

HARD WORDS

If the Schwa Sound were a Letter 3

We know that there is no dedicated letter in the English alphabet to represent the schwa sound, despite it being the most common sound in English. What would a text look like if such a letter did exist? In the following original text the schwa sound is represented by the symbol @:

Last night I went t@ th@ cin@m@ with my friend Mandy. We saw @ really funny com@dy starring Will Ferr@ll called 'Blades @f Glory'. It w@s @bout two ice skat@s who hat@d each oth@ – they w@ riv@ls – b@t then end@d up having t@ work t@geth@ t@ win th@ tourn@m@nt. Aft@ that we went f@ something t@ eat @t th@ restaurant @round th@ corn@. I had @ salad @nd Mandy had steak @nd chips. We got home @t @bout elev@n @nd Mandy phoned h@ mum t@ get h@ t@ come @nd pick h@ up. It w@s @ great evening. I like spending time with Mandy bec@se we've got @ lot in comm@n. We're both good @t Maths @nd we both have @ twin broth@.

Last night I went **to** **the** **cinema** with my friend Mandy. We saw **a** really funny **comedy** starring Will Ferrell called 'Blades **of** Glory'. It **was** **about** two ice skaters who **hated** each other – they **were** rivals – **but** then ended up having **to** work **together** **to** win **the** tournament. **After** that we went **for** something **to** eat **at** **the** restaurant **around** **the** corner. I had **a** salad and Mandy had steak **and** chips. We got home **at** **about** **eleven** and Mandy phoned **her** mum **to** get **her** **to** come **and** pick **her** up. It **was** **a** great evening. I like spending time with Mandy **because** we've got **a** lot in **common**. We're both good **at** Maths **and** we both have **a** twin brother.

The text has 488 letters and the @ appears 55 times, so around 11% of the letters are the schwa sound. The schwa appears in function words, suffixes, prefixes, and mid-word:

33 Function Words:	16 Suffixes:	4 Prefixes:	2 Mid-Word:	0 Mid-Consonants:
6 – to	6 – -er	3 – a-	1 – -a-	
5 – a	2 – -ed	1 – to-	1 – -e-	
5 – and	1 – -a			
4 – the	1 – -ad			
3 – at	1 – -al			
3 – her	1 – -edy			
2 – was	1 – -ell			
1 – because	1 – -en			
1 – but	1 – -ment			
1 – for	1 – -on			
1 – of				
1 – were				

Tip: take a little time to note the places in a text where the schwa is likely to appear. In function words – with the most common here being 'to' + 'and' – in suffixes, with '-er' by far the most common, then to a much lesser degree in prefixes, mid-word, and mid-consonant. Learn the spellings that represent schwa sounds.