

/ɛ/ - 2.97%	/æ/ - 1.45%	/ɑʊ/ - 0.61%
/aɪ/ - 1.83%	/ɒ/ - 1.37%	/ɜ/ - 0.52%
/ʌ/ - 1.75%	/ɔ/ - 1.24%	/ɛə/ - 0.34%
/eɪ/ - 1.71%	/u/ - 1.13%	/ɪə/ - 0.21%
/i/ - 1.65%	/ʊ/ - 0.86%	/ɔɪ/ - 0.14%
/əʊ/ - 1.51%	/ɑ/ - 0.79%	/ʊə/ - 0.06%

One of the chief difficulties with this vowel for the non-native speaker is the great variety of spelling represented by /ə/ :

e.g. <i>a</i> as in <u>g</u> round	<i>er</i> as in fath <u>e</u> r	<i>or</i> as in sail <u>o</u> r
<i>o</i> as in <u>o</u> bstruct	<i>our</i> as in col <u>o</u> ur	<i>eur</i> as in chauff <u>e</u> ur
<i>ar</i> as in backw <u>a</u> rd	<i>ou</i> as in gener <u>o</u> us	<i>re</i> as in cent <u>r</u> e
<i>e</i> as in perman <u>e</u> nt	<i>i</i> as in terr <u>i</u> ble	<i>eou</i> as in courag <u>e</u> ous
<i>ure</i> as in measur <u>e</u>	<i>ur</i> as in sulph <u>u</u> r	<i>ia</i> as in Pers <u>i</u> a
<i>u</i> as in <u>s</u> uppose	<i>yr</i> as in zeph <u>y</u> r	etc.

Once the students are able to recognise the symbol ə in relation to the sound /ə/ the teacher is in a position to help them correctly pronounce a wide variety of English spellings. This initial recognition knowledge also provides a first step in helping students 'unlock' the dictionary pronunciation which someone once described as 'those funny letters which always follow dictionary spelling entries'.

English is a language in which one distinguishes stressed and unstressed syllables. Consider the following sentence: *It was 'easy for them to teach.* The words *easy* and *teach* are stressed giving /ɪt wəz 'izi fə ðəm tə 'ti:tʃ/. The pronunciation of the remaining words *was*, *for*, *them* and *to* all have the schwa /ə/ and are, of course, the weak forms of the words. Again awareness of the schwa sound in relation to weak forms can aid pronunciation enormously.

## Presenting the schwa to the class

- Write a number of simple, high frequency words on the board to illustrate the sound and underline the spelling represented by the schwa.  
e.g. father, a flower, an aeroplane, the, banana.
- Introduce the symbol to the class using a large flash card (see fig. 1 below).

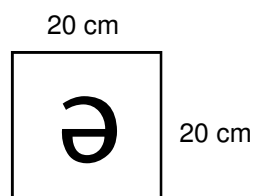


Fig. 1

- Illustrate the relationship orally/aurally then ask the students to chorally repeat first the sound and then the words. Remember to conduct them, thus avoiding ragged starts. Finish by asking one or two individuals to repeat both words and sound.

This simple presentation should not take more than three or four minutes.