

Wait a minute – where's the waiter?

Strong and weak vowels

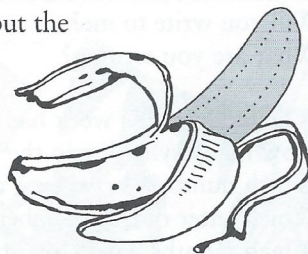
- A** **C7a** The word *London* has two vowel sounds that are written the same – **London** – but pronounced differently. The first **o** has a clear, strong sound, but the second **o** has a weak sound. Listen carefully to the difference.

London



- C7b** The word *banana* has three vowel sounds which are written the same – **banana**. The second **a** has a clear, strong sound, but the first **a** and the third **a** have a weak sound. Listen.

banana



Stressed syllables (see Units 30–32) have strong vowel sounds, but unstressed syllables often have weak sounds.

The weak sound in **London** and **banana** is /ə/.

London /'lʌndən/

banana /bə'nɑ:nə/

- C8a** Sometimes it's difficult to hear /ə/. Listen.

London

I have to go to London tomorrow.

banana

Would you like a banana?

This is very important for listening, because it makes it difficult to recognise words. When you speak English, you don't need to pronounce weak sounds as weakly as this, but it's important to make a clear difference between stressed (strong) and unstressed (weak) syllables.

- C8b** Listen to the other weak vowels in these two sentences.

W S W S W S W W S W

I have to go to London tomorrow.

have – go – Lon – morn are strong, and the others are weak.

W W S W W S W

Would you like a banana?

like – na are strong, and the others are weak.

Important
for listening

B

Sometimes different words sound the same because of the weak vowels. Look at these three sentences.

Where's the waiter?

Is this the way to the school?

Can you wait a minute?

waiter, way to and wait a sound the same: /'weɪtə/.

- C9** Listen to the three sentences and repeat.

Exercises

29.1 In the words below, * represents the weak vowel /ə/. Write the words with their full spelling.

EXAMPLE

lett* letter

1 Brit*n

2 t*day

3 *meric*

4 p*lice

5 *noth*

6 *gain

7 mount*n



Listen to check your answers. Check with the Key.



Then listen and repeat these phrases.

1 Great Brit*n

2 arriving t*day

3 going to *meric*

4 call th* p*lice

5 have *noth*

6 say it *gain

7 climb the mount*n

29.2 Look at the sentences below and find words and phrases in list 1 and list 2 with the same pronunciation.

EXAMPLE

Where's the waiter? – Can you wait a minute?



Where's the waiter?

list 1

~~Where's the waiter?~~

Not at all.

Look in the cellar.

It takes a long time.

Smoking isn't allowed.

I'd like to live in a newer house.

list 2

I heard a loud noise.

You'll see a tall building on your left.

My father knew a lot about music.

~~Can you wait a minute?~~

I'm trying to sell a house.

Walk along the beach.



Listen to check your answers. Check with the Key. Then listen and repeat.

29.3 Write these words.

EXAMPLE

/prə'naʊns/ pronounce

1 /ə'merɪkə/

2 /'sentəns/

3 /'dɪfrənt/

4 /'maʊntən/

5 /tə'deɪ/

6 /'letə/

7 /pə'liːs/

8 /ə'gen/



Check with the Key. Then listen and repeat.