

Elision (Gradation)

Quite simply, elision is all about not pronouncing sounds fully in fluent speech. It is also called gradation and involves the loss of a sound in connected speech. This tends to happen in unstressed syllables and, in a sense, elision is a simplification made in rapid speech.

For instance, we know that the word round is pronounced /raʊnd/ and the word to is pronounced /tə/. However, when the words are used together as in round to, we often drop the final /d/, so that phonetically it reads /raʊn tə/.

Where elision happens?

There are different phonetic environments where this occurs. In here, we will look at some:

1. / t / and / d /

With consonants, it is / t / and / d / which are most commonly elided, especially when they appear in a consonant cluster. For example,

conscripts	/ 'kɒnskripts /
the fact that	/ ðə fæk ðət /
next day	/ neks deɪ /
mashed potatoes	/ məʃ pə 'teɪtəʊz /
Liz smiled gently	/ 'lɪz 'smail 'dʒentli /

2. /ə/

In connected speech /ə/ can easily disappear at word boundaries when the sound comes at the start of a word, positioned between two stressed syllables, as in:

go away / 'gəʊ_ 'weɪ/

or when it is followed by a stressed syllable beginning with /r/ or /l/

police /pli:s/

3. /h/

/h/ is lost in the weak form of the pronoun when they don't occur at the start of an utterance. As you can see from the example below, the /h/ of the two masculine pronouns is retained at the beginning of the sentence, but gets elided when it occurs for a second time, in the middle of the sentence.

He passed his exam /hɪ 'pa:st ɪz ɪg'zæm/

4. /t/ in the negative ending

he mustn't do it

/hɪ 'mʌsn 'dʊ ɪt/

5. /v/ from 'of'

native speakers of English will be aware of elisions that may attract social disapproval; for example, the loss of /v/ from 'of' in many environments before consonants.

A waste of time

/ə weɪst ə taɪm/

Tips

- Remember that it relates to **fluency**. As you increase their fluency in English, you may develop the confidence to elide the forms listed above, but this is by no means required.
- TV or radio may be too fast but there is some great free listening material that has been (slightly) graded at the BBC learning English site, such as their Words in the News series. It is a good idea to listen (and follow the transcript if necessary) in your free time.

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