# ESOL E3 – Pronunciation Part 1

# 1 of 23 – Aims of this session

In this session, you will learn about pronunciation. This means the sounds we use to say words and sentences.

This session will help:

* You to understand people when they talk
* People understand you when you talk

Remember, you don’t need to have a British accent. Your accent probably sounds beautiful to British people anyway.

By the end of this session you will:

* Know about standard British English pronunciation
* Know why pronunciation can help with our listening and speaking skills

# 2 of 23 – Introduction

By the end of this session you will have looked at:

* Long and short vowel sounds
* Word stress
* Sentence stress
* Linking sounds

# 3 of 23 – The alphabet

Here is the English alphabet:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

A, E, I, O and U are vowels. The rest are consonants.

Let’s consider the way children first learn the English alphabet.

To hear how this is learnt and pronounced, visit the associated ‘Alphabet sounds audio file’.

# 4 of 23 – Vowels – long and short sounds

So far, we have considered ten different vowel sounds.

When you considered these, did you notice the vowel sounds were different?

To hear the difference, visit the associated ‘Vowels long and short sounds audio file’.

# 5 of 23 – Vowel sounds

We have considered ten vowel sounds so far.

There are only five vowel letters in the alphabet: a, e, i, o and u, but there are fourteen main vowel sounds. That is quite a lot. For example, Spanish only has five vowel sounds. Urdu has eleven vowel sounds, Pashto has seven, and Arabic and Polish have six.

Next, we will consider the schwa vowel sound.

Many languages have this sound, but some do not, for example Polish, Japanese, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese.

# 6 of 23 – Schwa

The schwa vowel sound is the most common in English.

It is not in the alphabet, so we use the other vowel letters to spell it.

This makes it difficult for learners to know when we need to use it.

The schwa looks like a strange word, but don’t worry, it’s a very simple sound.

To hear the schwa sound, visit the associated ‘schwa audio file’.

# 7 of 23 – The schwa sound

Consider the schwa sound in these words: teacher, polite, agree, a pen, an idea, nervous.

Did you notice that this sound is very quiet?

It is an unstressed vowel.

# 8 of 23 – Schwa and syllables

A syllable is a beat in a word with a vowel sound, for example, cat.

Cat has one syllable or beat. The whole word is clear.

Water has two syllables. The first syllable is stressed. It is easy to hear.

The second syllable is unstressed. It is not easy to hear. It’s a schwa sound.

Very often, a word with two syllables has a schwa sound, but not always.

# 9 of 23 – Word stress

Here are some words with two syllables, for example: doctor.

Syllables always have a vowel sound. The syllable which is louder and clearer is called the **stressed** syllable. The quieter syllable is called **unstressed**.

The stress is not always on the first syllable. The syllable with no stress has a schwa sound. For example, teacher and sofa have stress on the first syllable, and above and after have stress on the second syllable.

The syllable with no stress has a schwa sound.

# 10 of 23 – Question 1

Consider these words. Do they have a schwa sound in them?

Tip: The schwa sounds lazy. It can be difficult to hear because it is always an unstressed syllable:

1. doctor
2. son
3. polite
4. kitchen
5. after
6. happy

The answer is: a) c) d) and e) do have the schwa sound in them, the others do not. Y is not a vowel letter in the alphabet, but at the end of a word, it has a vowel sound like ‘ee’.

# 11 of 23 – Word stress continued

Most two syllable nouns and adjectives have the stress on the first syllable. For example:

* farmer (noun)
* table (noun)
* shower (noun)
* plastic (noun and adjective)
* clever (adjective)
* stupid (adjective)

Most two syllable verbs have the stress on the first syllable. For example:

* begin
* decide
* measure
* practise

# 12 of 23 – Question 2

Consider these words. Is the stress on the first or the second syllable?

1. farmer
2. alive
3. toilet
4. alone
5. before
6. alright

Tip:

* English does not usually have equal syllables. Usually, one syllable is stressed and the other is unstressed
* The stressed syllable is louder and clearer than the unstressed syllable
* An unstressed syllable usually has a schwa sound, but not always; for example, pretty

The answer is: a) and c) have stress on the first syllable. b) d) e) and f) have stress on the second syllable.

# 13 of 23 – Three more vowel sounds

So, we have considered eleven vowel sounds so far. There are three more a and o pronunciations.

Here are some words representing the final three sounds:

Sound 1 – horse, walk, bought

Sound 2 – boy, noise, boil

Sound 3 – towel, down, trousers

# 14 of 23 – Long and short syllables

Sometimes, the spelling of the word tells us if a vowel is long or short.

Usually, when we have an ‘e’ at the end of the word, this makes the vowel sound long.

If there is no ‘e’, then the vowel sound is short.

Examples of a long vowel sound can be found in the words: note, bite and time.

Examples of s short vowel sound can be found in the words: not, bit and Tim.

# 15 of 23 – Long and short syllables continued

‘e’ at the end of a word makes the vowel sound long. No ‘e’ at the end makes the vowel sound short.

Here are some examples of words with ‘e’ at the end, that make the vowel sound long: note, bite, time, rate and hope.

Here are some examples of words without an ‘e’ at the end, that make the vowel sound short: not, bit, Time, rat and hop.

‘ck’ at the end of a word makes the vowel sound short. Here are two examples:

* snake is a long vowel sound, but snack is a short vowel sound
* bake is a long vowel sound, but back is a short vowel sound

‘ea’ in the middle of a word makes the vowel sound long. Here are three examples:

* bead is a long vowel sound, but bed is a short vowel sound
* mean is a long vowel sound, but men is a short vowel sound
* seat is a long vowel sound, but set is a short vowel sound

Exceptions - Some important words do not follow the final ‘e’ making the vowel sound long; phone, wine and tune have a long vowel sound and follow the usual rules but have, love, come and some do not follow these rules and have a short vowel sound.

# 16 of 23 – Long and short syllables with a final ‘e’ pronunciation

Usually, when we have an ‘e’ at the end of the word, it is silent.

However, some words are borrowed from other languages and we keep the original pronunciation by pronouncing the final ‘e’.

This is not typical in English. The final ’e’ sound is usually to show that the vowel sound is long.

Consider the following words that have been borrowed from other languages, where the ’e’ is pronounced.

* café is borrowed from French
* fiancé is borrowed from French
* lasagne is borrowed from Italian
* karate is borrowed from Japanese

# 17 of 23 – Sentence stress

English is a stress-timed language.

This means that certain English words follow a regular beat, like a drum.

Consider this sentence: I want to go home. ‘Want’, ‘go’ and ‘home’ are the most important words.  
  
These words are stressed. This is called sentence stress.

The other words are unstressed. They have schwa vowels.

We can understand the sentence, with just the noun, ‘home’ and the verbs ‘want’ and ‘go’.

# 18 of 23 – Sentence stress continued

In English, we stress the important words. The functional grammar words are unstressed.  
Consider these sentences. Can you identify the sentence stress?

1. I live in Newcastle
2. I’ve got two children
3. Do you want some tea?
4. I have a car and a motorbike
5. I went to the supermarket, but it was shut
6. Fish and chips

The stress was on the following words in each sentence:

1. live and Newcastle
2. got, two and children
3. want and tea
4. have, car and motorbike
5. went, supermarket and shut
6. fish and chips

# 19 of 23 – Linking sounds

Consider this sentence: I live in Newcastle.

Can you hear how the ‘v’ sound joins to the ‘in’ sound?

In English, when we have a word ending in a consonant sound next to a word beginning with a vowel sound, we join them together.

So, for ‘live in’, we get this sound: ‘vin’.

In this sentence, ‘I live in Aberdeen’ we have an ‘n’ and ‘A’ next to each other. So, for ‘in Aberdeen’, we get this sound: ‘nab’.

# 20 of 23 – Linking sounds continued

Here are some more linking sounds.

Consider this sentence: I fancy an ice cream.

Here, ‘fancy an’ sound like ‘yan’.

Here is another example. Consider this sentence: We need a pen and some paper.

Look at ‘need a pen’. ‘Need a pen’ sound like ‘dap’.

Now consider ‘pen and’ in that same sentence.

‘Pen and’ sound like ‘penan’.

# 21 of 23 – Question 3

How many vowel sounds are there in English? Select the correct response:

1. 5
2. 7
3. 14
4. 21

The correct answer is: c).

# 22 of 23 – Question 4

What is the most common vowel sound in English? Select the correct response:

1. schwa
2. a
3. e
4. o

The correct answer is: a).

# 23 of 23 – Session conclusion

Well done, you have completed part 1 of the Pronunciation sessions.

You have now looked at:

* Long and short vowel sounds
* Word stress
* Sentence stress
* Linking sounds

If you have any questions about anything covered in this session, please speak to your tutor for more help.