

Saying the ends of words

English A1

What this topic teaches

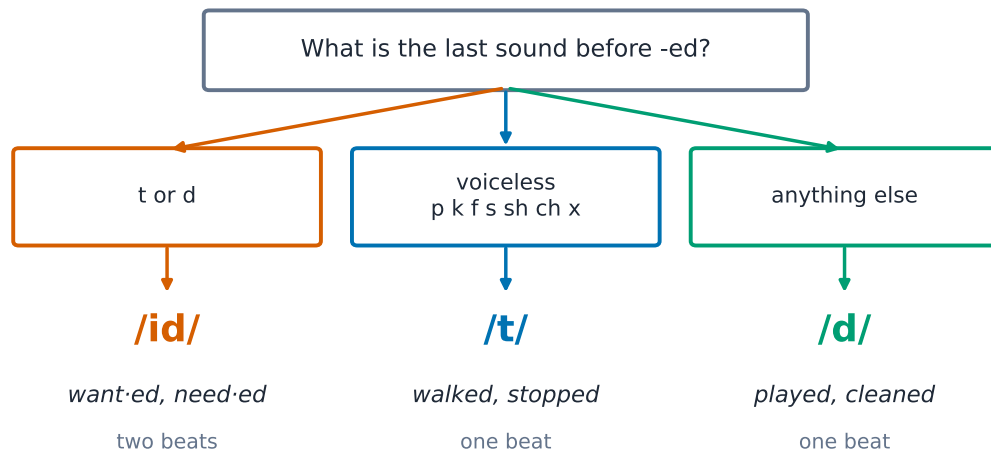
Chinese words end softly. English words end with a **consonant ending** : the last sound is often a chain, and swallowing it changes the word. This topic trains the ends: the three sounds of -ed, the plural -s, and the endings Chinese speakers most often drop.

- Memory hook: the end of the word is the **door** of the word. Close it, or the listener walks into the wrong room.
- Bad news first: *want* and *wanted* are different words, and the difference is only the ending.
- Good news: English endings follow three small systems, and they never change their rules.

The three sounds of -ed

The ending **-ed** has exactly three sounds, chosen by the last sound before it.

Last sound before -ed	-ed sounds like	Example
t, d	/ɪd/ (an extra syllable)	wanted, needed
voiceless: p, k, f, s, sh, ch, x	/t/	walked, watched, stopped
everything else	/d/	played, cleaned, arrived



The last sound of the verb picks the sound of -ed; only t and d add a beat

- Say the verb alone, then say the last sound, then add the ending. *Walk* ends in k, so *walked* is *walkt*.
- Only t and d add a whole syllable: *want-ed* has two beats; *walked* has one.

■ A first try

Say each pair aloud. Feel the ending.

- walk / walked (t)
- play / played (d)
- want / wanted (ɪd)

The plural -s: also three sounds

The **plural s** -s follows the same logic: three sounds, chosen by the last sound before it.

Last sound of the noun	-s sounds like	Example
s, z, sh, ch, x, ge	/ɪz/ (an extra syllable)	buses, watches, boxes
voiceless: p, k, t, f (not s)	/s/	books, cats, cups
everything else	/z/	pens, dogs, cars

- *Books* is *bookss*; *dogs* is *dogzz*. The spelling never changes; the sound does.
- After a hissing sound (s, sh, ch, x), the ear needs the extra syllable: *bus-iz*.

■ Say it aloud

- one book / two books (s)
- one dog / two dogs (z)
- one watch / two watches (ɪz)

Endings that disappear

Chinese syllables end in a vowel or n, so English **final clusters** are new. The most-lost endings: *most*, *must*, *last*, *first*, *old*, *find*, *helped*, *asked*.

- *I am first* must end in two sounds: f-i-r-s-t. Do not stop at *firs*.
- Past tense is where endings matter most: *I help her* (now) and *I helped her* (before) are one sound apart.
- Say the ending louder than feels natural for one week. Loud endings become soft, correct ones.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- Do not add a vowel to save the cluster: *most* is not *mos-te*.
- The written -ed never says e-d as in the alphabet; it is t, d or id.
- *wanted*, *wantid* and *want-ed*: only the first exists on paper; the middle one is how it sounds; the last shows the two beats.

Check yourself

- The three sounds of -ed: name them with one example each.
- Why do buses and watches need an extra syllable?
- Which is correct at speed: I ask him yesterday, or I asked him yesterday?
- Say these with endings closed: first, must, helped.