

Teacher Talk- The Schwa

The schwa is the most common vowel sound in the English language yet is rarely explicitly taught! The schwa sound occurs in an unstressed syllable of a multisyllabic word. The schwa sound is found in lots of words throughout all 36 units. You can introduce the schwa in unit one or wait if you think your students are not ready. The sooner you talk about it, the sooner you will be able to explain why some sounds seem to not match the vowel in spelling.

The schwa sound is not a short or long vowel sound. It can sound similar to a short u /uh/, or sometime a short i /i/. Both are softer and more subtle than the original short sound. We say the schwa sounds lazy or bored. Sometimes it is called a reduced vowel sound.

Introduce the schwa when your students begin learning multisyllabic words and syllable types. However, start with words that have clear, concise vowel sounds. When students become confident with those patterns, then introduce the schwa. There are too many schwa words to completely avoid and ignore it! Introduce the concept and gradually show examples as you more through the sequence.



All of the vowels can produce the schwa sound.

a: ago, away, again, Alaska, pizza, banana, extra

e: velvet, camel, system, travel, open

i: pupil, denim, pencil, cousin, family

o: wagon, bottom, lemon, gallon, carrot, brother

u: focus, upon, support, album, suggest

Additional Resources and Activities:

In order to teach the schwa sound, students need practice identifying which syllable is stressed. Some students have never been exposed to accents and the rhythm of language. This is a great time to play and have some fun with stress!

One way to do this is to show that stress can change the meaning of a word or sentence. Say each word stressing the bolded syllable. How did it change the meaning?

present/present **produce**/produce **record**/ record **object**/ object

Read this sentence stressing each of the bolded words. How did it change the meaning?

I didn't steal your lunch!
I **didn't** steal your lunch!
I didn't **steal** your lunch!
I didn't steal **your** lunch!
I didn't steal your **lunch**!

You can find *Google Slides*, additional activities, and information about the schwa in our **Favorite Link List** at <https://readingrev.com/favorite-online-links-list>

ə

The Lazy Vowel

ə

Schwa



The most common vowel sound is like a weak and lazy /ǘ/. It's found in unaccented syllables

velv^əeta^əgop^əolite

Stressed & Unstressed Syllables

Directions: Circle the stressed syllable. Then, draw the schwa symbol (ə) above the vowel representing the unstressed schwa sound.

a go
ago

ex tra
extra

sys tem
system

trav el
travel

den im
denim

pen cil
pencil

wag on
wagon

bot tom
bottom

fo cus
focus

u pon
upon

ev i dent
evident

Stressed & Unstressed Syllables

Directions: Circle the stressed syllable. Then, draw the schwa symbol (ə) above the vowel representing the unstressed schwa sound.

/ə/ a go

ago

/ə/ ex tra

extra

/ə/ sys tem

system

/ə/ trav el

travel

/ə/ den im

denim

/ə/ pen cil

pencil

/ə/ wag on

wagon

/ə/ bot tom

bottom

/ə/ fo cus

focus

/ə/ u pon

upon

/ə/ ev i dent

evident