

Pronunciation: Disappearing Syllables

In English you cannot always tell how a word is pronounced just by the spelling. The truth is, English spelling does not make much sense. One reason for this is “disappearing syllables.” This basically means that many words are spelled with a syllable that they are not pronounced with. For example, the word “vegetable” is pronounced “*veg-table*”, the second “e” is cut out of the word completely.

Note: Some words can be pronounced both ways. For example, most English speakers pronounce the word “memory” as “*memry*,” but some people say “*memory*”.




1. All of the words below are pronounced with a “disappearing syllable.” Read through the words and cross out the syllable you think is silent.

- Chocolate
- Business
- Evening
- Every
- Comfortable
- Basically
- Probably
- Interest
- Favourite
- Restaurant



2. Now listen to the audio and check your answers.


Unfortunately there are not many rules for which syllables disappear, but there are some. The letters “ally” at the end of a word are usually shortened to “*ly*”. For example “actually” is pronounced “*actu-ly*”. This includes many common words such as “usually”, “basically”, and “specifically” and “annually”.

 3. Listen to the audio of the sentences below and decide which syllables disappear. Each sentence has 2 disappearing syllables.

- a) My favourite food is chocolate.
- b) Every evening I come home and cuddle my cat.
- c) The average summer temperature in England is eighteen degrees.
- d) I don't know why, but you're not allowed to use cameras in the library.
- e) There are several good bars near here, it's probably the best area in town.
- f) I specifically asked for no vegetables, and they gave me a salad!
- g) Some people feel uncomfortable at the gym, but if you go regularly you get used to it.
- h) He runs pretty regularly, but every time he has to walk up stairs he gets out of breath.
- i) The book is beautifully written, it's about a catholic family in Ireland.
- j) I think documentaries about nature are really interesting.



 4. Now practice saying the sentences above without pronouncing the disappearing syllables.

 5. Read through the text and cross out the disappearing syllables. Then read text out loud without pronouncing the disappearing syllables. There are 10 disappearing syllables.

The business I work at recently bought new chairs, and they're very uncomfortable. Every evening I come home with a sore back, and I think that's probably because of these new chairs. I tried to complain to my boss about it, but he just wasn't interested. Basically he told me if I didn't like it, I could leave. Several of my colleagues are also pretty annoyed about the chairs, so we're going to have a meeting in a nearby restaurant to decide if we're going quit together!