

Final /s/ and Final /ed/

Introduction

The pronunciation of the letter ‘S’ at the end of *plural nouns*, *verbs* in the *third person*, and in the *possessive case* cause problems for non-native speakers due to its three possible pronunciations: /s/, /z/, or /ɪz/. This pronunciation is contingent upon the final sound of the verb or noun, typically a consonant. To grasp the nuances of pronouncing the final ‘S,’ it is essential to understand *voiced* and *voiceless* consonants, along with *sibilant* sounds. In addition, the pronunciation of the ‘ED’ at the end of regular verbs in the *past tense* (e.g., wanted, helped, lived), certain *adjectives* concluding with ‘ED’ (e.g., tired, embarrassed, relaxed), and some *past participles* can be challenging for non-native speakers because the pronunciation of ‘ED’ may manifest in three distinct ways: /ɪd/, /t/, or /d/.

1. Voiced Consonants vs. Voiceless Consonants

- A **voiced** consonant (or sound) means that it uses the vocal cords and they produce a vibration or humming sound in the throat when they are said. Put your finger on your throat and then pronounce the letter L. You will notice a slight vibration in your neck / throat. That is because it is a **voiced** sound.
- A **voiceless** sound (sometimes called unvoiced sound) is when there is no vibration in your throat and the sound comes from the mouth area. Pronounce the letter P. You will notice how it comes from your mouth (in fact near your lips at the front of your mouth). The P sound doesn't come from your throat.
- A **sibilant sound** is produced by forcing air out toward your teeth, and it is characterized by:
 - Z like the sound a bee makes (a buzzing soundzzzzz)
 - S like the sound a snake makes, or when there is a gas leak (a hissing soundssssss).
 - SH like the sound a teacher makes when they want you to be quiet... shhhhh.

2. The pronunciation of the Final /s/ in English Words

The pronunciation of the final S in plural words and verbs in the third person depend on the final consonant sound before that S. The ending is pronounced /s/ **after a voiceless sound**, it is pronounced /z/ **after a voiced sound** and is pronounced /ɪz / or /əz/ **after a sibilant sound**

A. The /ɪz/ sound (or /əz/ sound)

- Sometimes this sound is written as /əz/ and uses the symbol “schwa” or “upside down e” before the z.
- If the last consonant sound of the word is a **sibilant sound** (a hissing or buzzing sound), the final S is pronounced as /ɪz/. This /ɪz/ sound is pronounced like an extra syllable. (e.g. the word *buses* has two syllables) “bus-es.” /'bʌsɪz/.
- After verbs ending in **-sh, -ch, -ss and -x**, we add the -es to the end of the verb (in third person) and the pronunciation is /ɪz/ as an extra syllable.

B. The /s/ sound

- If the last consonant of the word is **voiceless**, then the S is pronounced as /s/.
- **NOTE:** The consonants c, s, sh, ch and x are **voiceless** though they use the **sibilants ending**.

C. The /z/ sound

- If the last letter of the words ends in a **voiced** consonant (or sound), then the S is pronounced like a Z /z/ (without creating another syllable). This Z sound is similar to the sound a bee makes *zzzz*.
- We also use this ending when the word ends in a vowel sound (e.g. bees, flies etc.)

The table below shows examples of words with the ending of /s/, /z/ and /iz/ sound:

Table 1: Word with the ending of /s/, /z/ and /iz/ sound

Voiceless sound		Voiced sound		Sibilant sound	
/S/		/Z/		/IZ/	
P	<i>Stops, Helps, Sleeps</i>	B	<i>Crabs, Describes, Rubs</i>	C	<i>Races, Pieces</i>
K	<i>Walks, Looks, Cooks, Books, Drinks</i>	M	<i>Homes, Dreams, Plums</i>	S	<i>Buses, Pauses, Nurses, Rises</i>
T	<i>Starts, Cats, Hats, Students, Hits, Writes</i>	N	<i>Opens, Pens, Fans, Drains, Runs,</i>	X	<i>Fixes, Boxes, Taxes</i>
F	<i>Cliffs, Beliefs</i>	L	<i>Walks, Deals, Calls, Falls, Hills</i>	Z	<i>Amazes, Quizzes, Freezes, Prizes,</i>
TH	<i>Myths, Tablecloths</i>	V	<i>Gloves, Wives</i>	SS	<i>Glasses, Misses , Passes, Bosses</i>
GH	<i>Laughs, Graphs</i>	G	<i>Bags, Rugs</i>	CH	<i>Aches, Witches, Churches, Sandwiches,</i>
		Y	<i>Plays, Boys, Says</i>	SH	<i>Wishes, Washes, dishes, pushes</i>
		R	<i>Stars, Wears</i>	GE	<i>Bridges, Ages, Garages, Judges</i>
		D	<i>Words, Adds, Cards, Rides, Ends</i>		
		W	<i>Windows, Blows</i>		

Key point:

- The *-gh* and *-ph* here are pronounced like a F

E.g:

- Words with the “gh” ending: **Tough- Enough- Rough- Cough- Laugh.**

- Words with the “ph” ending: **Elephant- Paragraph- Photograph- Alphabet- Dolphin- Graph.**

3. The pronunciation of the Final /ed/ in Past Regular Verbs, Past Participles and Adjectives

A. The /id/ sound

If the last letter of the word is spelled with D or T, the ED is pronounced as a separate syllable with a /id/ sound (and it rhymes with words like: kid, lid, squid and bid).

- wanted (sounds like “want-id”)
- waited
- needed
- folded
- wasted

B. The /t/ sound

If the last consonant of the word is **voiceless**, then the ED is pronounced as a T (without creating an extra syllable or “id” sound).

- talked (sounds like “talk-t”)
- missed (the S sound comes from the front of mouth so it would sound like “miss-t”)
- helped (with the word “helped”, if you say “help-id” as a two syllable word, then it is very likely that people will NOT understand the word or what you are saying. (It is pronounced like “help-t”)
- parked

C. The /d/ sound

If the last letter of the words ends in a **voiced** consonant (or sound), then the ED is pronounced like a D (without creating another syllable).

- played (sounds like “play-d”)
- closed (the S sounds like a vibrating Z so the word would sound like “cloz-d”)
- opened
- lived

The table below shows examples of past tense verbs with the ending of /d/, /t/ and /id/ sound:

Table 2: Word with the ending of /d/, /t/ and /id/ sound

/D/		/T/		/ID/	
B	<i>Described</i>	P	<i>Stopped</i>	T	<i>Completed</i>
V	<i>Loved</i>	K	<i>Worked</i>	D	<i>Needed</i>
M	<i>Named</i>	SS	<i>Missed</i>		
N	<i>Maintained</i>	F	<i>Cuffed</i>		
R	<i>Appeared</i>	GH	<i>Laughed</i>		
Z	<i>Amazed</i>	SH	<i>Wished</i>		
SE	<i>Caused</i>	CH	<i>Watched</i>		
L	<i>Called</i>				
TH	<i>Breathed</i>				
G	<i>Hugged</i>				