

# 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 waking!). 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.