English Pronunciation and Accent Practice - Four Parts - Terms we use for the practice

1. **Intonation and Natural Speech Quality**
   - **Intonation** is the contrast between more prominent and higher points in speech and less prominent and lower points in speech. Contrast in high points and low points is essential for clear speech. English speech is marked by a wide pitch range, which is to say a noticeable difference between high points and low points. Intonation is the “melody of phrases and sentences”.
   - **Added stress** - Adding stress, or extra stress, to English words provides expression, tone, attitude, and mood to English speech. It is an essential part of English communication and speech. Adding stress to words supports intonation in a strong way. Adding stress to a word, or words, means that speakers “mark intonation” or “make intonation non-neutral” by projecting their personal attitude towards what they say onto the words themselves”. Marked, or non-neutral, intonation supports what speakers mean to say. So we can say that intonation is unmarked and neutral or marked and non-neutral. Marked intonation, or non-neutral intonation, affects, or alters, a speaker’s message.
   - **Focus word** - The focus word is the most important word in a phrase, thought group, or breath group. The focus word is the last content word or the second to last content word in a phrase, thought group, or breath group: the focus word is the most prominent and highest point in an English phrase, thought group, breath group, or sentence. Speakers affect meaning by adding stress to a word other than the focus word or by adding stress to the focus word itself. Adding stress to another word, other than the focus word, changes the focus of a phrase or sentence, or it affects meaning. When speakers change the focus of a phrase or sentence, “they project their personal attitude towards what they are saying onto the words themselves”.
   - **Time stress** - The syllables that receive primary stress in content words provide the rhythm or the beat for English speech. Time stress creates a pulse for English speech. Intonation determines time stress. Time stress, which goes with intonation, is essential for clear English speech.
   - **Connecting or linking sounds** - Connect sounds, or link sounds, seamlessly in order for speech to sound natural, fluid, and clear. Unnatural or irregular disconnections and slight breaks in speech distract listeners by breaking up the pace, rhythm, and natural flow of speech. This is the NSQ - Natural Speech Quality.
   - **Thought groups or breath groups** - Sentences, phrases, clauses, or words - even just one or two words together - are thought groups or breath groups. Thought groups or breath groups tell you when to pause to take a breath. Take a breath before each thought group or breath group to connect sounds seamlessly, and let it out as you speak.
2. **Word Primary Stress**
   
   A. Two-syllable nouns, adjectives, and verbs that do not use a prefix or a suffix mostly start high and then fall.
   
   B. Compound words start high and go low. However, this is not the case with a limited list of prepositional compound words.
   
   C. Two-syllable words that use prefixes or suffixes mostly start low and go high. These words are often verbs.
   
   D. Two-syllable words that use prefixes or suffixes mostly start low, go high, and then fall.
   
   E. Multi-syllable words have primary stress patterns which have to do with the last syllable of a word.
   
   F. One-syllable word intonation glides down.

3. **Phonemes - Individual Sounds**
   
   - **Vowels** - Clear and strong vowel sounds are essential for clear speech.
   
   - **Consonants** - Producing inaccurate consonant sounds causes speech to sound accented. While inaccurate consonant sound production may be noticeable, it may or may not be a significant factor for intelligibility (how easy it is to understand someone).

4. **Conversational Contractions (Reduction or Reduced Forms)**
   
   - Conversational contractions are essential for natural sounding conversational speech.
   
   - **Weak forms of “structure words” or “function words”** - A function or structure word is a “grammar word”. The vowel in weak forms of function or structure words is neutral vowel schwa. Using the weak form of function or structure words supports intonation, time stress, and NSQ - natural speech quality.
   
   - Contractions standard for both writing and speaking - Using contractions supports intonation, time stress, and NSQ - natural speech quality. People might not use contractions when speaking at slower speech rates and for emphasis.
   
   - **Conversational Contractions** - Conversational contractions such as “wan”, used for “want to”, allow for faster speech, support time stress and intonation, and, in turn, support intelligible speech. Conversational contractions, or reduced forms, contribute to natural speech quality - NSQ.