

Sentence Stress

Almost all the words which have both a strong and weak form belong to a category that may be called function words - words that do not have a dictionary meaning in the way that we normally expect nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs to have. These function words are words such as auxiliary verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, etc., all of which are in certain circumstances pronounced in their strong forms but which are more frequently pronounced in their weak forms. It is important to remember that there are certain contexts where only the strong form is acceptable, and others where the weak form is the normal pronunciation

There are some fairly simple rules; we can say that the strong form is used in the following cases:

1. For many weak-form words, when they occur at the end of a sentence; for example, the word 'of' has the weak form əv in the following sentence:

'I'm fond of chips' aɪm 'fʌnd əv 'ʃɪps

However, when it comes at the end of the sentence, as in the following example, it has the strong form DV: ʃɪps ə 'wɒt aɪm 'fʌnd ɒv

2. When a weak-form word is being contrasted with another word; for example:

'The letter's from him, not to him' ðə letəz frəm ɪm nɒt tu: ɪm

A similar case is what we might call a co-ordinated use of prepositions:

I travel to and from London a lot' aɪ 'traveɪl an tu: ən frəm 'lʌndən ə lɒt

3. When a weak-form word is given stress for the purpose of emphasis; for example:

'You *must* give me more money' ju 'mʌst 'ɡɪv mi 'mɔ: 'mʌni

4. When a weak-form word is being "cited" or "quoted"; for example:

'You shouldn't put "and" at the end of a sentence'

ju 'ʃʊdnt pʊt and ət ði 'end əv ðə 'sentəns

Another point to remember is that when weak-form words whose spelling begins with 'h' (e.g. 'her', 'have') occur at the beginning of a sentence, the pronunciation is with initial h, even though this is usually omitted in other contexts.

The most common weak-form words are introduced in the attached (Strong and weak Forms).