



What is Estuary English?

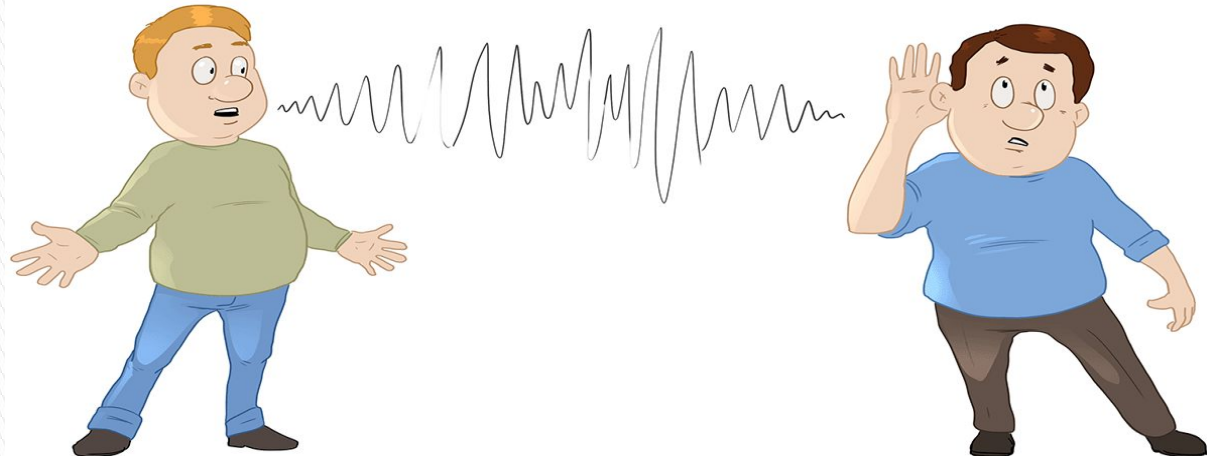
Estuary English is an English accent associated with the south east, especially the area along the Thames river and estuary.

What are the phonetic characteristics of Estuary English (EE)?



- ❑ • **l-vocalization**, pronouncing the l-sound in certain positions almost like [w], so that *milk bottle* becomes [mɪɔk 'bɒtɔ] (almost like ‘miwk bottoo’), and *football* becomes ['fʊʔbɔɔ] (‘foo’baw’).
- ❑ • **glottalling**, using a glottal stop [ʔ] (a catch in the throat) instead of a t-sound in certain positions, as in *take it off* [teɪk ɪʔ ɒf], *quite nice* [ˌkwaɪʔ 'naɪs]. This is not the same as omitting the t-sound altogether, since *plate* [pleɪʔ] still sounds different from *play* [pleɪ]. Nevertheless, authors who want to show a non-standard pronunciation by manipulating the spelling tend to write it with an apostrophe: *take i' off*, *qui'e nice*. The positions in which this happens are most typically syllable-final — at the end of a word or before another consonant sound. London's second airport, *Gatwick*, is very commonly called ['gæʔ wɪk] (“Ga’wick”).





- **happY-tensing**, using a sound more similar to the [i:] of *beat* than to the [ɪ] of *bit* at the end of words like *happy*, *coffee*, *valley*. Many recent works on English phonetics transcribe this weak vowel as [i] which can then be interpreted in various ways according to the speaker's accent. In strong syllables (stressed, or potentially stressed) it is crucial to distinguish tense long [i:] from lax short [ɪ], since *green* must be distinct from *grin* and *sleep* from *slip*. But in weak syllables this distinction does not apply — the precise quality of the final vowel in *happy* is not so important.
- **yod coalescence**, using [tʃ] (a ch-sound) rather than [tj] (a t-sound plus a y-sound) in words like *Tuesday*, *tune*, *attitude*. This makes the first part of *Tuesday* sound identical to *choose*, [tʃu:z].



However, unlike Cockney, EE does not involve, for example,

- • **h-dropping**, omitting [h], so that *hand on heart* becomes [ˌænd ɒn ɑː ʔ] ('and on 'eart); or
- • **th-fronting**, using labiodental fricatives ([f, v]) instead of dental fricatives

([θ, ð]). This turns *I think* into [aɪ 'fɪŋk] and *mother* into [ˈmʌvə].