

Strong forms and weak forms in English conversation

It is very common to use strong form and weak form when speaking in English because English is a stress-time language. It means you stress on content words such as nouns, principal verbs, adjectives, adverbs and negation words while structure words such as auxiliaries, conjunctions, prepositions are not stressed. Using proper strong form and weak form can help you to speak English more fluently.

For example, take a look at these sentences; only the underlined syllables are stressed.

- *She can play violin.*
- *Mary is from Chicago.*

In this case the words 'can' and 'is from' take the weak form. The weak form change the vowel to "ə" sound.

- **can** in strong form: /kæn/ → **can** in weak form: /kən/
- **from** in strong form: /frɒm/ → **from** in weak form: /frəm/

In the next handout are some function words with their strong and weak forms. Note that, generally, the weak form occurs when the structure word is in initial or middle positions but in final position, it is the strong form which is likely to be used.

- What are you looking **at** (/æt/)?
- Where are you **from** (/ frəm/)?

The weak form is usually used in **everyday English conversation**, especially when speaking fast i.e. in connected speech.

Exercise1: Give the weak forms of the structure words in this sentence.

She is fond of playing the guitar in her room.

/ ʃɪ / /z/ /v / /ðə/ /hə/

Exercise2: Stress the following sentence.

Examples are provided for practice.

Source: <http://learnenglish.vn/how-to-learn-english/strong-form-weak-form-english-conversation/>

STRONG AND WEAK FORMS

Auxiliary verbs

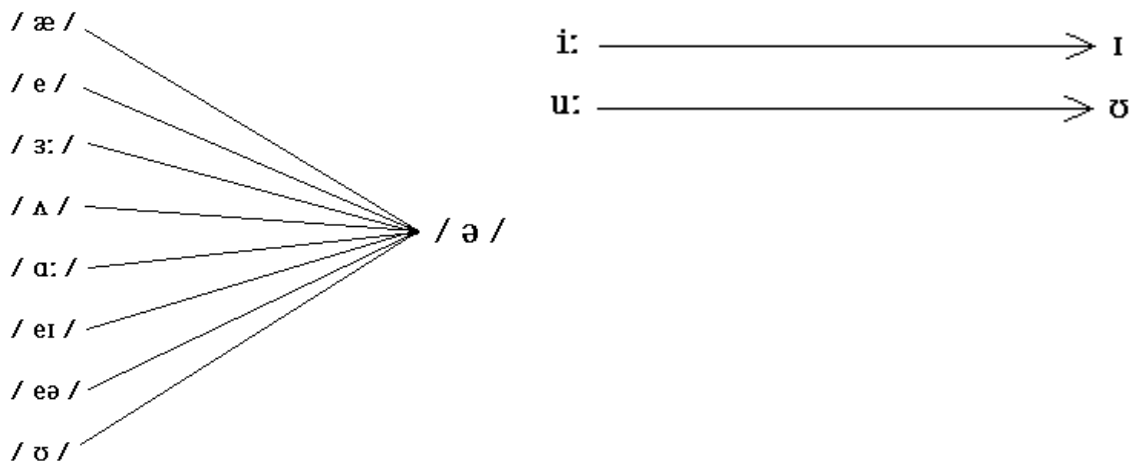
WORD	STRONG	WEAK	EXAMPLE	TRANSCRIPTION
am	æm	m (after I)	I'm tired.	aɪm taɪəd
		əm (elsewhere)	Why am I here?	waɪ əm aɪ hɪə
are	ɑ:	ə (before consonants)	They're going.	ðeə ɡəʊɪŋ
			The girls are beautiful.	ðə ɡɜ:lz ə bjʊ:təfl
	ɑ:r	ər (before vowels)	They're honest.	ðeər ɒnɪst
			The men are ugly.	ðə men ə ʌɡli
is	ɪz	s (after voiceless sounds other than /s, tʃ, ʃ /)	That is fine.	ðəts faɪn
			This cat 's fast	ðɪs kæts fɑ:st
		z (after voiced sounds other than /z, dʒ, ʒ /)	This dog is lovely.	ðɪs dɒɡz lʌvlɪ
			Where is John? John's here.	weəz dʒɒn/ dʒɒnz hɪə /
		ɪz (after / s, z, tʃ, dʒ, ʒ, ʒ /)	This watch is mine.	ðɪs wɒtʃ ɪz maɪn
			Which is right?	wɪtʃz raɪt
was	wɒz	wəz	The weather was terrible	ðə 'weðə wəz 'terəbl
were	wɜ:	wə (before consonants)	We were late.	wɪ wə leɪt
		wər (before vowels)	They were asleep.	ðeɪ wər əsli:p
do	du:	də (before consonants)	How do they come?	haʊ də ðeɪ kʌm
		dʊ (before vowels)	What do I get?	wɒt dʊ aɪ ɡet
does	dʌz	dəz	When does the train leave?	wen dəz ðə treɪn li:v
has	hæz	həz (initially in a sentence)	Has he paid the bill?	həz ɪ peɪd ðə bɪl
		əz (after /s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ /)	The rose has withered.	ðə rəʊz əz wɪðəd
			The place's changed.	ðə pleɪs əz tʃeɪndʒd
		z (after voiced sounds other than / z, dʒ, ʒ /)	The lion's died.	ðə laɪənz daɪd
			Mary's passed.	meərɪz pɑ:st
		s (after voiceless sounds other than / s, tʃ, ʃ /)	The milk's gone sour.	ðə milks ɡɒn saʊə
John's been sick.	ðʒɒns bi:n sɪk			
have	hæv	v (after I, he, she, we, they)	You've broken it.	ju:v brəʊkən ɪt
		əv (elsewhere)	The men have eaten.	ðə men əv i:tɪn
had	həd	həd (initially in a sentence)	Had he already danced?	həd ɪ ɔ:lredɪ dɑ:nsd
		d (after vowels)	We'd never seen it before.	wɪ:d nevə si:n ɪt bɪfə:
			They'd left home early.	ðeɪd left həʊm ɜ:lɪ

		əd (elsewhere)	The men had gone home.	ðə men əd ɡɒn həʊm
			The night had been fine.	ðə naɪt əd bi:n faɪn
When <i>has, have</i> and <i>had</i> are full verbs they should always be pronounced hæz, hæd, hæv			I have two brothers.	aɪ hæv tu: brʌðəz
can	kæn	kən	How can I help?	haʊ kən aɪ help ju:
could	kʊd	kəd	How could he do it?	ʔaʊ kəd ɪ du: ɪt.
shall	ʃæl	ʃəl/ʃl	We shall need to run.	wɪ ʃl ni:d tə rʌn
should	ʃʊd	ʃəd	Why should he care for anybody?	wai ʃəd ɪ keə fə enɪbɒdɪ
must	mʌst	məs (before consonants)	You must try your best.	jʊ məs traɪ jɔ: best
		məst (before vowels)	He must eat well.	hi məst i:t wel
will	wɪl	l (after consonants except /l/, and also after I, he, she, we, you, they – personal pronouns)	This watch'll do.	ðɪs wɒtʃl du:
			They'll give it away.	ðeɪl ɡɪv ɪt əweɪ
			This'll teach him.	ðɪsl ti:tʃ hɪm
		əl (after vowels and /l/)	The girl'll win.	ðə ɡɜ:l əl wɪn
			The boy'll lose.	ðə bɔɪ əl lu:z
would	wʊd	wəd (sentence initially)	Would you come for a walk?	wəd ju kʌm fə ə wɔ:k
		d (after I, he, she, we, you, they)	He'd be happy.	hi:d bi hæpi
		əd (elsewhere)	All would agree.	ɔ:l əd əɡri:
Conjunctions				
and	ænd	ən (generally everywhere)	Come and sit down.	kʌm ən sɪt daʊn
			black and white	blæk ən waɪt
		n (occasionally after /t, d, s, z, ʃ/)	Wash and wear	wɒʃ n weə
			Bread and butter	bred n bʌtə
as	æz	əz	This is as good as gold.	ðɪs ɪz əz ɡʊd əz ɡəʊld
			Come as soon as possible.	kʌm əz su:n əz pɒsəbl
Initial <i>as</i> is likely to be accented - æz		As a father he was a failure		æz ə fa:ðə ɪ wəz ə feɪljə.
		As for him, it is not possible to say anything.		æz fə ɪm ɪts nɒt pɒsəbl tə seɪ enɪθɪŋ
than	ðæn	ðæn/ðn	better than ever	bətə ðæn evə
			This is better than that.	ðɪs ɪz betə ðæn ðæt
that	ðæt	ðæt	He said that he was coming.	hi sed ðæt ɪ wəz kʌmɪŋ
			This is the method that works.	ðɪs ɪz ðə meθəd ðæt wɜ:ks.
			I admit that I did it.	aɪ ədmɪt ðæt aɪ dɪd ɪt

The word that in phrases like <i>that man</i> , and <i>that's good</i> is always pronounced ðæt and never weakened.				
but	bʌt	bət	But, why not today	bət waɪ nɒt tədeɪ
Pronouns				
he	hi:	hɪ (initially in a sentence)	He likes it.	hɪ laɪks ɪt
		ɪ (elsewhere)	Did he win?	dɪd ɪ wɪn
him	hɪm	ɪm	Give him two.	ɡɪv ɪm tuː
his	hɪz	hɪz (initially in a sentence)	His name was mentioned.	hɪz neɪm wəz menʃnd
		ɪz (elsewhere)	They all liked his tie	ðeɪ ɔːl laɪkt ɪz taɪ
she	ʃi:	ʃɪ	Where does she live?	weə dəz ʃɪ lɪv
her	hɜː (before consonants)	hə (initially in a sentence)	Her face is red.	hə feɪs ɪz red
		ə (elsewhere)	Take her home	teɪk ə həʊm
	hɜːr (before vowels)	hər (initially in a sentence)	Her eyes are black.	hər aɪz ə blæk
		ər (elsewhere)	Give her a book.	ɡɪv ər ə bʊk
me	mi:	mi	Bring me a chair.	bɪŋ mi ə tʃeə
we	wi:	wɪ	We came here yesterday.	wɪ keɪm hɪə jɛstədəɪ
them	ðem	ðəm/ ðm	Send them by post	send ðəm baɪ pəʊst
who	hu:	hʊ (initially in a sentence)	Who do you want?	hʊ də ju wɒnt
		uː (occasionally as a relative pronoun)	The man who is standing there is a thief.	ðə mæn uːz stændɪŋ ðeəz ə θɪ:f
you	ju:	jʊ	I'll tell you everything.	aɪl tel ju evrɪθɪŋ
Prepositions				
at	æt	ət	He'll come at nine.	hi:l kʌm ət naɪn
for	fɔ:	fə (before consonants)	Come for coffee	kʌm fə kɒfi
		fər (before vowels)	Come for a game of chess.	kʌm fər ə geɪm ɒv tʃes
from	fɾɒm	fɾəm	I've come from Delhi.	aɪv kʌm fɾəm delɪ
of	ɒv	əv	He's a friend of my father.	hɪz
to	tu:	tʊ (before vowels)	Try to ask him over.	traɪ tʊ æsk ɪm əʊvə
		tə (before consonants)	He's gone to take a test.	hɪz ɡɒn tə teɪk ə test
Articles				
a	eɪ	ə	I want a pen	aɪ wɒnt ə pen
an	æn	ən	Buy me an apple.	baɪ mi ən æpl
the	ði:	ðə (before consonants)	The thief's escaped Shut the door	ðə θi:fz ɪskeɪpt ʃʌt ðə dɔː
		ði (before vowels)	The apples are rotten Wait for the end	ði æplz ə rɒtn weɪt fə ðɪ end

some	sʌm	səm/sm	I want some tea	aɪ wɒnt səm ti:
Miscellaneous words				
be	bi:	bɪ	Don't be rude.	dəʊnt bɪ ru:d
been	bi:n	bɪn	He hasn't been invited	hɪ hæznt bɪn ɪnvaɪtɪd
Sir	sɜ:	sə (before consonants)	Sir William	sə wɪljəm
	sɜ:r	sər (before vowels)	Sir Anthony	sər æntəni

1. All the words with initial / h / (he, his, him, her, who, had, has, have) commonly lose their / h / when they occur unaccented within a sentence. But they retain / h / when they occur initially in a sentence or when they are accented.
2. In almost all the cases, weakening is effected by the replacement of a vowel phoneme by either / ə /, / ɪ / or / ʊ / according to the following pattern.



3. **is** and **has** follow the rules for formation of the plural morpheme.