

## ***Strong and Weak Syllables***

Syllables consist of an onset, nucleus (peak) and coda. The onset and coda are occupied by consonants forming the margins of the syllable, and the nucleus is universally obligatory and occupied by vowels.

Syllables may sound stronger or weaker according to the tone they bear. It is almost certainly true that in all languages some syllables are in some sense stronger than other syllables; these are syllables that have the potential to be described as stressed. It is also probably true that the difference between strong and weak syllable is of some linguistic importance in every language, but, strong and weak syllables do not occur at random.

### **Weak Syllable**

The syllable becomes weak when we find the following four cases:

- 1- the vowel /ə/ (schwa), it is a mid or half way between front and back. It is originally described as **lax**. e.g. **better** /betə/, **open** /əʊpən/.
- 2- a close front unrounded vowel in the general area of /i:/ and /ɪ/, it is neither long /i:/ nor short /ɪ/, it is in between. It is usually symbolized as /ɪ/, e.g. **happy** /hæpi/.
- 3- a close rounded vowel in the general area of /u:/ and /ʊ/. It is usually symbolized as /ʊ/, e.g. **thank you** /θænk ju/
- 4- a syllabic consonant occurs after another consonant and the way it is produced depends, to some extent, on the nature of the consonant. These consonants are: /l/, /m/, /n/, /r/ and /ŋ/, e.g. **bottle** /botl/, **threaten** /θretŋ/, **history** /histri/, and **thicken** /θɪkŋ/.

## **Spelling Rules:**

### **A- Spelling Rules of Schwa /ə/**

- 1- Spelt with 'a': **attend** /ətend/, **character** /kærəktə/. The latter word has three syllables: kær-rə-ktə, the syllable /kær/ is strong because its center is not one of the above four possibilities.
- 2- Spelt with the two letters 'er' as in: **particular** /pətɪkjələ/, **monarchy** /monəki/.
- 3- It can be found with 'a' in adjectives ending with 'ate'. The strong pronunciation is /eit/, e.g. **accurate** /ækjərət/ but there are some exceptions like **'private'** /praɪvɪt/.
- 4- Spelt with 'o' e.g. **tomorrow** /təməʊə/, **potato** /pəteɪtə/, the strong pronunciations for these two words are: /təməʊə/, /pəteɪtə/.
- 5- Spelt with 'or', the strong is /o:/, e.g. **forget** /fəget/, **opportunity** /opəʃju:nɪti/.

- 6- Spelt with 'e'. the strong pronunciation is /e/ e.g. **settlement** /setlmənt/, **violet** /vaiələt/, **postman** /pəʊstmən/.
- 7- Spelt with 'er', the strong pronunciation is /ɜ:/ like in **person** /pɜ:son/, the weak pronunciation is /pəson/, **perhaps** /pəhæps/, **stronger** /strɒŋgə/. The first syllable is strong because there is no /ə/.
- 8- Spelt with 'u', the strong pronunciation is /ʌ/, e.g. **support** /sʌpɔ:t/, **Autumn** /o:təm/.
- 9- Spelt with 'ough', e.g. **thorough** /θʌrə/
- 10- Spelt with 'ous', e.g. **famous** /feiməs/, **gracious** /ɡreɪʃəs/.

## B- Spelling Rules of /i/ and /u/:

Two other vowels are commonly found in weak syllables, the close front and close back vowels. /i/ is called as neutralized because it is neither /i:/ nor /ɪ/ (short). It has the feature of both but it is neither of them. The same thing is on the close back vowel /u/.

/i:/ \_\_\_\_\_ /i/ \_\_\_\_\_ /ɪ/

/u:/ \_\_\_\_\_ /u/ \_\_\_\_\_ /ʊ/

e.g.: **easy** /i:zi:/ or /i:zi/

**you** /ju:/ or /ju/

The neutralized /i/ and /u/ are more likely long when they precede another vowel, but when they precede consonant or pause they don't be long any more. It is not absolute rule because there are some exceptions.

## Spelling Rules of /i/

- 1- Words that are spelt with 'y' in final position or 'ey' usually after one or more than one consonants, e.g. **happy** /hæpi/, **valley** /væli/.
- 2- In a prefix: such as those which are spelt (re, pre, de) e.g. **react** /riækt/, **preoccupied** /priɒkjʊpaɪd/, **deactivate** /diæktɪvɪət/.
- 3- In the suffixes that are spelt with (iate, ious) when they have two syllables, e.g. **appreciate** /əpri:ʃiət/, **hilarious** /hɪləəriəs/.
- 4- In the following words when they are unstressed: (**he**, **she**, **we**, **me**, **be**) and the word (**the**) when it precede a vowel. These words will be pronounced as /hi/, /ʃi/, /wi/, /mi/, /bi/ and /ði/.
- 5- It can be seen that /i/ is most often represented in spelling of the letters 'i' and 'e'.

## Spelling Rules of /u/

- 1- This vowel can be found in the words (**you, to, into, do**) when they are unstressed and not immediately preceding a consonant, e.g. **through** /θru/, **who** /hu/ when they are unstressed.
- 2- The vowel /ʊ/ is usually found with a preceding /j/ as in **commutation** /kəmjuːteɪʃn/.