111 Weak forms

1 Weak vowels

Weak vowels are vowels that we do not stress (say strongly).
The two weak vowels are /ə/ and /ɪ/:

	WEAK	STRONG
a/an	/ə/ /ən/	/eɪ/ /æn/
the	/ðə/	/ðiː/
of at	/əv/ /ət/	/ɒv/ /æt/
can	/kən/	/kæn/
was	/wəz/	/wɒz/
been	/bɪn/	/biːn/

We usually use weak vowels in 'grammar' words, e.g. *the, a, an,* prepositions and auxiliary verbs.

2 Weak forms in prepositions

Most short prepositions are weak when we are speaking:
I'm going to /tə/ *the cinema. Dimitri is from* /frəm/ *Greece. He's at* /ət/ *the doctor's.*

We usually use the weak form of *to* /tə/ in *going to* and *used to*:
Are you going to /tə/ *phone the cinema?*
We used to /tə/ *get the school bus at 8.00 in the morning.*

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3 Weak forms in other words

- *a/the*: We usually pronounce *a/an* and *the* with /ə/:
  a book, an apple, the garden
  But when a vowel sound comes after *the*, we pronounce *the* with /iː/:
  the apple
- *was/were* /wəz/ /wə/:
  Was it hot in Corfu? There were a lot of insects.
- *that* /ðət/:
  Do you think that everyone's ready?
  But when we use *that* to ask about something or choose something, it is always strong:
  What's that? I'd like that one, please.
- *than* /ðən/: We also use weak forms in comparative and superlative adjectives:
  cheaper /-ə/ *cheapest* /ɪst/
  The restaurants are cheaper here than in London.
  But the cheapest restaurants are in the country.
- *been* /bɪn/: We usually pronounce *been* with the weak form /ɪ/:
  We've been to the theatre. Have you ever been to India?
- *can* /kən/: We usually pronounce *can* as /kən/ in statements and questions.
  Karen can play the piano. Can Karen play the piano?
  We use the strong form /kæn/ in short answers:
  Yes, she ***can.***
  The negative *can't* is usually strong /kɑːnt/ in most varieties of British English:
  Karen ***can't*** *play the guitar.*

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