

Schwa in grammar words

Level: B1+

Age: 12+

Time needed: min. 25 minutes

Materials needed: “Schwa in grammar words” handout, frontal check slideshow, sound recordings, loudspeakers

Classroom organisation: frontal, individual

Notes to the teacher:

- Before conducting this game, we recommend teaching the “Stress in English and in Hungarian” and the “Introducing the schwa” activities.
- Make sure that the students know how to pronounce the schwa and that they can recognise both the symbol of the schwa and its pronounced form.

Procedure:

1. Brush up the students’ previously acquired knowledge about the schwa (namely that it is the most common sound of English and that it is never stressed).
2. Distribute the “Schwa in grammar words” handout. (The title of the handout – “Schwa hunt” – is not the same as the name of the file and that of the activity because students are not supposed to know at this point yet that schwas will only occur in grammar words.)
3. The students’ task is to circle words in which they think the vowel is a schwa (the sentences consist of one-syllable words, so each word will contain one vowel only). This can be done in pairs or individually. We recommend that the students should use pencils so that they can erase their mistakes later (which will most certainly occur – anticipate that the students will find much fewer schwas than the sentences have, and they are also likely to put some in the wrong place).
4. When the students think they have finished, ask them how many words they have found (there are 17 altogether). As the students won’t have possibly found all of them, hold an auction to raise their interest. Before starting to discuss the answers, you might want to reveal the number of schwas to be found (in order to make the students try to find some more).
5. Play the audio recordings and ask the students to correct their answers based on the listening.
6. Frontal check the answers after each sentence, using the frontal check slideshow. You might want to play each recording one more time after checking the answers, so that the

students will be convinced that there are schwas in those places, even if they did not hear all of them for the first time.

7. Remind the students that the schwa is really the most common sound in English. You may also want to call their attention to the fact that “important” words (i.e., nouns, main verbs, adjectives and adverbs) are all stressed and therefore the one vowel they contain cannot be a schwa. Only the so-called grammar words (i.e., articles, prepositions, auxiliaries, pronouns, etc.) will be the ones in which the vowel sound can be a schwa, because these words are less important and are unstressed.
8. Explain the rationale behind the activity: If language learners are not aware that most grammar words are pronounced with a schwa, they can have difficulty perceiving grammar words, thus, they might have a harder time processing spoken English.