

Commonly mispronounced words

Printable practice pack · free from onlinetonguetwister.com

Some words are hard for everyone: silent letters, buried syllables, stress in an unexpected place, or a spelling that lies about the sound. This pack collects the forty that trip people up most.

Who this helps: Public speakers, presenters, interviewees, actors, and advanced learners polishing their diction.

How to make the sound

- 1 Say the word slowly, one syllable at a time, from the respelling — not from the spelling.
- 2 Find the CAPITALISED syllable and make it longer and louder than the rest.
- 3 Reduce every unstressed syllable to a soft schwa 'uh'. English rhythm depends on it.
- 4 Say it three times slow, then three times at speaking speed.
- 5 Use it in a real sentence the same day, or it will not stick.

Common mistakes

- Pronouncing letters that are silent: the 'l' in salmon, the 'd' in Wednesday, the 'b' in subtle.
- Adding a syllable that is not there: 'ath-uh-lete' for athlete, 'ex-pres-so' for espresso.
- Putting the stress on the wrong syllable, which is more confusing to listeners than a wrong vowel.
- Guessing from spelling on loanwords — colonel, choir and epitome are all traps.

A ten-minute daily routine

- 1 **Warm up (1 min).** Hum, then stretch the jaw and lips. Cold mouths slur.
- 2 **Isolate (2 min).** Make the target sound on its own, held long, ten times.
- 3 **Words (3 min).** Work one block of the word list on page 2, slowly, from the respelling.
- 4 **Contrast (2 min).** Run the minimal pairs on page 3 and listen for the difference.
- 5 **Speed (2 min).** Finish with a twister from page 4 — slow first, then fast.

Tip: record yourself on a phone before and after a week of practice. People rarely hear their own errors live, but almost always hear them in a recording. The microphone practice mode at onlinetonguetwister.com transcribes what you actually said and scores it against the target.

Word list

Word · IPA · say it (CAPITALS = stressed syllable)

Silent letters

Wednesday	/ˈwɛnz.deɪ/	WENZ-day
salmon	/ˈsæm.ən/	SAM-uhn
subtle	/ˈsʌʦ.əl/	SUT-uhl
receipt	/rɪˈsi:t/	rih-SEET
almond	/ˈɑː.mənd/	AH-muhnd
debt	/dɛt/	DET
island	/ˈaɪ.lənd/	EYE-luhnd
indict	/ɪnˈdaɪt/	in-DITE
mortgage	/ˈmɔːr.gɪdʒ/	MOR-gij
queue	/kjuː/	KYOO

Stress in a surprising place

entrepreneur	/ˌɑːn.trə.prəˈnɜːr/	ahn-truh-pruh-NUR
epitome	/ɪˈpɪt̬.ə.mi/	ih-PIT-uh-mee
hyperbole	/haɪˈpɜːr.bə.li/	hy-PUR-buh-lee
comparable	/ˈkɑːm.pə.ə.bəl/	KAHM-pur-uh-buhl
mischievous	/ˈmɪs.tʃə.vəs/	MIS-chuh-vuhs
applicable	/ˈæp.lɪ.kə.bəl/	AP-lih-kuh-buhl
preferable	/ˈprɛf.ə.ə.bəl/	PREF-ur-uh-buhl
infamous	/ˈɪn.fə.məs/	IN-fuh-muhs
developer	/dɪˈvɛl.ə.pə/	dih-VEL-uh-pur
photography	/fəˈtɑː.grə.fi/	fuh-TAH-gruh-fee

Spelling that lies

colonel	/ˈkɜːr.nəl/	KUR-nuhl
choir	/ˈkwaɪ.ə/	KWY-ur
quinoa	/ˈkiːn.wɑː/	KEEN-wah
Worcester-shire	/ˈwɜːs.tə.ʃə/	WUUS-tur-shur
gauge	/geɪdʒ/	GAYJ
suite	/swiːt/	SWEET
niche	/niːʃ/	NEESH
façade	/fəˈsɑːd/	fuh-SAHD
genre	/ˈʒɑːn.rə/	ZHAHN-ruh
cache	/kæʃ/	KASH

Words people add or drop syllables in

athlete	/ˈæθ.liːt/	ATH-leet, 2 syl.
espresso	/ɛˈspres.oo/	eh-SPRESS-oh (no X)
nuclear	/ˈnuː.kli.ə/	NOO-kee-ur
jewelry	/ˈdʒuː.əl.ri/	JOO-uhl-ree
library	/ˈlaɪ.brɛr.i/	LY-brair-ee
February	/ˈfɛb.ju.ɛr.i/	FEB-yoo-air-ee
probably	/ˈprɑː.bə.bli/	PRAH-buh-blee
particularly	/pəˈtɪk.jə.lə.li/	pur-TIK-yuh-lur-lee
comfortable	/ˈkʌmf.tə.bəl/	KUMF-tur-buhl
anyway	/ˈɛn.i.weɪ/	EN-ee-way (no S)

Minimal pairs

Say each pair aloud. If they sound identical, slow down and exaggerate.

A	B	What to listen for
athlete	ath-uh-lete	two syllables, never three
espresso	expresso	there is no X
nuclear	nucular	NOO-kee-ur
prescription	perscription	PRE, not PER
supposedly	supposably	not a word
et cetera	ex cetera	ET, not EX

Sentence ladders

Build up: single word, then phrase, then full sentence. Three times each.

1	entrepreneur
2	a young entrepreneur
3	The young entrepreneur was the epitome of comfortable confidence.

1	Wednesday
2	next Wednesday
3	Next Wednesday the colonel will visit the library.

1	particularly
2	particularly comparable
3	That figure is particularly comparable to February's.

1	mischievous
2	a mischievous athlete
3	A mischievous athlete ordered almond espresso.

Twisters for this sound

Slow and clear first. Speed is the last step, never the first.

The dog drags the doll down the driveway.

EASY · sound focus: d

Kooky kittens knock over knitted mittens.

MEDIUM · sound focus: k

Tasty tarts took time to top tiny tables.

MEDIUM · sound focus: t

Double drums draw dredge down damp docks.

MEDIUM · sound focus: d

Paper pockets pick per petty purple pits.

HARD · sound focus: p

Did Dot do duty during dark daily drives?

MEDIUM · sound focus: d

Five-day tracker

Practice task	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Read the word list aloud					
Minimal pairs, 3× each					
Sentence ladders					
Twisters, slow					
Twisters, fast					
Record yourself and listen back					

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