

Lesson Plan: Weak Forms and Connected Speech

For C1+ Business and Exam English students

Level: C1-C2

Time: 50-60 minutes

Focus: Pronunciation, listening

Exam link: IELTS Listening, Cambridge Listening

Learning objective

By the end of the lesson, students can recognise and produce weak forms of common function words in connected speech, and use a dictation-comparison technique to keep improving their listening for connected speech independently.

1. Warmer (5 minutes)

Say naturally, at normal speed: *"I was waiting for a bus to town."* Ask students to write down exactly what they heard. Compare answers, most will have missed or guessed at "for a" and "to." Reveal the sentence in full, written form. Ask: why was that harder to catch than reading it?

2. Presentation (10 minutes)

Explain: most function words (prepositions, auxiliary verbs, articles, conjunctions, pronouns) have a strong form (used alone or for emphasis) and a weak form (used almost everywhere else in connected speech), usually reduced to a neutral, relaxed "uh" sound (called a schwa) or dropped almost entirely.

- *to* (strong: "too") → weak: "waiting to leave" → sounds like "tuh"
- *was* (strong: "woz") → weak: "he was late" → sounds like "wuz"
- *and* (strong: "and") → weak: "fish and chips" → sounds like "fish 'n chips"
- *can* (strong: "kan") → weak: "I can help" → sounds like "I c'n help"

Also introduce linking and blending: "did you" → "didjoo"; "want to" → "wanna" (informal); "an apple" links to "a-napple." This is normal fluent speech, not slang or laziness.

3. Controlled practice (10 minutes)

Handout: mark the weak-form words in each sentence, then practise saying each sentence at natural speed. Answer key on the last page.

1. What are you waiting for?
2. She could have told us earlier.
3. I'll have a coffee and a croissant.
4. He was going to call but forgot.
5. Let me know what you think of it.

4. Freer practice (15 minutes)

In pairs: students take turns describing their weekend or a recent work situation at natural speed, deliberately using weak forms rather than over-pronouncing function words. Partner listens for two things: did it sound natural, and could they still understand everything.

5. Exam-style practice: the dictation-comparison technique (10 minutes)

Play a 30-45 second clip of natural native speech (a podcast excerpt or news interview, teacher's choice). Students write exactly what they hear. Reveal the real transcript. Discuss: which gaps were weak forms or connected speech, not new vocabulary? This is the technique students should repeat independently, weekly, with fresh clips.

6. Wrap-up (5 minutes)

Discuss: over-pronouncing every word doesn't just sound less natural, it makes your own speech slower and makes it harder to understand native speakers, since you're listening for full forms that rarely occur. Weak forms aren't a finishing touch, they're functional.

Answer key (controlled practice, weak-form words underlined in bold)

1. What **are** you waiting **for**?
2. She could **have** told us earlier.
3. I'll have a coffee **and** a croissant.
4. He **was** going **to** call but forgot.
5. Let me know what you think **of** it.