e/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ʊ/, /ʊ/, /ə/
- Produce all 5 long vowels: /i:/, /ɑ:/, /ɔ:/, /ɜ:/, /u:/
- Produce all 8 diphthongs: /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/, /əʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/, /ʊə/
- Produce all 6 plosives: /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/
- Produce all 9 fricatives and 2 affricates
- Produce all 3 nasals and 4 approximants

RHYTHMIC AND STRESS COMPETENCE

- Apply all 31 foundation tricks — punching, tonic landing, endings, schwa mastery, weak forms, linking, silent letters, intonation
- Read connected prose in British RP with stress-timed rhythm
- Model correct intonation for statements, questions, commands, requests, and lists

TEACHING COMPETENCE

- Explain the anatomy of every phoneme using accurate physiological description
- Diagnose common Nigerian mispronunciations by phoneme and prescribe targeted drills

- Design and deliver a phoneme-specific pronunciation lesson to a class of any age from Primary 4 upward
- Deploy the six-element structure in their own classroom
- Use minimal pairs as a diagnostic tool
- Provide corrective voice-note feedback using the green/amber/red signal system

PROFESSIONAL OUTCOMES

- Deliver public speaking, presentations, and voice-over work in British RP
- Serve as an in-school pronunciation expert and mentor to junior teachers
- Confidently present at teacher-training workshops on English pronunciation
- Add the Diction Masters Master Practitioner Certification to their professional credentials

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE & DELIVERY

DELIVERY PLATFORM

The 44 Academy is delivered through a private Telegram Academy. Enrolled teachers are added to two Telegram groups.

Group 1 — The Academy

Organised as topic threads: one thread per trick and one thread per phoneme (75 threads total). Each thread contains the video lesson, the drill words, the practice passage, the minimal pairs, the dialogue, and the anatomy video where applicable.

Group 2 — The Discussion Group

The practice group. Teachers post their voice recordings, tagged by lesson. Jonathan personally reviews each recording and responds with green/amber/red feedback within 72 hours.

COHORT CADENCE

The 44 Academy runs on an academic-term cadence. Cohorts start at fixed intervals (typically at the beginning of each Nigerian school term). The full programme runs for 12 to 16 weeks:

- Weeks 1–2: The 31 foundation tricks (compressed pace)
- Weeks 3–5: Phase 1 (Short Vowels) — 7 sounds
- Weeks 6–7: Phase 2 (Long Vowels) — 5 sounds
- Weeks 8–10: Phase 3 (Diphthongs) — 8 sounds
- Weeks 11–12: Phase 4 (Plosives) — 6 sounds
- Weeks 13–14: Phase 5 (Fricatives and Affricates) — 11 sounds
- Weeks 15–16: Phase 6 (Nasals and Approximants) — 7 sounds + Master Practitioner Assessment

THE SIX-ELEMENT LESSON STRUCTURE

Every phoneme lesson follows the same six-element structure — the pedagogical spine of The 44 Academy:

1. **Anatomy Video** — Mouth position, tongue placement, voicing state
2. **Spelling Patterns** — The graphemes that map to this phoneme
3. **Drill Words** — 15–30 words featuring the sound in different positions
4. **Practice Passage** — Connected prose loaded with target words
5. **Minimal Pairs** — Word pairs differing only by this sound, for contrast
6. **Dialogue and Tongue Twister** — Teacher-friendly classroom exchanges and a repeating drill

FEEDBACK SIGNALS

●	GREEN — Mastered	The target sound or trick is being produced correctly. Move to the next lesson.
●	AMBER — Solid, Refinable	The sound is broadly correct with specific small refinements suggested.
●	RED — Needs Rework	The sound has not been captured accurately. Re-watch the video, re-drill the words, re-record.

SUGGESTED PACING

The 44 Academy is designed around a single primary cadence — the term-long cohort pace of 12 to 16 weeks.

THE STANDARD COHORT — 16 WEEKS

The default pace for individually enrolled teachers. One structural module per phase, with weekly practice submissions.

WEEK	FOCUS
1	Tricks 1–8 (Rhythm foundation, endings, first vowels)
2	Tricks 9–31 + Graduation passage
3	Sounds 1–3 (Phase 1: /ɪ/ KIT, /e/ DRESS, /æ/ TRAP)
4	Sounds 4–5 (/ʌ/ STRUT, /ɒ/ LOT)
5	Sounds 6–7 (/ʊ/ FOOT, /ə/ SCHWA)
6	Sounds 8–10 (Phase 2: /i:/, /ɑ:/, /ɔ:/)
7	Sounds 11–12 (/ɜ:/, /u:/)
8	Sounds 13–15 (Phase 3: /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/)
9	Sounds 16–18 (/aʊ/, /əʊ/, /ɪə/)
10	Sounds 19–20 (/eə/, /ʊə/)
11	Sounds 21–23 (Phase 4: /p/, /b/, /t/)
12	Sounds 24–26 (/d/, /k/, /g/)
13	Sounds 27–30 (Phase 5: /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/)
14	Sounds 31–37 (/s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /h/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/)
15	Sounds 38–44 (Phase 6: /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /l/, /r/, /w/, /j/)
16	Master Practitioner Assessment and Graduation

THE INTENSIVE COHORT — 12 WEEKS

Available on request for committed teachers who can allocate 5–7 hours per week. Compresses the standard programme by grouping phonemes more aggressively.

THE SCHOOL-WIDE COHORT — FULL ACADEMIC TERM

For school-based enrolments, the pace can be aligned with the school's term calendar. Diction Masters works with school leadership to embed the weekly lessons within the professional-development schedule.

PART 1 — THE 31 FOUNDATION TRICKS

The 44 Academy begins with the 31 foundation tricks — a compressed re-teaching of the material in Sound British in 7 Days. Even for teachers who have completed Sound British previously, these two weeks are important: they establish the shared vocabulary and rhythmic baseline that every phoneme lesson will build on.

The tricks are covered at accelerated pace (approximately 15 tricks per week for the first two weeks). Full lesson materials are available in each trick's Telegram thread.

#	TRICK	DESCRIPTION
1	Punch the Content Words	The rhythm foundation. Content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) are pushed forward with volume, breath, and jaw drop; function words are compressed.
2	Land the Tonic Syllable	The pitch drop that ends every English thought group. The tonic syllable carries the sentence's meaning peak with a clean pitch fall.
3	Fix -tion, -ed, -ing, -er Endings	The four most common English word endings. -tion becomes /ʃən/; -ed splits into three sounds; -ing becomes soft /ɪŋ/; -er collapses to /ə/.
4	The -s Ending (three sounds)	Splits into /s/ after voiceless consonants, /z/ after voiced, and /ɪz/ after sibilants.
5	The Long /ɔ:/ Vowel	The rounded, elongated vowel in “walk,” “daughter,” “more.” Often collapsed to a shorter /ɒ/ by Nigerian speakers.
6	The Relaxed /ʌ/ Vowel	The relaxed central vowel in “cup,” “love,” “young,” “blood.” Four spellings, one sound.
7	The /eɪ/ Diphthong	The gliding vowel in “day,” “take,” “break.” Starts open and slides to closer — not a single held vowel.
8	Compound Stress and Name Stress	Compound nouns take stress on the first element (BEDroom, POSTman). Formal names take stress on the surname.
9	The TH Sounds (/θ/ and /ð/)	Tongue between or against the teeth. Nigerian /t/ and /d/ substitutions are the single most identifiable pronunciation error.
10	The Long /ɜ:/ Vowel	The long, non-rhotic vowel in “bird,” “work,” “learn.” No curled R at the end.
11	The /əʊ/ Diphthong	The British “go” sound. Starts relaxed and glides to rounded — distinct from the American /oʊ/, which starts already rounded.
12	Master the Schwa /ə/	The heart of the course. The tiny, lazy vowel in every unstressed syllable of English. Master it and half of British RP falls into place.
13	Weak Forms of Function Words	to → /tə/, for → /fə/, of → /əv/, and → /ən/, the → /ðə/. Weak forms create the characteristic British flow.
14	Word Stress Shifts (REcord vs reCORD)	Same spelling, different meanings: first-syllable stress makes a noun, second-syllable stress makes a verb.
15	Linking and Connected Speech	Consonant-to-vowel and vowel-to-vowel links across word boundaries. “An apple” becomes “uh-NAPPLE.”
16	The CO- Prefix Schwa	When CO- is unstressed (correct, continue, complete), it collapses to /kə/, not /koʊ/ or /kɔ/.

#	TRICK	DESCRIPTION
17	-ize and -ism Endings	The stress stays on the root of the word, not the ending. CAPitalism, not capi-TAL-ism.
18	The Weak A Start	Words beginning with an unstressed A — about, around, again — take a schwa /ə/, not a full /a/.
19	The Linking R	Word-final R is silent before a consonant but “wakes up” before a vowel. “Her about” becomes “her-RUH-bout.”
20	The Schwa Endings Family	Eleven common endings — -ous, -our, -ure, -ant, -ent, -ance, -ence, -ate, -tive, -et, -ards — all collapse to schwa.
21	This vs That — Confusables	Word pairs that look related but pronounce differently: bath/bathe, cooperate/corporate, delegate as noun vs verb.
22	Final-Syllable Vowel Collapse	Any vowel in an unstressed final syllable becomes schwa: kingDəm, mediəm, LonDən, itəm.
23	Silent Letters	K in knight, B in comb, L in walk, T in often, P in receipt, B in debt, W in write, GH in night. Skip them all.
24	The -al Ending	Always unstressed and always /əl/: national, vital, normal, formal, social, medical.
25	Quick Wins	High-impact fixes: often (silent T), receipt (silent P), debt (silent B), schedule (SHED-yool), lieutenant (lef-TEN-ant).
26	The Long /ɑ:/ Vowel	The long, open vowel in “bark,” “bath,” “father,” “car.” Silent R throughout in British RP.
27	/ɪ/ vs /i:/ (ship vs sheep)	Short relaxed vs long tense — one of the most fundamental vowel contrasts, frequently merged by Nigerian speakers.
28	/ʊ/ vs /u:/ (good vs brew)	Short relaxed vs long tense in the back-rounded pair. Minimal pairs: full/fool, pull/pool, look/Luke.
29	The /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ Sounds	Same tongue and lip position, only voicing differs. /ʃ/ in “pressure,” /ʒ/ in “vision.”
30	The /eə/ Vowel	The long open diphthong in “air,” “hair,” “care.” Silent R throughout; glides from EH to schwa.
31	Rising and Falling Intonation	Statements and wh-questions fall. Yes/no questions and polite requests rise. Lists rise-rise-rise-fall. Commands fall.

PART 2 — THE 44 PHONEMES OF BRITISH RP

The heart of The 44 Academy. Every one of the 44 phonemes of British Received Pronunciation is covered in a dedicated lesson following the six-element structure. Each lesson closes with teaching notes tailored to the realities of Nigerian classrooms.

The phonemes are grouped into 6 progressive phases. The sequence is deliberate: short vowels first (fastest wins), then long vowels, then the more challenging diphthongs, then plosives, then fricatives and affricates, and finally nasals and approximants.

PHASE 1 — SHORT VOWELS

7 SOUNDS

Seven short, simple vowels. The fastest wins — teachers who complete Phase 1 will already sound audibly more British.

SOUND 1 /ɪ/ KIT

Short, relaxed front vowel. Tongue high and forward but jaw only slightly closed; lips relaxed. Distinct from the longer, tenser /i:/.

SPELLINGS i (kit, sit) · y (gym, myth) · e (pretty) · ui (build)

DRILL WORDS kit, sit, big, ship, fish, this, will, six, live, sing, film, king, drink, dinner, English

MINIMAL PAIRS ship/sheep, sit/seat, bit/beet, live/leave, fill/feel

TEACHING NOTES Nigerian students frequently merge /ɪ/ with /i:/. Teach the contrast through minimal pairs, exaggerating length and tension. The relaxed jaw is the key visual cue.

SOUND 2 /e/ DRESS

Short front vowel; tongue at mid-front position, jaw slightly more open than /ɪ/. Purer than the Nigerian tendency to diphthongise.

SPELLINGS e (bed, red) · ea (bread, head, dead) · a (many, any)

DRILL WORDS bed, red, ten, dress, get, help, letter, better, tell, sell, next, best, fresh, when, then

MINIMAL PAIRS bed/bad, pen/pan, said/sad, met/mat, hem/ham

TEACHING NOTES Students often blur /e/ with /æ/ (“bed” = “bad”). Emphasise higher tongue position and less open jaw.

SOUND 3 /æ/ TRAP

Short, open front vowel; jaw drops noticeably lower than /e/. Frequently shortened or blurred into /e/ or /ʌ/.

SPELLINGS a (cat, bag, hand, apple)

DRILL WORDS trap, cat, bag, hand, apple, back, dance, chance, family, matter, happy, action, laugh, ask, fast

MINIMAL PAIRS cat/cut, bag/bug, hat/hut, ran/run, sang/sung

TEACHING NOTES Insist on the jaw drop. Note that some /æ/ words (dance, chance, ask) shift to /ɑ:/ in RP — see Sound 9.

SOUND 4 /ʌ/ STRUT

Relaxed central vowel; jaw open and relaxed, tongue central and low. One sound across four spelling patterns.

SPELLINGS u (cup, bus) · o (love, mother, son) · ou (young, tough) · oo (blood, flood)

DRILL WORDS cup, bus, sun, love, mother, son, honey, young, tough, couple, blood, flood, cousin, above, discussion

MINIMAL PAIRS cup/cap, run/ran, sung/sang, luck/lack, but/bat

TEACHING NOTES Teach by ear, not spelling. Nigerian speakers often produce “love” as “loov” — insist on the relaxed central position.

SOUND 5 /ɒ/ LOT

Short, rounded back vowel; lips slightly rounded, jaw open, tongue back and low. Shorter than /ɔ:/ and rounded.

SPELLINGS o (lot, hot, box) · a after w (watch, want, wash)

DRILL WORDS lot, hot, box, top, dog, watch, want, wash, clock, coffee, model, problem, response, common, doctor

MINIMAL PAIRS cot/cut, pot/put, hot/hut, not/nut

TEACHING NOTES *The audible lip-rounding is often skipped by Nigerian speakers. Model the lip position explicitly.*

SOUND 6 /ʊ/ FOOT

Short, relaxed back-rounded vowel; lips loosely rounded, tongue high and back. Distinct from the longer /u:/.

SPELLINGS oo (good, book, foot) · u (put, push) · ou (could, would, should)

DRILL WORDS foot, good, put, book, look, took, cook, pull, push, would, should, could, sugar, woman, wolf

MINIMAL PAIRS full/fool, pull/pool, look/Luke, could/cooed, foot/food

TEACHING NOTES *Frequently merged with /u:/. Use minimal pairs; teach students to feel the lip-tension difference.*

SOUND 7 /ə/ SCHWA — the master sound

The lazy central vowel of every unstressed syllable. Appears more often than any other vowel; every spelling, one neutral sound.

SPELLINGS any unstressed vowel — a (about), e (father), i (pencil), o (lemon), u (support)

DRILL WORDS about, sofa, father, taken, pencil, lemon, memory, support, focus, banana, computer, elephant, teacher, tomorrow, communication

MINIMAL PAIRS Cannot be minimal-paired — defined by its unstressed context.

TEACHING NOTES *The single most important sound in British RP. Teach it as the “lazy uh.” In “banana,” only the middle syllable is a full vowel.*

PHASE 2 — LONG VOWELS

5 SOUNDS

Five long, elongated vowels. Duration and tenseness matter as much as tongue position; often shortened by Nigerian speakers.

SOUND 8 /i:/ FLEECE

Long, tense front vowel; tongue high and forward, jaw closed, lips slightly spread. Longer and tenser than /ɪ/.

SPELLINGS ee (tree, see, feet) · ea (sea, tea, read) · ie (field, believe) · y (happy, city)

DRILL WORDS tree, see, feet, sea, tea, read, key, meet, week, three, please, evening, complete, receive, believe

MINIMAL PAIRS sheep/ship, seat/sit, beet/bit, leave/live, feel/fill

TEACHING NOTES Emphasise both length AND tenseness. Have students hold the vowel for two beats when drilling.

SOUND 9 /ɑ:/ BATH

Long, open, back vowel; jaw fully open, tongue back and low, silent R after. British RP shifts many /æ/ words to /ɑ:/.

SPELLINGS a (father, past, class) · ar (car, park) · al (calm, half) · au (aunt, laugh)

DRILL WORDS father, past, class, bath, dance, chance, ask, half, laugh, car, park, bark, hard, garden, market

MINIMAL PAIRS bat/bath, hat/heart, cat/cart

TEACHING NOTES The BATH-shift (ask, dance, past) is a signature RP feature — teach explicitly, along with the silent R in car, park.

SOUND 10 /ɔ:/ THOUGHT

Long, rounded, back vowel; lips rounded more than /ɒ/, jaw somewhat closed. Notably long duration.

SPELLINGS aw (draw, dawn) · au (caught, sauce) · ough (thought) · or (more, sport) · all (call, all)

DRILL WORDS thought, walk, talk, chalk, daughter, caught, bought, sauce, draw, dawn, morning, sport, more, before, board

MINIMAL PAIRS caught/cot, port/pot, sort/sot, dawn/don

TEACHING NOTES Often shortened into /ɒ/ ("thought" → "thot"). Insist on length AND strong lip-rounding.

SOUND 11 /ɜ:/ NURSE

Long, neutral, central vowel; jaw neutral, tongue central, lips relaxed. Silent R throughout — no tongue curl.

SPELLINGS ir (bird, girl) · ur (nurse, curve) · er (her, term) · ear (learn, earn) · or after w (word, work) · our (journey)

DRILL WORDS nurse, bird, girl, work, learn, term, her, journey, worker, earnest, permanent, service, university, purpose

MINIMAL PAIRS bird/bud, work/walk, term/turn

TEACHING NOTES No R at the end — the key non-rhotic feature. This vowel is the long version of the schwa.

SOUND 12 /u:/ GOOSE

Long, tense, back-rounded vowel; lips pursed and rounded, tongue high and back. Longer and more rounded than /ʊ/.

SPELLINGS oo (goose, food) · u (blue, ruby) · ue (blue, true) · ew (new, few) · o (do, who) · ou (through, group)

DRILL WORDS goose, food, moon, blue, true, new, do, who, group, through, ruby, cool, school, choose, June

MINIMAL PAIRS fool/full, pool/pull, Luke/look, cooed/could, food/foot

TEACHING NOTES *Emphasise the strong lip-purse — the tightest lip-rounding of any English vowel. Use a mirror to check.*

PHASE 3 — DIPHTHONGS

8 SOUNDS

Eight gliding vowels that change shape mid-production. The trickiest phase for Nigerian speakers.

SOUND 13 /eɪ/ FACE

Gliding diphthong; starts open (EH) and slides closer (IH). A glide, not a single held sound.

SPELLINGS a-e (face, take) · ay (day, pay) · ai (paid, rain) · ea (great, break) · ey (they, grey)

DRILL WORDS face, day, take, cake, paid, rain, great, break, they, grey, lake, name, wait, mail, weight

MINIMAL PAIRS made/mad, wait/wet, pain/pen, sail/sell, tale/tell

TEACHING NOTES Often flattened into a single /e/ (“make” → “mek”). Insist on the audible glide, with jaw movement.

SOUND 14 /aɪ/ PRICE

Gliding diphthong; starts open (AH) and slides closer (IH). One of the most audible diphthongs in English.

SPELLINGS i-e (price, time) · y (my, why, sky) · igh (night, right) · uy (buy, guy) · ie (die, tie)

DRILL WORDS price, time, five, my, why, sky, night, right, high, buy, guy, die, tie, kind, mind

MINIMAL PAIRS pin/pine, tin/time, sit/site, bit/bite, hit/height

TEACHING NOTES Two common errors: flattening to /a/, or merging with /eɪ/. Fixed by insisting on the audible open-to-close glide.

SOUND 15 /ɔɪ/ CHOICE

Gliding diphthong; starts rounded (OH) and slides to closer, unrounded (IH). The only diphthong with a rounded onset.

SPELLINGS oi (choice, oil, join) · oy (boy, toy, enjoy)

DRILL WORDS choice, boy, join, oil, toy, enjoy, boil, coin, avoid, employ, destroy, voice, noise, poison, appointment

MINIMAL PAIRS boy/bay, toy/tie

TEACHING NOTES Rarely difficult for Nigerian speakers. Focus on a fully rounded onset and an audible closing glide.

SOUND 16 /aʊ/ MOUTH

Gliding diphthong; starts open (AH) and slides to rounded (OO). Wide jaw movement in native production.

SPELLINGS ou (mouth, house, sound) · ow (now, cow, brown)

DRILL WORDS mouth, house, sound, now, cow, brown, down, town, out, about, our, hour, allow, power, thousand

MINIMAL PAIRS now/no, cow/coe, town/tone, sound/sewn, gown/goon

TEACHING NOTES Insist on the glide from open AH to rounded OO. Use a mirror so students see the lips finish rounded.

SOUND 17 /əʊ/ GOAT — the distinctively British vowel

Gliding diphthong; starts schwa-like and slides to rounded (OO). Distinct from the American /oʊ/, which starts already rounded.

SPELLINGS o (go, so, no) · o-e (phone, home) · oa (goat, road, boat) · ow (know, show, snow) · oe (toe)

DRILL WORDS go, so, no, phone, home, goat, road, boat, know, show, snow, toe, only, over, whole

MINIMAL PAIRS coat/cot, road/rod, boat/bought, note/not, hope/hop

TEACHING NOTES *THE distinctively British vowel. Model the unrounded start gliding INTO the rounding — explicitly contrast with American /oʊ/.*

SOUND 18 /ɪə/ NEAR

Centring diphthong; starts at /ɪ/ and slides inward to the schwa. Silent R at the end.

SPELLINGS ear (near, hear, dear) · eer (deer, beer) · ere (here) · ier (pier, fierce)

DRILL WORDS near, here, dear, ear, hear, deer, beer, pier, fierce, cheer, weird, appear, career, serious, mysterious

MINIMAL PAIRS beer/bear (/ɪə/ vs /eə/)

TEACHING NOTES *Silent R at the end. The vowel must START short (/ɪ/), not long (/i:/) — a common Nigerian substitution.*

SOUND 19 /eə/ SQUARE

Centring diphthong; starts at /e/ and slides inward to the schwa. Silent R throughout.

SPELLINGS air (hair, chair, fair) · are (square, care, share) · ear (bear, wear, pear) · ere (there, where)

DRILL WORDS hair, chair, fair, square, care, share, bear, wear, pear, there, where, careful, various, prayer, aware

MINIMAL PAIRS beer/bear, here/hair, deer/dare

TEACHING NOTES *Silent R, plus an open onset. Merging with /ɪə/ is common — minimal pairs isolate the confusion.*

SOUND 20 /ʊə/ CURE

Centring diphthong; increasingly rare in modern RP — many speakers now use /ɔ:/ instead (poor → /pɔ:/).

SPELLINGS ure (cure, sure, pure) · our (tour, your) · oor (poor, moor)

DRILL WORDS cure, sure, pure, tour, your, poor, moor, secure, endure, curious, jury, during, Europe, furious, mature

MINIMAL PAIRS Often interchangeable with /ɔ:/ for many modern speakers.

TEACHING NOTES *A sound-change in progress. Teach both as acceptable, demonstrating the traditional glide as the “textbook” version.*

PHASE 4 — PLOSIVES

6 SOUNDS

Three voiceless plosives (/p/, /t/, /k/) and their three voiced mirror-twins (/b/, /d/, /g/).

SOUND 21 /p/ PEN (voiceless)

Voiceless bilabial plosive. Lips close firmly, pressure builds, then release with an audible burst. No vocal cord vibration.

SPELLINGS p (pen, cup) · pp (happy, apple)

DRILL WORDS pen, cup, spot, happy, apple, party, paper, please, stop, keep, drop, help, deep, sleep, jump

MINIMAL PAIRS pen/Ben, pat/bat, pig/big, cap/cab

TEACHING NOTES Teach aspiration word-initially (a paper held in front of the mouth should move on “pen”). Final /p/ may be unreleased.

SOUND 22 /b/ BAT (voiced)

Voiced bilabial plosive. Same position as /p/, with vocal cord vibration during closure — the mirror-twin of /p/.

SPELLINGS b (bat, big, cab) · bb (rubber, hobby)

DRILL WORDS bat, big, cab, rubber, hobby, baby, brother, table, number, problem, remember, about, job, club, describe

MINIMAL PAIRS bat/pat, big/pig, cab/cap, back/pack, bin/pin

TEACHING NOTES Have students alternate “pa-ba-pa-ba” with a finger on the throat to feel voicing switch on and off.

SOUND 23 /t/ TEN (voiceless)

Voiceless alveolar plosive. Tongue tip touches the alveolar ridge; pressure builds; release is audible.

SPELLINGS t (ten, sit) · tt (letter, better) · ed after voiceless (walked, kissed)

DRILL WORDS ten, sit, stop, letter, better, table, water, story, English, little, minute, matter, question, important, without

MINIMAL PAIRS ten/den, two/do, coat/code, hat/had, seat/seed

TEACHING NOTES Word-medially between vowels, RP keeps a clear /t/ (unlike American flapping to /d/) — insist on “water,” “better” staying crisp.

SOUND 24 /d/ DOG (voiced)

Voiced alveolar plosive. Same position as /t/, with vocal cord vibration during closure.

SPELLINGS d (dog, sad) · dd (ladder, sudden) · ed after voiced (played, called)

DRILL WORDS dog, sad, red, ladder, sudden, daughter, decide, describe, husband, understand, difficult, education, president, considered, dedicated

MINIMAL PAIRS dog/tog, doe/toe, code/coat, side/site, made/mate

TEACHING NOTES Alternate “ta-da-ta-da” with a finger on the throat to feel the voicing distinction from /t/.

SOUND 25 /k/ CAT (voiceless)

Voiceless velar plosive. Back of tongue rises to the soft palate; pressure builds; release is audible.

SPELLINGS c (cat, cup) · k (kite, king) · ck (back, black) · ch (chemistry) · qu (quick — /kw/)

DRILL WORDS cat, cup, kite, king, book, back, black, quick, school, class, work, look, question, quality, chemistry

MINIMAL PAIRS cap/gap, come/gum, back/bag, coat/goat, cool/ghoul

TEACHING NOTES Teach word-initial aspiration. Ensure a crisp release, not a dragged-out /kh/.

SOUND 26 /g/ GO (voiced)

Voiced velar plosive. Same position as /k/, with vocal cord vibration during closure.

SPELLINGS g (go, big, dog) · gg (bigger, egg) · gh (ghost, ghetto)

DRILL WORDS go, big, dog, bigger, egg, ghost, game, girl, garden, group, great, get, again, together, English

MINIMAL PAIRS go/co, gap/cap, bag/back, goat/coat, gum/come

TEACHING NOTES Voicing distinction from /k/. Note G is silent in some initial pairs (gnaw, gnome) and before N (sign, design).

PHASE 5 — FRICATIVES & AFFRICATES

11 SOUNDS

This phase includes the notorious TH sounds — the single largest audible improvement any Nigerian speaker can make.

SOUND 27 /f/ FISH (voiceless)

Voiceless labiodental fricative. Upper teeth touch lower lip; air passes with audible friction.

SPELLINGS f (fish, life) · ff (off, coffee) · ph (phone, photo) · gh (laugh, tough, enough)

DRILL WORDS fish, life, safe, off, coffee, phone, photo, elephant, laugh, tough, enough, family, friend, offer, difficult

MINIMAL PAIRS fan/van, few/view, leaf/leave, safe/save, life/live

TEACHING NOTES Straightforward for Nigerian speakers. Key point: PH always maps to /f/ (phone, photo, elephant).

SOUND 28 /v/ VAN (voiced)

Voiced labiodental fricative. Same position as /f/, with vocal cord vibration.

SPELLINGS v (van, love, save) · ve (love, save) · f in one word (of)

DRILL WORDS van, love, save, live, drive, seven, every, over, never, before, believe, remove, arrive, evening, television

MINIMAL PAIRS van/fan, view/few, leave/leaf, save/save, live/life

TEACHING NOTES Some students substitute /f/ or a bilabial /b/. Insist on upper-teeth-to-lower-lip with voicing. “Of” is spelled with F, said with /v/.

SOUND 29 /θ/ THINK — the critical Nigerian teaching point

Voiceless dental fricative. Tongue tip touches or protrudes between the teeth; audible friction, no voicing.

SPELLINGS th (think, three, both, path, breath)

DRILL WORDS think, three, both, path, breath, thing, thank, thick, thin, throw, thought, method, month, mouth, north

MINIMAL PAIRS thin/tin, thick/tick, three/tree, thought/taught, path/pat

TEACHING NOTES THE critical lesson. Nigerian speakers substitute /t/ almost universally. Insist on tongue between the teeth — exaggerate at first, check with a mirror.

SOUND 30 /ð/ THIS (voiced)

Voiced dental fricative. Same position as /θ/, with vocal cord vibration — its mirror-twin.

SPELLINGS th (this, that, mother, brother, breathe, other, whether)

DRILL WORDS this, that, mother, brother, breathe, other, whether, together, weather, father, another, without, either, neither, although

MINIMAL PAIRS this/dis, then/den, that/dat, they/day, breathe/breed

TEACHING NOTES Second critical lesson. Nigerian speakers substitute /d/ almost universally, most audibly in this/that/they.

SOUND 31 /s/ SUN (voiceless)

Voiceless alveolar fricative. Tongue tip near the alveolar ridge; narrow channel, high-pitched friction.

SPELLINGS s (sun, bus) · ss (miss, class) · c before e/i (city, cent) · ce (rice, face)

DRILL WORDS sun, bus, best, miss, class, city, cent, rice, face, sit, sing, small, spend, this, house

MINIMAL PAIRS sip/zip, sue/zoo, race/raze, price/prize, ice/eyes

TEACHING NOTES *Straightforward for Nigerian speakers. C before E, I or Y makes /s/ (city, cell, cycle).*

SOUND 32 /z/ ZOO (voiced)

Voiced alveolar fricative. Same position as /s/, with vocal cord vibration.

SPELLINGS z (zoo, zero, buzz) · zz (buzz, jazz) · s between vowels (busy, easy, music) · s at word-end after voiced (dogs, is, has)

DRILL WORDS zoo, zero, buzz, jazz, busy, easy, music, please, cheese, size, prize, use, choose, closed, easily

MINIMAL PAIRS zip/sip, zoo/sue, raze/race, prize/price, eyes/ice

TEACHING NOTES *Some students substitute /s/. Alternate “sa-za-sa-za” with a finger on the throat. The plural -s after voiced consonants is /z/ (dogs, kings).*

SOUND 33 /ʃ/ SHIP (voiceless)

Voiceless postalveolar fricative. Tongue tip near the ridge behind the alveolar ridge; lips slightly rounded and protruded.

SPELLINGS sh (ship, fish) · ti before vowel (station, action, patient) · ci (special, ancient) · ssi (mission) · su (sure)

DRILL WORDS ship, fish, station, action, patient, special, mission, pressure, sure, shell, shape, show, English, machine, chef

MINIMAL PAIRS ship/sip, shell/sell, show/sow, sheep/seep, shore/sore

TEACHING NOTES *Straightforward for Nigerian speakers. Note TI and CI in “station” and “special” both make /ʃ/.*

SOUND 34 /ʒ/ VISION (voiced) — the rarest English sound

Voiced postalveolar fricative. Same position as /ʃ/, with vocal cord vibration — the rarest English phoneme.

SPELLINGS si before vowel (vision, decision) · su before vowel (treasure, measure) · ge (beige, garage)

DRILL WORDS vision, decision, treasure, measure, pleasure, television, occasion, usual, casual, unusual, conclusion, division, precision, revision, collision

MINIMAL PAIRS Few minimal pairs due to rarity.

TEACHING NOTES *Often replaced with /ʃ/ or /dʒ/. Teach as “voiced /ʃ/” — same position, with the throat humming. Rarely appears word-initially.*

SOUND 35 /h/ HAT (voiceless)

Voiceless glottal fricative. Air passes through the open vocal tract with slight glottal friction.

SPELLINGS h (hat, hot, help, behind) · wh in some words (who, whole)

DRILL WORDS hat, hot, help, behind, house, happy, hand, heart, hope, hello, however, husband, without, ahead, anyone

MINIMAL PAIRS hat/at, hot/ot (rare)

TEACHING NOTES *Straightforward for Nigerian speakers. Insist on a clear /h/ at word-starts. Note the silent H in honest, honour, hour.*

SOUND 36 /tʃ/ CHIP (voiceless affricate)

Voiceless postalveolar affricate. Begins as a /t/-like closure, releases as /ʃ/ — a single compound sound.

SPELLINGS ch (chip, church, teach) · tch (watch, catch, match) · t before ure (nature, culture, picture, future)

DRILL WORDS chip, church, teach, watch, catch, match, nature, culture, picture, future, cheap, child, chocolate, question, situation

MINIMAL PAIRS chip/ship, cheap/sheep, cheer/sheer, chose/shows, chin/shin

TEACHING NOTES *Sometimes produced as /ʃ/ only. Insist on the /t/-like onset before the /ʃ/-like release.*

SOUND 37 /dʒ/ JAM (voiced affricate)

Voiced postalveolar affricate. Begins as a /d/-like closure, releases as /ʒ/ — the voiced twin of /tʃ/.

SPELLINGS j (jam, job, joy) · g before e/i/y (age, giant, gym) · dg (edge, judge, badge) · du (schedule)

DRILL WORDS jam, job, joy, age, giant, gym, edge, judge, badge, general, gentle, June, just, subject, education

MINIMAL PAIRS jam/yam, judge/church, edge/etch, joke/choke, cage/catch

TEACHING NOTES *G before E, I or Y makes /dʒ/ (age, giant, gym) but before A, O, U makes /g/ (game, go, gum) — worth teaching explicitly.*

PHASE 6 — NASALS & APPROXIMANTS

7 SOUNDS

Includes the critical non-rhotic R teaching and the /ŋ/ vs /ŋg/ distinction.

SOUND 38 /m/ MAN

Voiced bilabial nasal. Both lips close; air passes through the nose while vocal cords vibrate.

SPELLINGS	m (man, some, come) · mm (summer, hammer)
DRILL WORDS	man, some, come, summer, hammer, mother, mine, market, family, remember, important, common, medium, museum, minimum
MINIMAL PAIRS	man/pan, mine/pine (nasal vs plosive)

TEACHING NOTES *Straightforward. In word-final position, ensure the lips actually close (some students release too early).*

SOUND 39 /n/ NO

Voiced alveolar nasal. Tongue tip touches the alveolar ridge; air passes through the nose with voicing.

SPELLINGS	n (no, sun, run) · nn (funny, dinner) · kn silent K (know, knight)
DRILL WORDS	no, sun, run, funny, dinner, know, knight, nice, need, name, another, question, information, education, conversation
MINIMAL PAIRS	no/mo, sun/sum, run/rum, name/mame, need/meed

TEACHING NOTES *Straightforward. The silent K in know, knight, knee is worth teaching explicitly.*

SOUND 40 /ŋ/ SING — the critical Nigerian teaching point

Voiced velar nasal. Back of tongue rises to the soft palate; air passes through the nose. Only ends syllables.

SPELLINGS	ng (sing, king, long, wrong) · n before k or g (think, drink, angry)
DRILL WORDS	sing, king, long, wrong, think, drink, angry, thing, along, evening, spring, meeting, everything, morning, singing
MINIMAL PAIRS	sing/sin, thing/thin, wrong/run

TEACHING NOTES *Critical point: /ŋ/ is a single sound. Nigerian speakers often add a hard G ("singg"). Insist it ends cleanly, no release.*

SOUND 41 /l/ LIP

Voiced alveolar lateral approximant. Tongue tip touches the alveolar ridge; air passes around the sides. Clear L before vowels, dark L before consonants or word-end.

SPELLINGS	l (lip, feel, milk) · ll (ball, tell, silly)
DRILL WORDS	lip, feel, milk, ball, tell, silly, look, learn, little, family, believe, English, willingly, difficult, ability
MINIMAL PAIRS	light/right, lip/rip, list/wrist, lame/rain, late/rate

TEACHING NOTES *Teach clear vs dark L by ear: "lip" starts clear, "pull" ends dark (tongue raised at the back).*

SOUND 42 /r/ RED — non-rhotic in British RP

Voiced postalveolar approximant. Tongue tip approaches (never touches) the alveolar ridge; lips slightly rounded. Pronounced only before a vowel.

SPELLINGS r (red, run, story) · rr (arrow, correct, sorry) · wr silent W (write, wrong)

DRILL WORDS red, run, story, arrow, correct, sorry, write, wrong, ready, response, right, around, remember, everyone, morning

MINIMAL PAIRS red/led, run/nun, right/light, rate/late, rain/lane

TEACHING NOTES *CRITICAL: RP is non-rhotic — R is silent after a vowel and before a consonant or word-end (car, park, work). Reinforce in every vowel+R lesson.*

SOUND 43 /w/ WATER

Voiced labiovelar approximant. Lips rounded and protruded; back of tongue raised. Only begins syllables.

SPELLINGS w (water, will, wet) · wh (what, when, where) · o in one (/wʌn/) · qu (quick — /kw/)

DRILL WORDS water, will, wet, what, when, where, one, quick, question, way, world, work, went, quiet, twelve

MINIMAL PAIRS wine/vine (rare)

TEACHING NOTES *Straightforward. In modern RP, WH is usually just /w/ (what = wot). “One” is idiosyncratic — /wʌn/.*

SOUND 44 /j/ YES — the final phoneme

Voiced palatal approximant. Tongue high and forward; slight friction, gliding into the following vowel. The final phoneme of British English.

SPELLINGS y (yes, young, yellow) · i in some words (onion, opinion) · u after some consonants (music, cute — /ju:/)

DRILL WORDS yes, young, yellow, year, yesterday, music, cute, tuna, few, view, new, opinion, onion, million, familiar

MINIMAL PAIRS yet/wet, yes/wess (uncommon)

TEACHING NOTES *Note the /ju:/ combination in music, cute, few, new. British RP retains this glide more often than American English.*

ASSESSMENT & CERTIFICATION

CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

Throughout the 16-week programme, teachers submit weekly voice recordings — at least one per week, tagged by the current lesson. Each recording receives one of three signals from Jonathan Onah, plus a written note.

THE MASTER PRACTITIONER ASSESSMENT

In Week 16, every teacher completes the Master Practitioner Assessment — a rigorous, structured assessment that determines whether the Master Practitioner Certification is issued. The assessment has four components:

Component 1 — The Comprehensive Passage

A specifically engineered passage of connected prose that features every one of the 44 phonemes plus a demonstration of the 31 tricks. The teacher submits a full recording. Every phoneme is checked. Green on all phonemes is required to pass this component.

Component 2 — The Anatomy Demonstration

The teacher records a video (not a voice note) demonstrating the mouth position, tongue placement, and voicing for eight randomly selected phonemes drawn from all six phases. The video is judged both on production accuracy and on teaching clarity.

Component 3 — The Minimal Pairs Diagnostic

The teacher is presented with a series of Nigerian student recordings featuring pronunciation errors. Their task: identify which phoneme is being merged in each case, and prescribe the correct minimal-pair drill. This tests diagnostic skill — the pedagogical layer of the programme.

Component 4 — The Teaching Simulation

The teacher records a 5-minute simulated classroom lesson on a randomly assigned phoneme. This is the final test: can the teacher not just produce, not just diagnose, but actually teach the sound to a class? Judged on structure, clarity, use of anatomy, drill selection, and management of student errors.

THE MASTER PRACTITIONER CREDENTIAL

Teachers who receive GREEN on all four components are awarded the Diction Masters Master Practitioner Certification. The credential includes:

- A formal certificate signed by Jonathan Onah as Founder of Diction Masters Technology Limited
- Inclusion in the public Diction Masters Master Practitioner Register
- Digital badge for use on CVs, LinkedIn, and school branding materials
- Priority invitation to Diction Masters teacher-training events and speaking opportunities
- The right to describe themselves professionally as a “Certified British RP Master Practitioner”

Teachers who receive amber on any component may re-submit that component within 30 days. Teachers who receive red on multiple components are invited to repeat the relevant phase in the next cohort at no additional charge.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Jonathan Onah

Founder · Diction Masters Technology Limited

Jonathan Onah is the Founder and Chief Executive of Diction Masters Technology Limited, an Abuja-based Nigerian EdTech company focused on British English pronunciation, diction, and literacy education. He is the architect of the Diction Masters curriculum suite, which includes The 44 Academy, Sound British in 7 Days, EchoSpell, and the Book of Conversation.

Jonathan's work with Nigerian teachers began through school partnerships — training English departments on-site at Nigerian secondary schools. Through this work he catalogued the specific pronunciation patterns Nigerian teachers actually carry into their classrooms, and identified the gap in their own training that The 44 Academy is designed to fill. The programme is not adapted from a British or American teacher-training model; it is built from the ground up for the Nigerian context.

He personally reviews every voice recording submitted by every teacher in every cohort. This is unusual for a programme of this scale, but it is intentional: The 44 Academy is not automated. The feedback loop that transforms teachers is the loop of a specific expert listening carefully to a specific teacher's voice, then responding with tailored notes.

Jonathan holds the Master Practitioner credential in British Received Pronunciation and is a lifelong student of English phonology. Under his leadership, Diction Masters continues to expand its curriculum offering, its school partnerships, and its cohort-based teacher training programmes across Nigeria.