

Are you Schwaducated? Take this Quiz to Find Out  
by Dr. Kelli Sandman-Hurley, Dyslexia Training Institute

It is not uncommon to sweep the schwa under the rug or give it a cursory nod in a short lesson and then move on. Instead many instructors choose to over-pronounce a word and avoid the schwa altogether. Think about this, the schwa is the most common utterance in the English language, and it deserves to be understood. Here is a quiz for you to become schwaducated and when you are done, you can peruse the answers to learn more about the schwa.

- |     |  |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 1.  | Spoken English language is syllable-timed.                                 | T | F |
| 2.  | The words <every> and <different> have schwa deletions.                    | T | F |
| 3.  | The schwa occurs in the unstressed part/s of a word.                       | T | F |
| 4.  | The word <the> contains a schwa.   | T | F |
| 5.  | The word <every> contains a schwa.   | T | F |
| 6.  | Which part of the word <fantastic> is stressed?                            |   |   |
|     | a. fan   |   |   |
|     | b. tas   |   |   |
|     | c. tic   |   |   |
| 7.  | A student can hum a word to find the stressed part of the word.            | T | F |
| 8.  | The schwa is too complicated to teach to younger students.                 | T | F |
| 9.  | A word may or may not have a schwa depending on the accent of the speaker. | T | F |
| 10. | How many schwas are in the word <problem> ?                                |   |   |
|     | a. one   |   |   |
|     | b. two   |   |   |
|     | c. zero  |   |   |

Answers:

1. False. Spoken English is a stress-timed language, not a syllable-timed language. This why there seem to be so many ‘exceptions’ when teaching with syllables. Here is a link that explains it further: <http://rachelsenglish.com/english-stress-timed-language/>
2. True. Check out number 6 in this article (and then read the rest of the article): [http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon\\_valley/2014/06/05/schwa\\_the\\_word\\_for\\_the\\_most\\_common\\_vowel\\_sound\\_in\\_english\\_comes\\_from\\_hebrew.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2014/06/05/schwa_the_word_for_the_most_common_vowel_sound_in_english_comes_from_hebrew.html)
3. True. Now that you have watched the video about stress-timed languages you can now begin to learn how to find the stressed part of a word. Hint: Number 7 of this quiz has a helpful tip.
4. True. The word <the> is often taught as an exception, but the fact is that <the> is usually unstressed in a sentenced, which explains the spelling. If you emphasize <the> by saying, “That was **the** best ice cream I have ever had, the <e> is stressed.
5. True, but it is a deleted schwa. See #3
6. b. A good tip we learned from Gina Cooke (www.linguisteducatorexchange) was to call the word to dinner or get the word in trouble in order to find the stressed part of the word.
7. True. Try it with the word <tenacious>.
8. 100% False! It is essential for anyone learning to read and spell English as their native language or a second (or third or fourth) language to understand the reason for discrepancy between our spoken words and our spelling. It should not be skipped or

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given a cursory tip of the hat, but studied and understood. Think about this, just about every polysyllabic word contains a schwa. Here are some examples: impossible, elevator, watermelon, convertible, calculator, harmonica, kindergarten, information, celebration.

9. True. Accent plays a very big role in whether or not a schwa will be present. For example, I met a French woman who pronounced each syllable in the word <Florida> where many Americans delete or schwa the <i>.
10. a. However, if you have heard a Canadian pronounce the word <problem> you might not hear a schwa at all.

So, let's hear it for the schwa and go continue your schwaducation. It's vitally important to understand our language and that our kids, especially those with dyslexia, deserve to get ALL of the information, not just what we think they can handle.