

Series 1 – No.5 Difficult

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 'difficult'. The dictionary gives two sub-meanings for 'difficult'. The first is the 'not easy' meaning, the second is the 'not friendly' meaning, equivalent to 'awkward'. We will work with this second meaning. The dictionary tells us that it has three syllables *diff-i-cult*, 'difficult'. But often in normal speech, it gets very close to two syllables, 'diff-cult', and often the final 't' becomes a glottal stop, thus not 'difficult' but 'diffcul'.

Part 2 Examples

We will work with four examples – as I say them, listen for the word 'difficult'. In three of the examples you will hear the full three syllable form of the word; in one of them you will hear the two syllable version.

Example 1

The manager is difficult to deal with.

Example 2

The manager is a difficult person to deal with.

Example 3

His wife is a very difficult person.

Example 4

Please children, don't be so difficult!

In which example did you hear the short version of 'difficult'? It was in example three: 'His wife is a very difficult person'. Even though 'difficult' is stressed it still is only two syllables, and does not have the final consonant, 't': 'diffcul' 'diffcul'.

Part 3 Practice

Let's work with the third example at different speeds, to improve your fluent pronunciation and your listening. First say it emphatically with five stresses, with a rising tone starting on 'wife', and a falling tone starting on the first syllable of 'person'. Say the full, three-syllable 'difficult':

Example 3A

// HIS WIFE is a // VEry Difficult PERson //

Now say it in one speech unit in a very rhythmic way, with 'difficult' as two syllables, and no final 't':

Example 3B

// his WIFE is a VEry Difficult PERson //

Although common in language teaching materials, such rhythmic speech is rare in everyday speech. So let's make this sentence more natural. We will do so by using just two stresses in one speech unit with a falling tone starting on the first syllable of 'difficult', and continuing over 'person'. We will do it at three different speeds: 120, 200, and 300 words per minute.

Example 3C

C1 // his WIFE is a very DIFFicult person // 120

C2 // his WIFE is a very DIFFicult person // 200

C3 // his WIFE is a very DIFFicult person // 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. Apart from what happens to 'difficult' the words 'is a very' are gabbled 'isavery', 'isavery', 'isavery'; and the syllables of 'person' are spoken quietly - they slow down, and carry the falling tone that starts on the first syllable of 'difficult': 'DIFFcultperson', 'DIFFcultperson', 'DIFFcultperson' - // his WIFE is a very DIFFicult person //.

Part 4 Pairwork

To end with, let's add a reply which gives a different opinion:

Example 3D

A // his WIFE is a very DIFFicult person //

B // OH // I think she's very FRIENDly //