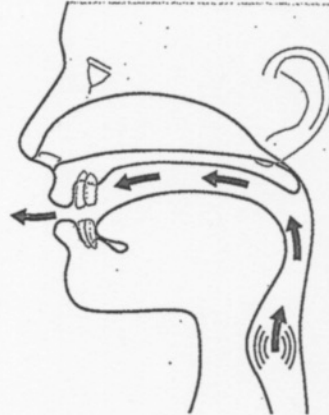
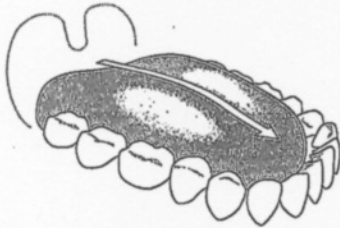


LETTER, COMMA

/ə/



This sound is called the **schwa**, but it is also known as the **neutral vowel**. It is an essential vowel sound in creating good English rhythm, and is arguably the most important sound you will learn in English. Because of this there are specific units devoted to it in the *RP rhythm* section of this book (Units 48–52). Use this unit to learn how to create the schwa. Use the *RP rhythm* section to learn in more detail when to use it.

Make the sound

Vowel grid reference: 5

This vowel is short.



- 1 Part your lips and teeth, just a little.
- 2 Relax your tongue and leave the tip to rest naturally, just behind your bottom front teeth.
- 3 Now make a very short sound.
- 4 The schwa should have no shape at all. Lips, tongue and jaw are all neutral and relaxed.

When do I use this sound?

The schwa can replace any spelt vowel in an unstressed syllable or word. The rules are covered in detail in on pages 110–111.



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Spelling	Examples
a	around, comma
e	begin, other
i	possible
o	official, director
u	particular

Now try it!



Say each of these words and sentences aloud. Then compare your pronunciation with the model on tracks 78–79.

- A** Peter seven letter other computer famous
 particular another forget glamour information amusing
- B** 1 Her mother opened the letter that was addressed to her father.
 2 The bananas were a peculiar colour but Debra ate them anyway.
 3 Her new dietician was stricter than she expected and though she wasn't supposed to eat after seven, hunger got the better of her.

Am I doing something wrong?

- X** A common mistake is to try and shape this vowel based on its spelling in the written word.
- ✓** If you use the schwa correctly, it should not be possible to guess how the word is spelt when you hear it. The schwa is completely neutral. It can almost disappear in speech. You might find it useful to imagine the spelling of your target word without a vowel at all:

e.g. control = c'ntrol
 banana = b'nana
 television = tel'vis'n

Ashlon & Shepherd 2012: 55