

How to understand fast speech

In this lesson you will learn how to understand people when they speak quickly.

Starter

- 1 Do you have any problems when listening to people speaking fast? Why do you think these difficulties occur?
- 2 The following sentences are not written using normal spelling. Try reading each one aloud. Then rewrite them using the normal correct spelling.
 - 1 Shwi start now?
 - 2 Dywanta gedda coffee?
 - 3 I hafte leave.
 - 4 Ah ye gonna see yim befor ee goes?
 - 5 She's bin promoted.
 - 6 She wz late.
 - 7 Didja go win t the factri?

Challenge

- 1 Linking sounds are extra sounds that appear when words are spoken together fluently. The sounds used are /j/, /w/, and /r/. Listen to the sentences below and note any linking sounds.
 - 1 He'll be in after three.
 - 2 I saw a good opportunity.
 - 3 Could you do it now, please?
 - 4 She visited China and India.
 - 5 Should we go out now?
 - 6 Can you see all the figures clearly?
- 2 Sometimes linking sounds come from silent letters that are not normally pronounced when the word is said on its own. Look at these sentences and predict where linking sounds might come in each one. Then listen to check your answers.
 - 1 She's owner and manager of the firm.
 - 2 Tell me your opinion of the report.
 - 3 I'm waiting for a new offer.
 - 4 Could you show a visitor around?
 - 5 I'll have to buy some new accounting software.

Practice

- 1 Listen to two people speaking. What are they discussing?
- 2 In the dialogue, the speakers ask six questions. Listen again and write them with their normal correct spelling.
- 3 Practise saying the dialogue with your teacher using weak forms, linking, and other features of fluent speech.

Language box

In fast speech, unstressed small words typically have a weak pronunciation with /ə/, /ɪ/, or /e/:

for	weak: /fə/	strong: /fɔ:/
was	weak: /wəz/	strong: /wɒz/
were	weak: /wə/	strong: /wɜ:/
and	weak: /ənd/	strong: /ænd/
can	weak: /kən/	strong: /kæn/
to	weak: /tə/	strong: /tu:/
her	weak: /hə/	strong: /hɜ:/
she	weak: /ʃɪ/	strong: /ʃi:/
been	weak: /bi:n/	strong: /bi:n/
where	weak: /we/	strong: /weə/

Weak pronunciation is also used when a syllable is unstressed:

She was on her way to **work**. (stress = **work**)
/ʃʃ/ /wɒz/ /hə/ /tə/ (= weak forms)

Hint

In very informal writing, spelling sometimes reflects pronunciation features:

gonna (going to), **wanna** (want to), **gimme** (give me),
dunno (don't know), **n** (and)

- 42.3 o
- 3 When people speak quickly, sounds sometimes change or get lost. Listen to two different speakers. Are they saying the same thing?
- 42.3 o
- 4 Listen again to the two speakers. List all the words and phrases that are pronounced differently.
- 5 For each of the sentences below, decide if there are any consonant sounds that might change or get lost when speaking in a fast, fluent way.
- 1 Did you have a look at this?
 - 2 So, could you tell me his name again?
 - 3 We went there last week
 - 4 Do you want to get a sandwich?
 - 5 What will you do next, Tim?
 - 6 Give me a moment. It's in my handbag.
- 42.4 o
- 6 Now listen to the sentences in 5. Do the sentences sound as you expected them to?



When the stress in a sentence changes, the weak forms change. The words *there are* are pronounced differently in these sentences:

- A There are no cafes in this street.
B There are! /ðə r a:/
- A Oh - yes. Two.
B There are three! /ðə r ə θri:/

Note that weak pronunciation is normal pronunciation. It's neither lazy nor incorrect to speak using weak forms (or other features of natural, fluent speech).

Look

Look at listening scripts 42.1-42.5 on page 137. Find examples of weak form pronunciation.

Lesson record

3 new words from this lesson

3 useful phrases from this lesson

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| 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 2 |
| 3 | 3 |

Things to remember

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