

HARD WORDS

Exceptions

1. There will always be **exceptions** to the rules that we identify. In our small sample of 80 words, we had problems understanding why only 16 of them were pronounced as they were [\[LINK\]](#). That's 20% that were exceptions in terms of either stress or sounds. Sometimes it is just not possible to accurately predict the pronunciation of every word **on sight**. With over **one million** words in English, it is natural that some will not fit our rules and patterns. It is necessary to learn lists of **sight words** – irregular words that students should learn to pronounce by heart. Learn both the **spelling** and the **pronunciation**. The aim of sight words – like 'have', 'come', and 'most' – is to be able to pronounce them correctly – on sight – without having to decode them. You could use the **Dolch List** [\[LINK\]](#), **Fry's 300 Sight Words** [\[LINK\]](#) – or my list [\[LINK\]](#) [\[LINK\]](#). Ideal English words which match our rules are:

nature	two-syllable noun, stress 1 st	suffix with schwa ('ure')	'a' = ei (vcv rule)
confirm	two-syllable verb, stress 2 nd	prefix with schwa ('o')	'ir' = er

However, not all words are as regular as these. Let's look at exceptions within each element of our practice:

2. **No. syllables** There can be no exceptions here. Every word has at least one syllable. When it comes to sound connections, again, there are no exceptions. Sound connections must be either vc (vowel to consonant) or F (friendly). If not they will make the word more difficult to pronounce. There is no point forcing a cc or cv connection, e.g. 'fath er' (cv), when breaking after 'fa' would be far more natural.

3. **Stressed syllable** English stress *tends* to be on the first syllable, but this is not a rule. Two-syllable nouns are usually stressed on the first syllable [\[LINK\]](#), while two-syllable verbs are usually stressed on the second syllable [\[LINK\]](#). We *can* predict *some* stress patterns confidently, because some suffixes are always stressed on the syllable before, like '-tion', '-ic', '-ual', and '-ence' (Lesson 3). However, we can meet exceptions to these rules and patterns. For example, 'hotel' is a two-syllable noun, but is stressed on the second syllable. It is also a loan word, from French, and is influenced by the French stress pattern. We cannot find any reason why 'machine' – another two-syllable noun – should be stressed on the second syllable. We learn it as an exception.

4. Sometimes we find **strong sounds in weak syllables (svs)** instead of the usual schwa / i / ii, e.g. or in 'automatic', ai in 'ideal', ei in 'aeroplane', or o in 'restaurant' (Lesson 5). The diphthong iy appears in many common suffixes, like '-iant', '-iate', '-ious', and '-ium'. We need to pronounce them quickly and softly.

5. **Stressed vowel sound** We can be really confident of the **vcv** and **vcc** rules: that 'sale' will have a long (alphabet) ei sound because of vcv, and that 'planning' will have a short a sound because of the double consonants 'nn' which 'protect' it (Lesson 4). However, it sometimes happens that there will be a short vowel sound, where we could expect to find a long one due to vcv:

come done gone one have love some any, etc.

In addition, we sometimes find an unexpected (non-alphabet) long vowel sound on the stressed syllable of a vcv word, e.g. 'area', 'story', 'plural', 'various', and 'move'. Equally, we might find ourselves using a long vowel sound when the vcc spelling tells us it should be short, e.g. ball, class, cold, find, last, most, roll, talk, and wild [\[LINK\]](#).

We must doggedly learn sight words and **high-frequency words**. These words are often exceptions to our rules. Fortunately, there *are* patterns we can learn. Below is just a small sample. Click the link for more: [\[LINK\]](#).

-alk	-all	-ass	-ast	-ild	-ind	-old	-oll	-ost
chalk	ball	class	fast	child	find	cold	poll	host
talk	call	grass	last	mild	kind	hold	roll	most
walk	fall	pass	past	wild	mind	sold	toll	post