

Series 1 – No.10 Excellent

Audioscript

Welcome to **Words Alive**. The **Words Alive** series helps with the pronunciation of, and listening to, words and their examples in the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary. **Words Alive** is written and recorded by Richard Cauldwell, and brought to you by Cambridge University Press.

Part 1 Today's Word

Today's word is 'excellent'. It is a three-syllable word with stress on the first syllable 'ex.cel.lent'. 'Excellent', when spoken fast, can sound as if it has only two syllables: 'excellent', 'excellent', 'excellent'. The dictionary tells us that it means 'extremely good'.

Part 2 Examples

The dictionary gives us four examples. As I say them, listen for the word 'excellent'. I shall read three with enthusiasm in my voice, and I shall read one as routine everyday speech – not enthusiastic. Which one is not enthusiastic?

Example 1

The food was excellent.

Example 2

Her car is in excellent condition.

Example 3

The fall in interest rates is excellent news for borrowers.

Example 4

'Our sales are up for the third year in a row.' 'Excellent.'

It is the second example 'Her car is in excellent condition' which is most 'routine' and least enthusiastic. In this example the word 'excellent' is not highlighted at all – it forms part of a stretch of syllables 'is in ex cell ent con' which goes 'isinexcellentcon', 'isinexcellentcon': 'Her car is in excellent condition'. Why would any speaker when using the word 'excellent' not want to highlight it? Well, sometimes the word has been used previously, and therefore the word does not have to be highlighted. What is also true is that everyday speech is often unpredictable. It contains content words such as 'excellent' which the speakers decide not to highlight.

Part 3 Practice

To help you handle such moments in everyday speech, let's work with this example at different speeds. Let's say it in two speech units, emphatically, with five stresses:

Example 3A

// HER CAR // IS in EXcellent conDItion //

Now say it in just one speech unit, with three rhythmic beats but with just one falling tone starting on the second syllable of 'condition':

Example 3B

// her CAR is in EXcellent conDItion //

And now let's stop highlighting 'excellent' and say the sentence at different speeds, with just 'CAR' and the second syllable of 'conDItion' highlighted. We will do it at three different speeds: 120, 200, and 300 words per minute.

Example 3C

C1 // her CAR is in excellent conDItion // 120

C2 // her CAR is in excellent conDItion // 200

C3 // her CAR is in excellent conDItion // 300

The last version at 300 words per minute may seem too fast for you, but these kinds of speeds are very common in everyday speech. Remember it is very common for words to be gabbled, when they are not highlighted. The three-syllable word 'excellent' becomes a two-syllable word: 'excellent', 'excellent' - and (here, before the consonant at the beginning of 'condition') loses its final 't' - 'ekslun' 'ekslun', 'ekslun'. 'Her car is in excellent condition'.

Part 4 Pairwork

To end with, let's add a reply from a friend who is pleased to hear that the car is in excellent condition.

Example 4

A // her CAR is in excellent conDItion //

B // OH WONderful //