

## *The Dialects of the United States*

General American, the dialect most often employed by the American news media, is the product of the mixing of dialects originating in eastern parts of the country. In general, the eastern United States tends to preserve earlier regional distinctions, whereas western dialects tend to be less identifiable by region. General American can possess certain regional characteristics, but it is generally identified with the following features.

1. Use of /æ/ in *path, fast, grass*.
2. Unrounding of /ɔ/ to /ɑ/ in *hot* and *top*.
3. Retention of /r/ in all positions.

The following list of features represents a selection of differences from General American. Each region has a considerable number of variations, and not all characteristic features are found in every part of the region. Consult the map in the handout for the regional boundaries.

Eastern New England (parts of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Vermont, esp. around Boston):

1. Retention of /ɔ/ in *hot* and *top*.
2. /o/ in *mourning* and *hoarse*, but /ɔ/ in *morning* and *horse*.
3. Use of /ɑ/ in *path, fast, grass*.
4. Loss of /r/ after vowels (*car, bar*), except before vowels (*carry*).

New York City:

1. Unrounding of /ɔ/ to /ɑ/ in *hot* and *top*. However, words like *cot* and *caught* are distinguished with the latter retaining the /ɔ/ pronunciation.
2. /o/ in *mourning* and *hoarse*, but /ɔ/ in *morning* and *horse*.
3. Loss of /r/ after vowels (*car, bar*), except before vowels (*carry*).
4. Pronunciations like /kɔil/ and /θɔid/ for *curl* and *third* (this actually consists of loss of /r/ with the development of a compensatory diphthong).

Upper North (Western New England, Upstate New York, the Great Lakes basin):

1. /o/ in *mourning* and *hoarse*, but /ɔ/ in *morning* and *horse*.
2. /ð/ in *with*.
3. /s/ in *grease* (verb) and *greasy*.
4. /ʊ/ in *roots*.

Traces of this dialect region extend into Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakotas.

Lower North:

1. Unrounding of /ɔ/ to /ɑ/ in *hot* and *top*, but also in *caught* in the western part of the region (western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois).
2. Unrounding of /ɔ/ to /ɑ/ before /r/ in words like *forest* in the eastern part of the region.
3. Raising of /æ/ to /ɛ/ before /r/ in words like *care, Mary*.

Upper South (extending into Missouri, Arkansas, and north Texas):

Contains features of the Lower North and Lower South in different mixes.

Lower South:

1. Loss of /r/ after vowels (*car, bar*), tending to do so even before vowels (/fa: əwe:/ *far away*).
5. Frequent use of diphthongs like /æə/, /æɪ/, /æjə/ in *path, fast, grass*.
2. Frequent use of diphthongs like /eɪ/, /ejə/ in *yes*.
3. Simplification of final consonant clusters in words like *las', kep', fin'* (for *last, kept, find*).
4. Raising of /ɛ/ before nasals (*pen* is pronounced /pɛn /).
5. Development of a glide /j/ between alveolar consonants and /u/ (e.g. *Tuesday, duty*).
5. /z/ in *grease* (verb) and *greasy*.