

# How can I understand and speak Australian English fluently?

## Connected speech - Why is it important?

Connected speech is a term that refers to sound changes that occur when we are speaking. Understanding these changes can dramatically improve your understanding of fluent native speakers of English. And if you don't use at least some of the features of connected speech yourself, you may sound stilted and formal. This can be a barrier to communication, particularly in informal situations. Formal presentations without the features of connected speech may also be a strain on a native speaker audience.

## What are the features of connected speech?

Basically, there are three features of connected speech.

### Unstressed words

As the name implies, these words are usually 'smaller', less important words than the stressed information words which carry most meaning in English. Unstressed words are usually pronounced more lightly and softly than stressed words and many are pronounced with the indefinite or schwa vowel sound /ə/.

e.g. I'm a **student** at 3 unstressed words: I'm, a, at

**UTS** 2 information words: student, UTS

Stressed words, in contrast, are usually 'content' words such as nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs.

## Why is it important to know how to pronounce unstressed words?

Unstressed words are important because they make stressed information 'stand out'. Saying unstressed words more quickly and lightly also gives the speaker time to lengthen the stressed syllables in key words and make clear intonation contours. Here is a summary list of unstressed words.

articles	The, a, an
prepositions	at, to, for
pronouns	me, you, him, her, it
conjunctions	and, but
auxiliary verbs	is, was, has, have, had
modal verbs	can, could, should

## Linking

Fluent speech at normal speed is spoken without breaks between words. The sound at the end of one word is joined or linked to the beginning of the next word. Often these words sound like one word. There are basically three different ways of linking in English.

### Consonant + vowel

I'm studying my Masters s in Business Aministr

### Consonant + consonant

The best thing about this course is ...

### Vowel + vowel

I'll be <sup>/j/</sup> a registered nurse in two and <sup>/w/</sup> half years

## Sound changes

Sometimes linking sounds together actually produces a new or different sound. This usually happens in two ways.

/t/ + /j/ | This is my first <sup>/tʃ/ (as in 'ch' for 'chair')</sup> year.

/d/ + /j/ | This is my second <sup>/dʒ/ (as in 'j' for 'just')</sup> year.

## Are there any 'secrets' for how to link words together?

Yes. Speak as much as possible in phrases and try to keep your breath and your voice going as you 'move' from one word to the next.

