

Tutoring Session #2: English flap

In regular conversation, speakers of North American English will reduce the /t/ sound into /r/ (a flapped consonant). This sound is very similar to the sound used in Japanese ら,り,る,れ,ろ.

Can you work out the rules for the different pronunciations?

	[r]	[t/t ^h]
1.	forty	fourteen
2.	atom	atomic
3.	matter	master

There are many grammatical contexts where /r/ will appear.

1. Regular past tense verbs and past participles ending in /t/

-ate	-ite	-ute	-ote	-ete	-eat
educated	excited	contributed	noted	completed	defeated
related	invited	distributed	voted	secreted	repeated

2. Comparative and superlative forms of adjectives ending in /t/

-er	-est
greater	shortest
smarter	brightest

3. In the -ing form of verbs ending in /t/

getting	meeting	putting	eating	sitting	writing
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4. Agent nouns ending in -er

writer	voter	waiter	babysitter	batter	heater
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5. Nouns ending in -ity

quality	activity	ability	gravity
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/r/ also often occurs across word boundaries

1. Questions that begin with *what* followed by an auxiliary verb

	is		(h)ave
What	am	What	(h)as
	are		(h)ad

2. Phrasal verbs ending in /t/

hit	off			up
put	up	get	+	on
heat	out			in
shut	+ it +	away		off
cut		in		
get		on		
set		over		
beat				

3. In many phrases with prepositions

a bit of a lot of the rate of the state of sort of
upset at not at all

/r/ rules:

- 1.) /t/ at the beginning of unstressed syllables is reduced to a flap.
- 2.) The /t/ sound must also be between two voiced sounds.

Find the flap!

In the following passage, underline the spots where you think a native English speaker will pronounce a flap.

What are we going to do today? Well, we're starting with a quiz. You won't have to do any actual writing, but you will have to recognize the flaps in this piece of writing. This is an activity to help you analyze a part of pronunciation in English. But if you have trouble finding flaps, then what is the best strategy for completing the quiz? First, it would be a great idea if you located the occurrences of *t* and then decided if the two conditions apply. Of course, you may find a lot of *t*'s that are not at all pronounced the /r/. I hope you won't get upset about all the letter *t*'s. It's not really so complicated. I believe in your capability. Good luck!

Practice Dialogue

Try to predict where in this dialogue that /t/ will become /r/. Let's practice together!

Betty: Peter, what are you doing tonight?

Peter: Nothing exciting, Betty. What about you?

Betty: Well, Sally and I are meeting some students from our class at a restaurant downtown.

Peter: What time?

Betty: Oh, about eight o'clock.

Peter: Sounds great! A lot better than eating at home! Thanks for inviting me.

Answer sheet

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