

Unit Nine The Schwa /ə/

The schwa is the most frequent vowel sound in English speech. It gives English a unique sound and rhythm, as well as being a major factor to an English accent when Anglophones speak other languages.

How to make the sound: make the schwa with your jaws slightly open, your lips relaxed, and your tongue in the same position as when you wake up (everyone uses the schwa upon wakening!). Schwa is nearly always short.

Where is it found?

1. /ə/ can usually be found in function words which are unstressed in the sentence:

a, am, an, and, are, as, at, but, can, do, for, had, has, have, her, him, his, if, in, is, it, its, of, on, or, than, that, the, their, them, to, was, will, with, you, your.

2. /ə/ can be found in prefixes and suffixes as well:

in-, suc-, to-, ad-, be-, un-, -ible, -able, -ish, -ment, etcetera.

3. /ə/ can be found in content words as well:

able, according, account, action, affair, afraid, ago, agree, allow, alone, along, amount, animal, arrive, article, attempt, away, battle, beautiful, became, become, began, begin, believe, belong, broken, business, captain, certain, certainly, character, children, college, command, common, company, complete, condition, consider, contain, continue, control, decide, declare, degree, demand, desire, destroy, difference, different, direct, direction, discover, distance, double, enemy, England, enough, even, experience, family, famous, forest, garden, general, gentlemen, given, golden, happen, heaven, human, husband, hundred, idea, important, Indian, industry, interest, island, kitchen, listen, little, market, material, method, million, minute, moment, mountain, movement, nation, national, natural, necessary, notice, office, officer, often, open, opinion, people, period, pleasant, position, possible, practice, prepare, probably, problem, promise, public, purpose, question, reason, receive, regard, remain, remember, reply, report, require, result, return, season, second, service, settle, seven, several, single, special, station, success sudden, suddenly, supply, suppose, system, table, taken, thousand, today, together, tomorrow, travel, trouble, uncle, various, village, visit, woman, women.

Exercise One:

Find all the possible schwas in the following sentences. Then read them aloud.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. It's five to two and we're late. | 2. A table for four, please, around seven if possible. |
| 3. She can type 60 words per minute. | 4. George'll cut them into smaller pieces if you ask him. |
| 5. Pass the spoons and forks, please. | 6. I'm going to appeal this decision, you know. |
| 7. The President said that that was his policy. | 8. You could've informed me about it. |
| 9. Do you have to work late this evening? | 10. Good-bye, see you later. |
| 11. I don't know, but we could ask them. | 12. I thought it was really exciting. |
| 13. Where are my leather gloves? | 14. Marilyn is taller than Charlotte. |
| 15. There were seven or eight of them present. | 16. Pierre is famous everywhere he goes. |
| 17. The officers expressed several opinions. | 18. The train services many villages around here. |
| 19. Can you remember the directions there? | 20. There are a lot of mountains in British Columbia. |

Exercise Two: Listen and Repeat

Repeat the phrases below. The underlined word will contain the schwa.

each <u>and</u> every	cold <u>as</u> ice	feel <u>at</u> ease
John <u>had</u> gone	That <u>would</u> be wonderful.	These <u>are</u> cheap.
three <u>or</u> four	Wait <u>for</u> your brother.	None <u>have</u> broken.
box <u>of</u> apples	cup <u>of</u> tea	we <u>can</u> stay
more <u>than</u> that	Get <u>some</u> sleep.	close <u>to</u> home
that <u>was</u> that	There <u>are</u> some.	ten <u>to</u> two.

Exercise Three: Same or Different

You will hear two sentences or phrases. If they are the same, write S in the space provided; if they are different, write D.

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

Exercise Four: Dictation

Listen to the sentences and write them.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Part Five: Questions for Answers Given

In this section, you will hear 5 answers. You will not hear the questions. Listen carefully to the answer, and then record the question in the space provided on your tape by using your drill/record button.

Example: _____? I'm fine, thanks.
(you record "How are you?" onto your tape BEFORE the answer.)

1. Did you...

2. Did you...

3.

4. Is _____ as cold as _____?

5.

A

English from England

The English from England is different from English in Canada. The differences are in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. In grammar, the form of negation is sometimes different. The British say, "We haven't got any". A big difference in pronunciation is the "R" sound. The British "R" is a much softer sound than the Canadian "R" and the tongue lies almost flat in the mouth. Finally, there are many words which are different. For example, the British use the word "jumper" for the Canadian word "sweater", and "petrol" for "gas".

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

B

English from Canada

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.