



Amy Stoller  
DIALECT DESIGNER & DRAMATURGE

---

Suiting Words to Actions Since 1995  
917-319-7448 ★ amystoller@stollersystem.com ★ www.stollersystem.com

So you're interested in becoming a dialect coach. Perhaps you enjoy mimicking other people's accents, or doing impressions. Or you're an actor with a particular talent for dialect work. Maybe you have a linguistics degree. You think it would be fun to have job that takes that advantage of your special ability. **Please think again!** If being able to own your own home, save for retirement, go on yearly vacations, dine at nice restaurants, and other things you may associate with success are important to you, a private practice in dialect coaching is not for you.

Most coaches with a private practice have to combine that practice with something else in order to make a living. Examples include speech-language pathology, public speaking for non-performers, improvisation for corporate team-building, EFL/ESL, and "accent reduction" (a term I dislike; it's inaccurate and misleading) for those whose accents, whether foreign or regional, hinder them in effective communication with the people they most need or want to reach. Many coaches have academic careers, with a private practice only as a sideline. These days, however, there are more applicants for academic positions than there are positions to go around, and tenure is very hard to come by. Some are voice actors (a highly competitive specialty). There are no easy answers.

My own practice is primarily in the performing arts. Although I have some experience working with non-performers, my passion is for working with actors, directors, and writers. I combine my accent and dialect work with other aspects of speech and text work, including dramaturgy. I have been working in professional show business for more than 40 years, primarily as an actor, but also as a director, production manager, and in various other capacities. It took many of those years to establish my reputation as a dialect designer and coach on a part-time basis, before I gambled on making it a full-time career.

I think it's important to **ask yourself why you want to do this**. What is *your* passion? Who do you want to serve? Are you truly committed to helping them—so much so that you are willing to make considerable sacrifices to do so? Most importantly, could you possibly be happy doing something else? If the answer to the last question is yes, I urge you to pursue that something else instead. But assuming you really do have zeal for this work, and the utmost respect for it, and you know whom you want to serve: What sort of training do you need?

There are degree programs designed to produce expert teachers who can train performers and others in safe and effective uses of voice and speech. Among them are those at (in alphabetical order) the A.R.T Institute at Harvard (USA), Birmingham School of Acting/Birmingham Conservatoire (UK), Central School of Speech and Drama (UK), Guildhall School of Music & Drama (UK), National Institute of Dramatic Arts (Australia), University of Alberta (Canada), and Virginia Commonwealth University (USA). Note that such programs can be altered or discontinued with changes of administration and budget. Note also that this list is neither exhaustive nor an endorsement of any particular program. Consider it a starting point for thorough research of your own. And be aware that vocal pedagogy programs are very difficult to get into. Some accept only one or two students per year.

There are performance-oriented programs that include voice and speech courses for actors and singers in undergraduate, graduate, and conservatory programs. Some may offer more: for example, Arizona State University has an MFA in Performance with a specialization/mentorship opportunity in Voice and Speech; CSULB offers a voice and speech track; University of Southern Mississippi offers a chance to become a Lessac Practitioner. There are also certification courses in voice and/or speech training methods, such as (in alphabetical order) Estill Voice Training, Fitzmaurice Voicework, Knight-Thompson Speechwork, Lessac Kinesensics, Linklater voice training, Patsy Rodenburg training, Roy Hart voice work. There are speech-language pathology degrees, linguistics degrees, TESOL (or TOEFL or IELTS) certifications, and so forth, all at least potentially useful.



Amy Stoller  
DIALECT DESIGNER & DRAMATURGE

---

Suiting Words to Actions Since 1995  
917-319-7448 ★ amystoller@stollersystem.com ★ www.stollersystem.com

Again, this list is neither exhaustive nor an endorsement of any particular course of study. Investigate further for yourself.

Personally, I recommend a good grounding in the International Phonetic Alphabet, if you don't already have one. I know coaches who have worked successfully without it; but the IPA is in such wide use, and so many resources employ it, that you may find the lack of it a hindrance to your research, if not to your client work.

Regardless of all the foregoing, if your interest is in working with performers, there is one aspect of your training that you must not overlook if you wish to be effective—and to do no harm. That is to *acquire training and experience in the branch of performing arts you wish to serve.*

**If you want to help actors, you *must* learn to act, and you *must* work professionally as an actor.** Whether you study at a conservatory, university, or acting studio, without living a performer's life, you can't understand a performer's needs. Without a thorough, innate understanding of a performer's needs, you simply cannot be an effective performer's coach. I do not know of any reputable, effective performer's dialect coach who lacks training and experience in performance. My dialect design career began when I was still working as an actor. I made the transition to dialect coach with no formal training in teaching voice and speech, though I have certainly acquired some since. (It's not the recommended procedure, but I have a gift for doing things the hard way. Learn from my mistakes and get your training first.)

You are welcome to peruse my website for more information on what I do as a dialect designer and coach. I especially recommend my Bookshelf page and my Links page; the latter includes a link to a much lengthier page that I edit as an officer of the [Voice and Speech Trainers Association \(VASTA\)](#). I urge you to join VASTA yourself, so you can take advantage of its many resources, including our annual conferences, newsletters, and our professional journal, *The Voice and Speech Review*. Access to all of these and more are available through the VASTA website. Membership is inexpensive, and the benefits of joining a generous community of fellow practitioners far outweigh the cost. We are so generous that we have made the [VASTA Guidelines for the Preparation of Voice and Speech Teachers](#) available for free; it's thorough and well worth reading.

Finally, don't forget that if you are set on establishing your own private practice, no matter what its focus, it is best to learn as much as you can about the basics of starting and running a business.

Best of luck in your quest,

Amy Stoller

June 15, 2017