

7 Pronunciation Mistakes

Brazilian Portuguese speakers make — and how to fix them

Your grammar is fine. Your vocabulary is fine. So why do people still ask you to repeat yourself? These are the seven sounds giving you away — and the drills that fix each one.

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Coach Seven

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You don't have an English problem. You have a feedback problem.

Here's what nobody tells you. You've studied for years. You know the grammar better than most native speakers do. You can read, you can write, you can follow a movie without subtitles. And people *still* say "**sorry, what?**"

That's not a knowledge problem. It's a **correction** problem. Nobody in your daily life is going to stop you mid-sentence to tell you which sound went wrong. They'll nod, guess from context, and move on. So the mistake stays. For years.

THE REAL MATH

Portuguese gives you a real head start — you already have vowel reduction and stress patterns that most learners struggle with for years. But Brazilian Portuguese has its own set of automatic habits, and they're **loud**. The seven below are the ones I hear in almost every first session, and none of them are about grammar.

WHAT CHANGES WHEN YOU FIX THIS

- **You get understood the first time.** No repeating, no spelling your own name out loud.
- **You stop shrinking in meetings.** Most hesitation isn't about ideas. It's about bracing to be misunderstood.
- **People stop asking where you're from** in the first thirty seconds of every conversation.

I've spent seven years coaching intermediate and advanced speakers — people who are already good and are tired of being treated like they're not. These seven come up more than everything else combined for Brazilian speakers. The first three are pure Brazilian signature — fix those and you'll sound dramatically different within a month.

Work through them in order.

Adding a small vowel to the end of words

You say **"I need help-ee with my Facebook-ee account at the office-ee."** It's a clear ee on the end of almost every word. This is the number one Brazilian marker in English, and almost nobody notices themselves doing it.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Portuguese syllables want to end in a vowel. English is full of words that end in a hard consonant, and full of clusters your mouth has never had to close: *helped, asked, next, worlds*. When your mouth hits a consonant it can't resolve, it does what Portuguese does — it adds a small ee to give the consonant somewhere to land.

Listen for it in the words you use most: *Facebook-ee, YouTube-ee, office-ee, internet-ee*. Brand names and tech words are the worst offenders because you say them constantly. It's a very small sound — and the single fastest way for a listener to place your accent.

THE FIX — STOP THE AIR, DON'T RELEASE IT

The habit comes from **releasing** the final consonant. Say *stop* and notice that you can end it two ways: lips popping open with a puff after the /p/, or lips simply closing and staying closed. English usually takes the second one.

Freeze at the end. Say the word and physically hold the final position — lips shut, tongue against the ridge, whatever it is — for a full second before you relax. There's no room for a vowel if your mouth never opens. Test it with your hand in front of your mouth: a puff of air after the last consonant means a vowel is riding out on it.

DRILL — FREEZE THE ENDING

Say each word and hold the final position for a full second. No puff, no vowel.

help

desk

Facebook

YouTube

office

internet

next

link

Now sentences, where the habit is strongest:

I helped him and then I stopped.

My laptop is on the desk in the office.

Send me the link and I'll click it.

I saw it on Facebook and on YouTube.

2

MISTAKE TWO · T AND D

Turning T and D into "ch" and "j"

You say **"I have a meeting on Chews-day at fif-cheen"** and **"good jay"** instead of **"good day."**

WHY IT HAPPENS

In most of Brazil, *t* and *d* palatalize before an *i* sound — *tia* comes out as *chia*, *dia* as *jia*. It's completely automatic and completely correct in Portuguese.

English never does this. *Tuesday*, *fifteen*, *continue*, *media*, *studio* all keep a clean, hard /t/ or /d/. When you palatalize them, listeners hear an entirely different consonant, and words like *fifteen* and *fifty* start colliding.

THE FIX — TONGUE TIP, NOT TONGUE BODY

The Portuguese *ch* and *j* use the **body** of your tongue pressed up against the roof of your mouth, with air hissing over a wide surface.

English /t/ and /d/ use only the **tip**. Touch the tip of your tongue to the small ridge just behind your top teeth, block the air completely, then release cleanly. Nothing else in your mouth moves. There is no hiss at all — if you hear friction, you've palatalized.

Shortcut: say *ta*, *ta*, *ta* — that's already correct, because *a* doesn't trigger the habit. Now keep that exact tongue position and change only the vowel: *ta* → *tee*. Don't let your tongue slide back.

DRILL — KEEP IT HARD

The turquoise word is correct English. The coral word is what comes out when the habit fires.

Tuesday / **Chewsday**

fifteen / **fifcheen**

teach / **cheach**

day / **jay**

dinner / **jinner**

studio / **stujio**

Now in speech:

The meeting is Tuesday at fifteen.

I didn't see the details in the media kit.

Let's continue this discussion today.

3

MISTAKE THREE · FINAL L

Turning the final L into a W

You say **"I'm from Brazio and I work in a hoteo."** Two words, and your listener already knows where you're from.

WHY IT HAPPENS

In Brazilian Portuguese, an *l* at the end of a syllable becomes a *u* sound. *Brasil* is pronounced *Brasiu*. *Jornal* is *jornau*. Your mouth has literally never made an English final **/l/**.

In English, that final *L* is a full consonant and it carries meaning: *tell* versus *tow*, *full* versus *foe*, *call* versus *caw*. Turn it into a vowel and the word changes, or dissolves.

THE FIX — THE TONGUE HAS TO TOUCH

An English *L* — anywhere in the word, including the very end — requires the **tip of your tongue to touch the ridge behind your top teeth and stay there** while your voice runs.

That's the whole fix, and it's mechanical. Say *Brazil* and stop with your tongue glued to the roof of your mouth. Hold it. Don't let it drop into a *u*. It will feel like you're not finishing the word. You are.

Shortcut: add a fake extra syllable while you practice — *Brazil-luh*, *hotel-luh*. That forces the tongue contact. Then drop the fake syllable and keep the contact.

DRILL — TOUCH AND HOLD

Say the turquoise word with the tongue touching. The coral word is what it becomes if it doesn't.

Brazil / **Brazio**

hotel / **hoteo**

tell / **tow**

full / **foe**

call / **caw**

final / **finau**

Now in sentences — hold every *L*:

I'll **tell** you when the **deal** is **fina**.

The **hotel** **bill** was well over budget.

It's difficult, but it's not impossible.

4

MISTAKE FOUR · TH

Replacing TH with T, D, F or S

"I tink dis is de tird time" — or the other version, "I fink dis..." Either way, TH is the sound Portuguese simply doesn't own.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Portuguese has no /θ/ and no /ð/. Faced with a sound that doesn't exist, your brain substitutes the nearest thing it knows — usually *t* or *d*, sometimes *f* or *s*.

The problem is frequency. *The, this, that, they, them, there, with, think, through* — TH is in the most common words in the language. You can't route around it.

THE FIX — THE TONGUE LEAVES THE MOUTH

This is the only English sound where your tongue is **visible**. The tip goes lightly between your teeth, or just touching the back of the top teeth, and air flows over it continuously.

Voiceless /θ/ — *think, three, both*. Just air, no voice.

Voiced /ð/ — *the, this, mother*. Same position, voice on, tongue buzzing.

Do it in a mirror. If you can't see your tongue, you're not making the sound. Exaggerate it heavily in practice — native speakers use a smaller version, but they're shrinking a real TH. You'd be shrinking a *t*.

DRILL — SHOW YOUR TONGUE

think / tink

three / tree

thing / ting

path / pat

with / wit

month / mont

Now the voiced ones, in the words you use constantly:

This is the one that they wanted.

My brother and my mother are both here.

I think there are three of them.

5

MISTAKE FIVE · R AND H

Swapping your R and your H

"I hun to the ouse in the hain." You meant run to the house in the rain. The R became an H, and the H disappeared.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Two habits collide here. In Portuguese, an *r* at the start of a word — and *rr* in the middle — is pronounced as a throaty *h*. *Rato* sounds like *hato*. Meanwhile the letter *h* in Portuguese is completely silent: *hora* is *ora*.

So English *red* comes out *hed*, and English *house* comes out *ouse*. The two sounds swap places, and both words break.

THE FIX — TWO SEPARATE JOBS

The English R touches nothing. Pull your tongue back and up into the middle of your mouth, bunch it with tension, keep the tip floating free, and push your lips forward into a slight trumpet shape. No throat, no scraping, no tap. If you feel it in your throat, that's the Portuguese R.

Shortcut: say "er" like you're thinking and hold it — *errrrr*. That's the sound. Attach it to the front: *errrr* — *ed* becomes *red*.

The English H is real. It's a genuine puff of air from your chest, not silence. Put your hand in front of your mouth on *house* — you should feel warm air before the vowel.

DRILL — KEEP THEM APART

red / hed

rice / hice

run / hun

house / ouse

hate / ate

hair / air

Now both in the same breath, which is where it falls apart:

I ran home in the rain.

Her brother has a red car.

The hotel is really near here.

6

MISTAKE SIX · VOWELS

Collapsing the two English "i" sounds

You meant to say "**sheet of paper**" or "**I'll sit here.**" This one has embarrassed more of my students than any other on the list.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Portuguese has one *i*. English has two: the long, tense /i:/ in *seat*, and the short, relaxed /ɪ/ in *sit*. Portuguese speakers pronounce both as the Portuguese *i*, which lands close to /i/.

The result is that half of these words come out as the wrong word entirely — occasionally a much worse word.

THE FIX — RELAX, DON'T SHORTEN

Most people are told /ɪ/ is just a "short i." That's misleading, and it's why it never sticks. **It's a different mouth position, not a faster one.**

For /i/: lips spread wide like a smile, tongue high and pushed forward, muscles tense.

For /ɪ/: **let everything go slack.** Corners of the mouth relax, tongue drops slightly and pulls back.

Your jaw barely moves between the two — the change is in tension, and that's the whole trick.

DRILL — TENSE VS. RELAXED

Do this in front of a mirror. Say the turquoise word with a hard smile, then let your face go completely lazy for the coral one.

seat / sit

sheet / shit

beach / bitch

leave / live

feel / fill

reach / rich

green / grin

heat / hit

Then run them together so both live in one breath:

Please sit in that seat.

I live here, so I won't leave yet.

Did you fill it, or did you feel it?

7 MISTAKE SEVEN · WORD STRESS

Stressing the wrong syllable

"I need to speak with the ma-NA-ger about my COM-fort-a-ble hotel." Nobody catches either word.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Portuguese stress is largely predictable, and written accents tell you when it isn't. English stress is neither predictable nor marked. It's baked into each word individually, and it **moves** when the word changes form: *PHO-to-graph* becomes *pho-TO-gra-pher* becomes *pho-to-GRAPH-ic*.

Get the stress wrong and native listeners often don't recognize the word **at all**, even when every individual sound was correct. This one is invisible to most learners because nobody ever flagged it.

THE FIX — LEARN THE BEAT, NOT JUST THE WORD

From now on, when you learn a word, learn **where the punch lands**. The stressed syllable is louder, longer, and slightly higher in pitch. Everything around it shrinks and goes lazy.

Fast test: hum the word without saying it. If someone could still guess the word from the rhythm alone, your stress is right.

DRILL — FIND THE PUNCH

Say each word and exaggerate the marked syllable. Make it twice as long as the others.

de-VEL-op

COM-fort-a-ble

im-POR-tant

MAN-a-ger

op-por-TU-ni-ty

IN-ter-est-ing

ne-GO-ti-ate

a-VAIL-a-ble

Now the movers. Same root, different beat:

PRE-sent / pre-SENT

RE-cord / re-CORD

CON-tract / con-TRACT

OB-ject / ob-JECT

The “-ed” ending is usually not a syllable

You say “***I walk-ed to work and talk-ed to my boss.***” Native speakers say “***I walkt to work and talkt to my boss.***” No extra syllable at all.

WHY IT HAPPENS

You were taught that -ed makes the past tense, and then nobody told you how to say it. So you say it the way it's written — as its own syllable, with the habit from Mistake 1 adding a vowel on top.

But -ed is a full syllable in only one situation out of three. The rest of the time it's a single consonant glued onto the end, and the verb stays exactly as long as it was.

THE FIX — THREE RULES, NO EXCEPTIONS

1. Verb already ends in a t or d sound → /ɪd/, a real extra syllable. The only case that gets its own beat: *wanted* (WANT-id), *needed*, *started*.

2. Ends in a voiceless sound — p, k, f, s, sh, ch → /t/. No extra beat: *walked* = **walkt**, *helped* = **helpt**, *finished* = **finisht**.

3. Everything else → /d/. Also no extra beat: *called* = **callɪd**, *played* = **playɪd**, *arrived* = **arrɪvd**.

The shortcut: unless the verb already ends in a t or d, don't add a syllable. Say the verb, then quietly stick a t or a d on the end without opening your mouth again.

DRILL — COUNT THE SYLLABLES

Turquoise is correct. Coral is the two-syllable habit.

walkt / walk-ed

helpt / help-ed

finisht / finish-ed

callɪd / call-ed

playɪd / play-ed

The only group that really does get an extra beat — verbs already ending in t or d:

want-ed

need-ed

start-ed

decid-ed

Now mixed sentences. Count the beats:

I **walkt** to the office and **talkt** to my manager.

We **wan-ted** it, but they **deci-ded** against it.

Ten minutes a day beats two hours a week

Pronunciation isn't knowledge. It's a physical skill, like a golf swing. Reading this guide changes nothing on its own — your mouth has to build habits your first language never gave it, and muscles learn through short, frequent repetition, not long occasional sessions.

YOUR DAILY TEN MINUTES

- **Two minutes — one sound only.** Pick a single mistake from this guide. Not all seven. One.
- **Three minutes — minimal pairs, out loud, exaggerated.** Slower and bigger than feels normal.
- **Three minutes — the drill sentences.** Record yourself on your phone. Play it back.
- **Two minutes — free speech.** Talk about your day and try to catch the sound in the wild. This is where it transfers.

DO THIS

- **Record yourself.** You cannot hear your own mistakes live. Your brain hears what you meant to say.
- **Use a mirror.** Half of these fixes are visible on your face.
- **Exaggerate.** Overshoot in practice so normal speech lands right.

NOT THIS

- **Don't practice silently.** Reading a drill in your head trains nothing.
- **Don't chase all seven at once.** One sound per week beats seven per day.
- **Don't wait to feel ready.** It will feel strange for about two weeks, then it won't.

THE HONEST CATCH

There's one thing you can't do alone, and I'd rather tell you now than let you find out in six months. **You can't correct what you can't hear.** Your ear was built by Portuguese. When you add a small vowel to the end of an English word, you don't hear an extra sound — you hear a normal word. You'll record yourself, play it back, and think it was fine. That's not a discipline problem. It's why people plateau for years with perfect grammar. At some point you need someone outside your head to stop you and say *"that one. right there."*

You've got the list. Now get the feedback.

These seven fixes will move you further than another year of grammar study. But drilling alone only takes you to the edge of what your own ear can detect — and then it stops.

That's the whole reason Clear Accent Academy exists. I work with **intermediate and advanced speakers only** — people who are already good and are done being underestimated. No beginner material, no polite nodding, no pretending something was fine when it wasn't. You talk, I stop you, we fix it, you say it again correctly. That's the entire method.

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You're not bad at English. You've just never been corrected.