



Course Name: English Phonology

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Chapter 9: Strong and Weak Syllables

Questions:

- What are the types of syllables?
- Why is it necessary to study strong and weak syllables?
- What is the difference between strong and weak syllables?
- What makes a syllable weak?

- Syllables have two types: strong and weak
- It is important to understand the difference between strong and weak syllables especially when we consider stress, elision, and intonation.

The differences between strong and weak syllables:

- Length: Strong syllables are longer than weak syllables.
- Loudness: Strong syllables are louder than weak syllables.
- Quality: Strong syllables have vowels that differ in quality from the vowels of weak syllables.
- NOTE: It is always the vowel that makes the syllable longer, louder, or different in quality.

- The syllable is weak when it has the short vowel /ə/ (Schwa).
Example: better /betə/ - The second syllable is weak.
- The syllable is weak when it has the close front unrounded vowel /i/.
Example: city /sɪti/ - The second syllable is weak.
- The syllable is weak when it has the close back rounded vowel /u/.
Example: thank you /θæŋk ju/ - The second syllable is weak.
- The syllable is weak when it has a syllabic consonant /m, n, ŋ, l, r/.
Example: couple /kʌpəl/ - The second syllable is weak.
- The syllable is weak when it ends with the short vowel /ɪ/ and the next syllable starts with a consonant.
Example: design /dɪzain/ - The first syllable is weak.

- /ə/ is the weakest vowel in English and the most frequently occurring one.
- Only five consonants can be syllabic in English: /m̩, n̩, ŋ̩, l̩, r̩/.

List of important words with syllabic consonants:

cattle	wrestle	bottle	muddle
trouble	knuckle	panel	kernel
pedal	threaten	eaten	happen
often	uppermost	preference	Hungary
veteran	garden	rhythm	bottom
literal	visionary	couple	struggle
blossom	Handle	parcel	Petal
national	history	seven	Heaven



Question: Identify the weakest syllable in the following words and give reasons:

Open, happy, architect, radio, easy, forget, thorough, potato, trouble,
seven, Hungary, thicken