



SCHWA “uh”

IPA Symbol: /ə/

How to Pronounce

The schwa is a neutral vowel, meaning, the tongue is in a neutral or middle position in the mouth. It is similar to the sound /ʌ/ only it occurs in unstressed syllables.

Spelling

Schwa can occur in all vowels in English when they are unstressed. This means that all the vowels can be pronounced the same (“uh”) if unstressed.

Common Error

The most common error is to pronounce the vowel as it is spelled, not considering the reduction to schwa if it is unstressed. So “animal” is pronounced erroneously as “AA NIH MAL” instead of “AA nuh mul.”

To fix this issue, reduce the unstressed vowel to a quick “uh.”

Let’s look at Schwa examples in different vowels:

Avoid using the full vowel pronunciation in unstressed syllables. Instead say a quick “uh” sound. All unstressed syllables are **bolded**. All stressed syllables are CAPITALIZED.

“i” words

So the word CA **pi** tal: since the “i” is in the unstressed syllable, the vowel can reduce to “uh” sounds like “CA**pu**htal”

A **ni** mal: “nuh”
MEN **ti** on: “chun”

AC **ci** dent
AP **ti** tude
AR **bi** trate
AR **ti** fact
CA **pi** tal
COU **sin**
DET **ri** ment
DI **ffi** cult
Du **pli** cate

FA **mi** ly
MO **ni** tor
MUL **ti** tude
OP **ti** mist
PEN **ci** l
Per MI **ssi** on
PO **li** tics
PRE **di** cate
PRE **si** dent

PRO **mi** nent
SEN **si** tive
SO **li** tude
SUB **sti** tute
U **ni** corn
U **ni** form
VE **ni** son
a MER **i** ca

“o” words

OC **to** pus: “tuh”
con **FIRM**
com **BINE**
PUR **pose**
FA **mous**

ON **ion**
Com **PU** ter
BILL **ion**
MILL **ion**

TRILL **ion**
o **CCUR**
to DAY
FA **mous**

to WARD
GA llon
PA rrot

BO ttom
FREE dom
SE cond

po Si tion
ob SESSED

“a” words

E.g. FI na lly: “nuh”

THOU sand
PEN ta gon
a BOVE
AT las
SA lad
a MOUNT
a MAZE
a BOUT
PLEA sant
a GAIN
ba LLOON
a GEN da

a RE na
a RO ma
ASTH ma
ba NA na
CA mera
CO la
CO ma
CO mma
DA ta
DRA ma
ER a
EX tra

Ma ma
MA ni a
ME di a
pa JA ma
PAS ta
PHO bi a
PLA za
SAL sa
SO fa
SO ya

Schwa in “e” words

E ne my
Com pe TI tion
re PEAT

I tem
de VE lop
BUS iness

PRO blem
CE le brate

Schwa in “u” words

su CCEED
su PPORT
tu MUL tu ous

FO cus
VI rus
AU gust

su PPLY
CIR cum stance
AL bum

Schwa in “y” words

sy RINGE
VI nyl

CA ta lyst
py JA mas

a NA ly sis
Penn syl VA ni a