THE SCHWA 1



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Expemo code:
17A1-X319-4AAF

1 The schwa

The rhythm of English is made by stress patterns. Syllables can be **stressed** (loud) or **unstressed** (soft), and they can be different lengths. In other languages, the rhythm is made by the length of the syllables, which is often the same.

	The schwa
What it is:	A short vowel sound which is the most common in the English language. When spoken, it sounds like 'uh'. In phonetics, it's written as an upside down 'e': ə. As it is a reduced/unstressed sound, it emphasises a stressed sound even more, as they are usually next to each other.
How to make the sound:	Your mouth should be slightly open with the tongue relaxed and in a neutral position. Saying a schwa does not take much effort. The sound is the minimum needed to show that there is a separate syllable.
Examples:	difficult: ˈdif.i.k(ə)lt , physical: ˈfiz.i.k(ə)l , medicine: ˈmed.i.s(ə)n

2 The schwa sound

You will hear the schwa. Listen and repeat the sound you hear.

Audio

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3 Schwa in words

Listen to the audio. Underline the part of each word where you hear the schwa sound.

Audio

Example: activity	4. politics	8. authority
1. animal	5. similar	9. fiction
2. electricity	6. musical	10. support
3. intelligent	7. interview	11. effort

Now, practise saying the words out loud with a partner.

4 Schwa in sentences

Listen to the sentences below. Underline the syllables in each word that have a schwa sound.

Audio

1. I bought the present you wanted for Annabel.
2. The majority of people want shorter working hours.
3. The original show was much better than the remake.
4. When you have finished that article I would like to read it.
5. The most populated continent in the world is Asia.
6. We need a large quantity of food to feed this many people.
7. The president made a speech about his first year doing the job.
8. We're having some technical difficulties. Please bear with us.

5 Practice

Say the sentences below out loud to reproduce the schwa sound. Then listen to the audio to see if you have the sounds in the same places.

1. Melissa hates chocolate.
2. David grows vegetables in his garden and then sells them at the local market.
3. Isaac gave Amelia an engagement ring. It was a very expensive diamond one.
4. Henry wants to get a new camera because his old one uses photographic film.
5. Simon doesn't have any interest in fashion, but he does dress quite smartly.
6. The average temperature in the Sahara Desert is very high.

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6 Homework

Use the space below to make sentences with any words from the worksheet that you find difficult to pronounce. Practice saying the sentences out loud.

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