

average, novelist, happening

Words that lose a syllable

A

B86

Important
for listening

In some words, vowels tend to be left out in conversation. When this happens, the word loses an unstressed syllable:

average novelist happening

Some dictionaries show that the vowel /ə/ can be left out using the symbol ^o:

/æv^oriɔz//nɒv^olist//hæp^onɪŋ/

It is not necessary to leave these vowels out in your own speech in order to be understood, but leaving them out can make your speech sound more fluent and natural, and being aware of these changes can help you understand rapid speech.

B

B87

Important
for listening

Most vowels left out in this way come before /r/, /l/ or /n/.

Before /r/ –

considerable	directo r y	batt e ry	diction a ry	confere n ce	favo u rite
favo u rable	histo r y	discove r y	imagin a ry	differ e nce	inter e st
miserable	preferable	myst e ry	second a ry	refer e nce	restaur a nt

Before /l/ –

accident a lly	caref u lly	fam i ly	educatio n al	deafening	definite
especial l y	dreadf u lly	marvell o us	natio n al	frightening	prison e r
part i ally	thankf u lly	special i st	person a l	gardening	traditio n al

Before /n/ –



Note: Some other words with these endings rarely lose a syllable (e.g. *theory, cookery, formally*), and some words with these endings almost always lose a syllable (e.g. *historically, politically, technically*).

C

B88

Important
for listening

In a few words, left-out vowels come before sounds other than /r/, /l/ and /n/. For example:

govern~~a~~ment medic~~i~~ne veget~~a~~ble

D

B89

Important
for listening

In a few two-syllable words with stress on the second syllable, the first vowel is often left out in rapid speech so that the word is said with only one syllable:

I don't believe you. /bli:ɪv/

What's the correct answer? /krekt/

It's the police. /pli:ɪs/

I suppose so. /spəʊz/

E

B90

Important
for listening

A few words lose their first syllable completely in rapid speech:

About five o'clock.

I bought it because it was cheap.

I've invited everyone except Jack.

When these words are written to represent speech (for example, in novels) this pronunciation is sometimes indicated:

'bout, 'cause, 'cept

Exercises

- 1.1 Complete these sentences using the pairs of words below. (Notice that you may need to change the order of the words.)

frightening – discovery	considerable – difference	thankfully – battery
restaurant – favourite	mystery – prisoner	deafening – accidentally
interest – traditional	carefully – directory	secondary – miserable

EXAMPLE Carlo's is my *favourite* Italian *restaurant*.

- When she lived in Shanghai she developed an in Chinese medicine.
- The two cars seem identical, but there is a in how much they cost.
- I had a time in school.
- When he opened the door he made a
- The escaped and where he's gone is a complete
- I checked in the, but couldn't find his number.
- The torch didn't work, but I had a spare in the kitchen.
- When I pressed the button there was a bang.

- B91 Now listen and check your answers. Then read aloud the sentences making sure you pronounce the words you have written with the appropriate vowels left out.



- 1.2 Listen to the words in the box said slowly and carefully and write the number of syllables you hear (some of these are on the opposite page):

memory 3	formally 3	loyally	suppose	anniversary	police
machinery	technically	delivery	medicine	geometrically	
perhaps	historically	nursery			

- 1.3 Listen to the words from exercise 31.2 used in sentences. Again, write the number of syllables you hear. Is this the same number as in exercise 31.2 (write S) or a different number (write D)?

EXAMPLES I must be losing my **memory**. 2 D He was dressed **formally**. 3 S

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 He supported her loyally . | 7 There's a special delivery for you. |
| 2 I suppose not. | 8 I'm taking cough medicine . |
| 3 It's our wedding anniversary . | 9 It was geometrically patterned. |
| 4 The police arrived. | 10 Perhaps you're right. |
| 5 The machinery broke down. | 11 The play is historically accurate. |
| 6 It's technically very advanced. | 12 She goes to a nursery . |

Now check your answers in the Key. Then say the sentences aloud, leaving out syllables where appropriate.

- 1.4 Here are some extracts from books. Read aloud the quoted speech as it is written.

'Well, no one's making any calls, and no one's sending no faxes either, so I guess you'll just have to start thinking 'bout being poor. So there!!'

'... I jus' felt I had to warn you, 'cause it don't look too healthy, y'unnernan'?'...

"He tried once or twice," said the boy dismissively, "but he couldn't see well enough to teach anything 'cept what was in his head. ..."

Follow up: If someone said 'scuseme' to you, what might they want you to do?