



FREE RESOURCE · PRONUNCIATION

ED pronunciation

The -ed ending has three sounds. It is /ɪd/ after the sounds /t/ and /d/ (wanted, needed). It is /t/ after other voiceless sounds (worked, watched). It is /d/ after all voiced sounds (played, lived). The rule follows the last sound of the verb, not its last letter.

What to know

The three sounds of -ed

Regular past tense verbs and many adjectives end in -ed in writing, but the ending is not always said 'ed'. It has three pronunciations, and which one you use depends on the sound that comes just before it.

- *worked* /wɜːkt/ (one syllable, ends /t/) · *wanted* /ˈwɒntɪd/ (two syllables, ends /ɪd/)
- *played* /pleɪd/ (one syllable, ends /d/) · *needed* /ˈniːdɪd/ (two syllables, ends /ɪd/)

Rule 1: after /t/ or /d/, say /ɪd/

If the verb already ends in the sound /t/ or /d/, you cannot add another /t/ or /d/ directly. You need a small vowel to separate them, so -ed becomes a new syllable, /ɪd/. Many speakers make this vowel a little weaker, closer to /əd/, and that is fine.

Rule 2: after a voiceless sound, say /t/

A voiceless sound is one where your vocal cords do not vibrate. Put two fingers on your throat and say /s/: you feel nothing. Say /z/: you feel a buzz. After a voiceless sound, the ending is also voiceless: /t/.

Rule 3: after a voiced sound, say /d/

After every other sound, including all vowels, the ending is voiced: /d/. Voiced sounds include /b/, /g/, /v/, /z/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /l/, /r/, /dʒ/ and /ð/, and every vowel.

Look at the sound, not the letter

Spelling can mislead you. Danced ends in the letters -ced, but the last sound before -ed is /s/, so it is /dɑːnst/. Laughed ends in the letters -ghed, but the sound before it is /f/, so it is /lɑːft/. Liked ends in -ked, and the sound is /k/, so /laɪkt/.

How to make the sound

1. For /t/: put the tip of your tongue on the ridge behind your top teeth, then release a small puff of air. No voice.
2. For /d/: use the same tongue position, but let your voice hum through it.
3. For /ɪd/: add a short, relaxed /ɪ/ before the /d/, so the ending becomes a new syllable.
4. Place your fingers on your throat: it should buzz for /d/ and stay still for /t/.

Exercises

1. How is the -ed ending said in *worked*?
 - a. /d/
 - b. /t/

- c. /ɪd/
2. How is the *-ed* ending said in *played*?
- a. /t/
b. /d/
c. /ɪd/
3. Which verb has an extra syllable in its past form?
- a. called
b. stopped
c. needed
4. Which word ends with the sound /t/?
- a. watched
b. opened
c. cleaned
5. Which two words end with the same *-ed* sound?
- a. wanted and asked
b. played and washed
c. washed and missed
6. How many syllables does *decided* have? Write a number.
7. The *-ed* in *liked* is said _____.
a. /t/
b. /ɪd/
c. /d/
8. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) Last year (2) I (3) visit (4) my uncle (5) in Leeds.
9. How do you say the adjective *naked*?
- a. /neɪkt/, one syllable
b. /'neɪkɪd/, two syllables

Listening items (1) are online only and are not included in this list.

Practise online, free: hear every example and check your answers at www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/ed-pronunciation/practice/

IELTS tip. In Speaking Part 2 you often tell a story in the past: 'I visited', 'we talked', 'she decided'. A clear ending shows the listener that the event is finished. Practise the past tense verbs you use most, such as visited, enjoyed, started and worked.

FOR TEACHERS · PRONUNCIATION

ED pronunciation

AIM	Learners choose /t/, /d/ or /ɪd/ for regular past endings from the last sound of the verb.
TIME	20 minutes
LEVEL	B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)
MATERIALS	This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio

Warm-up

Write worked, played and wanted on the board. Learners say them and count syllables, then guess why one is different.

Lesson steps

1. Teach voiced and voiceless with a throat check on /s/ and /z/.
2. Sort a set of twelve verbs into three columns (/t/, /d/, /ɪd/) by saying the base verb first and checking its last sound.
3. Drill each column as a chant with a foot tap for syllables, so learners feel the one-beat and two-beat forms.
4. Pairs tell a short past-tense story and tick each ending they hear clearly.

Extension

Learners record a 60-second past-tense Part 2 answer, then write the three most frequent ending sounds they used.

Answer key

1. b) /t/. *Work* ends in the voiceless sound /k/, so the ending is the voiceless /t/: /wɜːkt/.
2. b) /d/. *Play* ends in a vowel, which is voiced, so the ending is the voiced /d/: /pleɪd/.
3. c) needed. *Need* ends in /d/, so the past form needs the vowel /ɪ/: /niːɪd/. *Stopped* and *called* stay one syllable.
4. a) watched. *Watch* ends in the voiceless /tʃ/, so *watched* is /wɒtʃt/. *Cleaned* ends /d/ and *opened* ends /d/ too.
5. c) washed and missed. *Washed* is /wɒʃt/ and *missed* is /mɪst/: both end /t/. *Played* ends /d/, *wanted* ends /ɪd/ and *asked* ends /t/, so the other pairs do not match.
6. 3. *De-ci-ded*. *decide* ends in /d/, so the ending adds a syllable. Two becomes three.
7. a) /t/. The last sound of *like* is /k/, a voiceless sound. So the ending is /t/: /laɪkt/.
8. Part 3: *visit* → **visited**. Last year is past time, so the verb needs the past form *visited* /ˈvɪzɪtɪd/, with an extra syllable.

g. b) /'neɪkɪd/, two syllables. A few adjectives such as *naked*, *wicked* and *crooked* keep the extra syllable /ɪd/.

Questions learners often ask

How do you pronounce -ed? Say /ɪd/ after /t/ or /d/, /t/ after other voiceless sounds and /d/ after voiced sounds. Look at the last sound of the verb, not the last letter.

Does -ed always add a syllable? No. It adds a syllable only after /t/ or /d/, as in *wanted* and *needed*. In *worked* and *played* it stays part of the same syllable.

What is a voiceless sound? A sound made without vibrating your vocal cords, such as /s/, /p/ and /k/. Touch your throat: for voiceless sounds you feel no buzz.

Why does this matter for IELTS? In the Speaking test you describe past events, and the -ed ending carries the tense. A clear ending helps the listener follow your story.

Sources

- Roach, P. (2009). *English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course* (4th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Cruttenden, A. (2014). *Gimson's Pronunciation of English* (8th ed.). Routledge.

Written by Will Salisbury · IELTS Laboratory · ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/ed-pronunciation · Free to copy for classroom use.