

Weak Prefixes & The Schwa

Sometimes prefixes are reduced, sometimes not. When O's and A's are weak, it's especially important to reduce them and pronounce them as a schwa. Since word stress is so important to comprehensible English speech, if you fully pronounce an ordinarily reduced vowel, it can cause the listener to misinterpret the word.

This list offers a sample of common words, but is not exhaustive. If you come across a word with one of these prefixes that is not on the list, check an online dictionary.

IPA symbols:

- schwa /ə/
- short o /ɒ/
- long o /oʊ/
- short u /ʌ/

Weak prefix a

ability
about
account
achieve
across
affect
again
another
approve
around
attend
aware
away
accountant
accomplishment
attendance
available

Weak prefix com

combine
command
commit
complete
committee
community
companion
compare

compete
completely
compose
complain
computer

Stressed com (short o): comedy, comment, commerce, common

Stressed com (short u): comfort, company, compass

Weak prefix con

conceal
concern
condemn
conform
confront
confuse
connect
control
convey
condition
confirm
consent
consider
consolidate
construction
consultant
consume/consumer
contain
continue
convenient
convert
conviction
convince

Stressed con (short o):

concept, confident, congress, constant, contact, content (noun), contest, context, contract, conversation

Weak prefix pro:

proceed/procedure
produce (verb)
profound
prolific
prolong
promote
propose
protect

provide
provoke
productive (-ive suffix places stress on syllable before suffix, so first syllable “pro” is weak)
prospective
professor

Stressed pro (short o):

probably, problem, process, prodigy, product, profit/prophet, progress, project, promise, prompt,
propaganda, proper/property, proverb, proximity

Stressed pro (long o):

profile, program, pronoun, protégé, protein, protest, protocol

Weak prefix to:

today
tomorrow
tonight
tomato
together

Other weak first syllable O's

correct
opinion
police
position