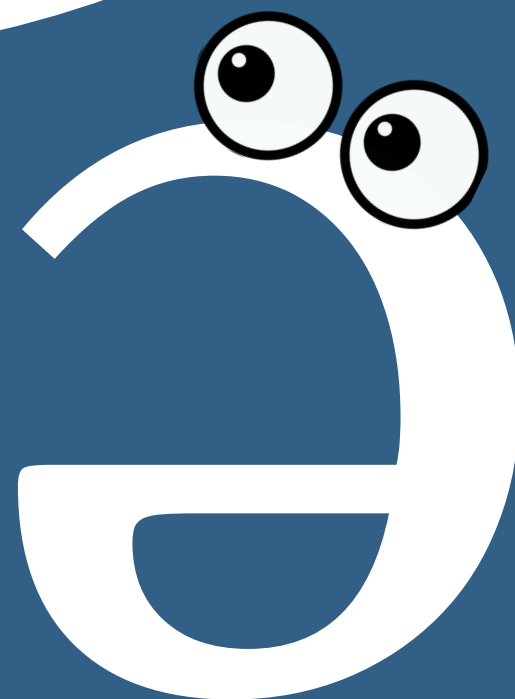


**What is a  
Schwa?**

**/uh/**



**It's often viewed as the laziest speech sound as you hardly open your mouth when you say it and your jaw is relaxed. It makes an /uh/ sound (as if you are thinking) and is, in fact, the most common vowel sound in the English language. Within words it is represented by a vowel letter (a, e, i, o, u) or it can be unwritten but heard.**

**The schwa sound plays an important role in making our speech more natural and fluent**

**In the international phonetic alphabet it's represented by a symbol that looks like an upside down e**



# **Initially Avoid It!**



**When teaching the initial letter sounds  
avoid adding the schwa sound to the  
end so /mmmmm/ not /muh/**

**Using what we call the 'pure sounds'  
means that it is easier for children to  
blend sounds together .**

**suh/u/nuh**



**suhunuh**

**sss/u/nnn**



**sun**

# Teaching Schwa

**As children progress through a systematic Phonics programme they will need to be taught about the schwa sound. It is the most common vowel sound after all! The first time they may come across it is in the word 'the'**

**Example words that contain a schwa represented by each vowel:**

**a**

**balloon**

**banana**

**salad**

**e**

**children**

**telephone**

**camel**

**i**

**animal**

**pencil**

**accident**

**o**

**ribbon**

**dinosaur**

**money**

**u**

**bonus**

**supply**

**virus**

**\*accent dependent**

# Unstressed Syllables

**In polysyllabic words (words that contain more than one syllable) we generally pronounce and stress one syllable more than the others. Within the stressed syllable the vowel usually makes its regular sound (short or long).**

**In an unstressed syllable the vowel letter can often become a schwa sound.**

sev<sup>ə</sup>n

tunn<sup>ə</sup>l

ribb<sup>ə</sup>n

ba<sup>ə</sup>n

alph<sup>ə</sup>bet

# ***How do I spell it?***

***The Schwa sound can be particularly frustrating when spelling words as the word does not look like how it sounds.***

***There are some spelling tips and rules that you can teach children to help them recognise the schwa sound and make sure that use the correct graphemes when they write.***

***flowu***  ***flower***

# **r controlled vowels**

*\*accent dependent*

**Vowel digraphs that contain an 'r' can also become a schwa often when they are at the end of a word.**

letter

sugar

river

polar

doctor

sailor

# **'a' at the start or end**

**When 'a' is found at the start or end of a polysyllabic word it can make the**

**schwa sound**

America

yoga

ago

pasta

away

scuba

sofa

# skipping it

There are words that we will often skip out the schwa sound completely when we say them

different → "differnt"  
chocolate → "chocláte"

## 'y' as a vowel

When the letter 'y' acts as a vowel then it can also become a schwa too.

vinyl      syringe

## vowel before 'l'

A vowel before the letter 'l' at the end of a word can become a schwa

dental

metal

fossil

bagel



# **What can I do to practise the the schwa?**

- **Practise identifying the stressed and unstressed syllables within words**
- **Encourage children to segment and blend a word and check if it sounds correct. If it doesn't, get them to replace one of the vowels with a schwa sound and check again.**
- **Hunt for the schwa in words**
- **Model breaking up a word into syllables and labelling the regular vowel and the schwa sound**
- **Sort words according to the letter that is representing the schwa**

pāndā

# Sing a Schwa Song!

to the tune of 'Wheels on the bus'

The schwa sounds goes like uh, uh,  
uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh.

The schwa sound goes like uh ,uh, uh in a word  
with 2 vowels

The schwa sound is in about and around, about  
and around, about and around.

The schwa sound is in about and around.  
Do you hear the uh?

The schwa sounds is in pizza and sofa, pizza and  
sofa, pizza and sofa.

The schwa sounds is in pizza and sofa  
Do you hear the uh?