

## Introduction to Stress and Intonation

### Part I : Word stress

#### Introduction :

English is considered as a stressed language while many other languages are considered syllabic. What does that mean? It means that in English, certain words have stress within a sentence, and certain syllables have stress within a word. And it is this stress that allows our ears to understand the meaning and also to pick up the important parts of the sentence. Stress is given to certain words while other words are quickly spoken (some students say eaten or swallowed!). In other languages, such as French or Italian, each syllable receives equal importance (there is stress, but each syllable has its own length). English however, spends more time on specific stressed words while quickly gliding over the other, less important, words.

In every word in English, there is one given/particular syllable that is emphasized. The stressed syllable is usually marked in transcription by placing a small vertical line ' high up just before the syllable it relates to. But what is stress? You will most probably agree that:

- The first syllable of words like ‘**f**ather’ , ‘o**p**en’ , ‘c**a**mera’ is stressed;
- That the second syllable of words like ‘po**t**ato’ , ‘a**p**artment’ , ‘re**l**ation’ is stressed;
- And that the final syllable of words like ‘a**b**out’ , ‘re**c**eive’ , pe**r**haps’ is stressed.

#### What is word stress then?

In multi-syllable words, the stress falls on one of the syllables while the other syllables tend to be spoken over quickly. For example, try saying the following words to yourself: *qualify, banana, understand*. All of them have 3 syllables and one of the syllables in each word will sound **louder** than the others: so, we get **QUALify, baNAna** and **underSTAND**. (The syllables indicated in capitals are the stressed syllables). What makes a syllable stressed? It is usually **higher in pitch** (the level of the speaker’s voice). It’s pronounced **louder**. And finally, it’s **longer** in duration. Stress can fall on the first, middle or last syllables of words, as is shown below:

Ooo	oOo	ooO	:
SYLlabus	enGAGEment	usheRETTE	
SUBstitute	baNAna	kangaROO	
TECHnical	phoNETic	underSTAND	

To better understand the question of stress, one may follow two ways: 1) to consider what the speaker does to produce stressed syllables; 2) to consider what characteristics make the sound seem to a listener to be stressed. The production of stress is generally thought of depending on the speaker **using more muscular energy than is used for unstressed syllables**. Indeed, It is assumed that the muscles that we use to expel air from the lungs are more active. When a word has more than one syllable, one of these syllables is more **prominent** than the others. When this happens, we say that that syllable is stressed. Therefore any stressed syllable within a word shows **prominence** (being noticeable and distinguished).

#### Phonetic properties of stressed syllables

- a. The stressed syllable has **greater duration**      1/9

b. The stressed syllable is **louder** (greater amplitude)

c. The stressed syllable is pronounced at a **higher pitch** (higher fundamental frequency)

d. The segments are pronounced with **greater precision**

### Importance of stress to English

Stress marking is an important element in the communicative competence expected of any user. Stress marking enables any user of English, for example, to immediately distinguish between “**import**” as a noun and “**import**” as verb.

In the following examples, stressed syllables are expressed with **boldface**.

Word	Pattern
<b>tea</b> .cher	' .
<b>beau</b> .ti.ful	' . .
un.der. <b>stand</b>	. . '
con. <b>ti</b> .nue	. ' .
con. <b>ti</b> .nu.a.tion	. ' . ' .

con. <b>ti</b> .nu.a.tion	. ' . ' .
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#### I. Placement of stress within the word:

A question that usually causes difficulty to foreign learners of English is how can one select the correct syllable or syllables to stress in an English word. English word stress is not always on the same syllable as in some languages. In French, for instance, the last syllable is usually stressed whereas the syllable before the last or the penultimate one is usually stressed in Polish. In Czech, however, it is the first syllable that is generally stressed.

In order to decide on stress placement, it is necessary to make use of some or all of the following information:

- i. Whether the word is morphologically simple, or whether it is complex as a result either of containing one or more affixes (that is, prefixes or suffixes) or of being a compound word.
- ii. The grammatical category to which the word belongs (noun, verb, adjective, etc.).
- iii. The number of syllables in the word.
- iv. The phonological structure of those syllables.

As such, the location of stress may be determined by a set of many complex rules. Therefore, predicting where the stress falls is not easy. However, some sets of words follow a simple pattern.

## Some common rules of word stress

### I. Two-syllable words

#### 1. Verbs:

a. The second syllable is stressed if it contains a long vowel or a diphthong, or if it ends with more than one consonant. Examples: a'pply; a'ttract; a'rrive; a'ssist

b. The first syllable is stressed if the final syllable contains a short vowel and one (or more) final consonant or if it contains the diphthong /əʊ/. Eg. **follow** /'fɒlləʊ /; **borrow** /'bɒrəʊ/, etc. Examples: 'enter, /'ɛntə/ 'open/ə'ɒpən/; 'envy/'ɛnvɪ/; 'equal/'i:kwəl/

2. **Adjectives** are stressed according to the same rule (See above). Examples: 'lovely;/'lʌvli/; di'vine /dɪ'vaɪn/; 'even/'i:vən/; co'rrect /kə'rekt/; 'hollow/'hɒləʊ/; a'live/ə'laɪv/.

3. **Nouns** require a different rule. If the second syllable contains a short vowel the stress will usually come on the first syllable. Otherwise, it will be on the second syllable. Examples: 'money;/'mʌni/; e'state /ɪs'teɪt/; 'product /'prɒdʌkt/; ba'lloon /bə'lu:n/; 'larynx /'lærɪŋks/; de'sign /dɪz'am/

4. Other two-syllable words such as **adverbs** seem to behave like **verbs** and **adjectives**; i.e., they obey the same rules.

### II. Three-syllable words

#### 1. Verbs

a. If the last syllable contains a short vowel and ends with more than one consonant, that syllable will be stressed, and stress will be placed on the preceding (penultimate syllable) syllable. Examples: en'counter / de'termine / /; en'courage / /.

b. If the final syllable contains a long vowel or diphthong, or ends with more than one consonant, that final syllable will be stressed. Example: enter'tain / /; resu'rect / /.

2. **Nouns** require a different rule. If the final syllable contains a short vowel or the diphthong /əʊ/, it is unstressed; if the syllable preceding this final syllable contains a long vowel or a diphthong, or if it ends with more than one consonant, that middle syllable will be stressed. Examples: mi'mosa / /; di 'saster/ /; po'tato / /; sy 'nopsis / /.

3. And if the final syllable contains a short vowel and the middle syllable contains a short vowel and ends with not more than one consonant, both final and middle syllables are unstressed, and the first syllable is stressed. Example: 'quantity / /; 'empror / /; 'cinema/ /.

4. **Adjectives** seem to behave according to the same rule: Examples: 'opportune / /; 'insolent/ /.

Nb: The above rules do not of course cover all English words. They apply to major categories of lexical words/content (nouns, verbs, adjectives, & adverbs) not to structural/function words (prepositions, pronouns, articles, conjunctions, etc.)

**Exercise 1:** Group the following words so that they match the patterns in the table

Word list				
infamous	banana	calendar	statement	
dinosaur	imply	cluster	kingdom	
enjoyment	mountain	eternal	countless	
excel	passage	before	defeated	
begin	arrive	worry	history	
pattern	• ' ...	. ' .	• ' .. ..	. ' .. • .
word				

**Exercise 2:** Consider the following two-syllable words. Underline the stronger syllable.

Two-syllable words	
produce	pervert
.....	.....
record	convert
.....	.....
present	conflict
.....	.....
conduct	project
.....	.....
contrast	contract

**Exercise 3** Transcribe and mark the stress on the following words:

**Verbs:** protect; clamber; festoon; detest; menace; disconnect; entering.

**Nouns:** language; captain, career; paper; event; injury; connection. **4/9**

**Exercise 4:** Look at the following three syllable words. Consider the stress patterns.

Three-syllable words		
<b>in.stru.ment</b>	<b>com.mer.cial</b>	<b>ar.ti.choke</b>
<b>ca.len.dar</b>	<b>va.nil.la</b>	<b>hur.ri.cane</b>
<b>cu.ri.ous</b>	<b>de.ve.lop</b>	<b>ap.pe.tite</b>
<b>sen.ti.ment</b>	<b>as.to.nish</b>	<b>cro.co.dile</b>
<b>do.cu.ment</b>	<b>op.po.nent</b>	<b>con.gre.gate</b>

**Exercise 5:** Read aloud the following sentences. Then, identify the stressed syllable in the bold-faced words.

- Can you pass me a **plas.tic** knife ?
- I want to take a **pho.to.gra.phy** class
- **Chi.na** is the place where I was born
- Please turn off the **tel.e.vi.sion** before you go out
- I can't **de.cide** which book to borrow
- Do you **un.der.stand** this person?
- Sparky is a very **hap.py** puppy
- It is **cri.ti.cal** that you finish your essay
- My grandfather wears an old-fash.ioned coat
- There is a lot of **traf.fic** on the highway today

## 1.COMPLEX WORDS

Complex words are of two major types: words made from a basic stem word with addition of an affix, and compound words, which are made of two (or occasionally more) independent English words (e.g. 'ice-crean', 'armchair'). We will look first at the words made with affixes: these will be called affix words. Affixes are of two types in English: **prefixes**, which come before the stem (i.e., prefix 'un-' + stem 'pleasant' – 'unpleasant') and **suffixes**, which come after the stem (e.g. stem 'good' + suffix '-ness;- 'goodness').

Affixes will have one of three possible on word stress:

- a) The affix itself receives the primary stress (e.g. 'semi- '+'circle' 's ɜ:kɪl – 'semicircle' 'semisɜ:kɪl; '-ality'+ 'person' 'pɜ:sn – 'personality' pɜ:sn'æɪlɪti).
- b) The word is stressed just as if the affix was not there (e.g. 'pleasant', 'pleznt, 'unpleasant' ʌn'pleznt, 'market' 'mɑ:kɪt, 'marketing', 'mɑ:kɪtɪŋ).
- c) The stress remains on the stem, not the affix, but is shifted to a different syllable (e.g. 'magnet' 'mægnət, 'magnetic' mæg'netɪk).

### A.SUFFIXES

#### I. Suffixes carrying primary stress themselves

In the examples given earlier, which seem to be the most common, the primary stress is on the first syllable of the suffix. If the stem consists of more than one syllable there will be a secondary stress on one of the syllables of the stem. This cannot fall on the last 5/9 syllable of the stem, and is, if necessary, moved to an

earlier syllable. For example, in 'japan' dʒə'pæn the primary stress is on the last syllable, but when we add the stress-carrying suffix '-ese' the primary stress is on the suffix and the secondary stress is placed not the second syllable but on the first: 'Japanese', dʒæpə'ni:z.

'-ain' (for verb only) : 'entertain' /,entə'teɪn/ ; 'ascertain' /,æsə'teɪn/

'-ee' : 'refugee' /,refjʊ'dʒi:/ ; 'evacuee' /'ɪ,vækju:'i:/

'-eer' : 'mountaineer' /,maʊntɪ'nɪə/ ; 'volunteer' /,vɒlə'nɪə/

'-ese' : 'portuguese' /,pɔ:tʃə'gi:z/ ; 'journalese' /,dʒɜ:nl'i:z/

'-ette' : 'cigarette' /,sɪgret/ ; 'laundrette' /,lə:ndret/

'-esque', '-ique' : 'pictureque' /,pɪktʃə'resk/ ; 'unique' /,iu:ni:k/

## II. Suffixes that do not affect stress placement

'-able': 'comfort' /'kʌmfət/ ; 'comfortable' /'kʌmfətəbl/

'-age': 'anchor' /'æŋkə/, 'anchorage' /'æŋkɪdʒ/

'-al': 'refuse' (verb) /rɪ'fju:z/, 'refusal' /'rɪ'fju:zl/

'-en': 'wide' 'ward' /'wɪd/, 'widen' /'wɪdŋ /

'-ful': 'wonder' 'wʌndə, 'wonderful' /'wʌndəfl/

'-ing': 'amaze' /ə'meɪz/, 'amazing' /ə'meɪzɪŋ/

'-ish': 'devil' /'devl/ ; 'devilish' /'devlɪʃ/

(this is the rule for adjectives, verbs with stems of more than one syllable always have the stress on the syllable immediately preceding 'ish', e.g. 'replenish' /rɪ'plenɪʃ/, 'demolish' /dɪ'mɒlɪʃ/.)

'-like': 'bird' /'bɜ:d/; 'birdlike' /'bɜ:dlɪk/

'-less': 'power' /'paʊə/; 'powerless' /'paʊələs/

'-ly': 'hurried' /'hʌrɪd/; 'hurriedly' /'hʌrɪdli/

'-ment' (noun): 'punish' /'pʌnɪʃ/; 'punishment' /'pʌnɪʃmənt/

'-ness': 'yellow' /'jeləʊ/; 'yellowness' /'jeləʊnəs/

'-ous': 'poison' /'pɔɪzn/; 'poisonous' /'pɔɪznəs/

'-fy': 'glory' /'glɔ:ri/; 'glorify' /'glɔ:rɪfaɪ/

'-wise': 'other' /'ʌðə/; 'otherwise' /'ʌðəwaɪz/

'-y' (adjective or noun): 'fun' /'fʌn/; 'funny' /'fʌni/

## III. Suffixes that influence stress in the stem (Primary stress on the last syllable of the stem)

'-eous': 'advantage' /əd'vɑ:ntɪdʒ/; 'advantageous' /,ædvən'teɪdʒəs/

'-graphy': 'photo' /'fəʊtəʊ/; 'photography' /fə'tɒgrəfi/

'-ial': 'proverb' /'prɒvɜ:b/; 'proverbial' /prə'vɜ:biəl/

'-ic': 'climate' /'klaɪmɪt/; 'climatic' /klaɪ'mætɪk/

'-ion': 'perfect' /'pɜ:fɪkt/; 'perfection' /pə'fekʃn/

'-ious': 'injure' /'ɪndʒə/; 'injurious' /ɪn'dʒʊəriəs/

'-ty': 'tranquil' /'træŋkwɪl/; 'tranquillity' /træŋ'kwɪlɪti/

'-ive': 'reflex' /'ri:fleks/; 'reflexive' /ri'fleksɪv/

**Nb1.** The suffixes '-ANCE', '-ANT' and '-ARY'

When these suffixes are attached to single—syllable stems, the stress is almost always placed on stem. When the stem has two syllable the stress is sometimes on the first, sometimes on the second syllable of the stem. To explain this we need to use a rule based on syllable-structure : If the final syllable of the stem contains a long vowel or diphthong, or if it ends with more than one consonant, that syllable receives the stress. For example : 'importance' /ɪm'pɔ:tns/; 'centenary' /sen'ti:nri/. Otherwise the syllable before the last one receives the stress: 'consonant' kɒnsənənt; 'military' 'mɪlɪtri.

**Nb2.** It may be said that when the above suffixes are found, i.e., (stem+suffix), the stress is on the penultimate (i.e., the syllable before the last one). Consider other examples : '-ics' lin'guistics ; '-ian' phone'tician ; '-iar' / 'ior' fa'miliar/su'perior ; '-ual' intel'lectual ; '-id' in'trepid ; '-it' ex'plicit ; '-ish' di'minish ; '-itis' appen'dicitis ; '-osis' dia'gnosis.

**Nb3.** When used, other suffixes make the **antepenultimate** (syllable before the penultimate) have the stress. Consider the following cases : '-ity' co'mmunity ; '-itive' com'petitive ; '-itude' 'attitude ; '-logy' a'nalogy ; '-logist' pharma'cologist ; '-logize' a'pologize ; '-graphy' pho'tography ; '-grapher' ge'oographer.

## **B. PREFIXES**

We will only deal briefly with prefixes. Their affect on stress does not have the comparative regularity, independence and predictability of suffixes, and there is no prefix of one or two syllables that always carries primary stress. Consequently, the best treatment seems to say that stress in words with prefixes is governed by the same rules as those for words without prefixes.

## **2. COMPOUND WORDS**

Compounds are written in different ways ; sometimes they are written as **one word**, e.g. 'armchair', 'sunflower' ; sometimes with the **words separated by a hyphen**, e.g. 'gear-change', 'fruit-cake', and sometimes with **two words separated by a space**, e.g. 'desk lamp', 'battery charger'. In this last case there would, of course be no indication to the foreign learner that the pair of words was to be treated as a compound. There is no clear dividing line between two-word compounds and pairs of words that simply happen to occur together quite frequently.

As far as stress is concerned, it is obvious to ask when is primary stress placed on the first word of the compound and when on the second? A few rules can be given, though these are not completely reliable. Usually, words which do not receive primary stress normally have secondary stress, though for the sake of simplicity this is not marked here. Perhaps the most familiar type of compound is the one which combines two nouns, and normally has stress on the first element, as in : 'typewriter' /'taɪpraɪtə/; 'suitcase' /'sju:tkeɪs/; 'sunrise' /'sʌnraɪz/. It is probably safest for foreign learners to assume that stress will normally fall in this way on other compounds; however, a variety of compounds receive stress instead on the second element. For example, compounds with an **adjectival first element** and **the-ed morpheme at the end** have this pattern (given in spelling only)

Bad-' tempered

Half-' timbered

Heavy-' handed

Compounds in which **the first element is a number in some form** also **tend to have final stress**:

Three-' wheeler

Second-' class

Five-' finger

Compounds **functioning as adverbs are usually final-stressed** :

Head-' first

North-' east

Down'stream

Finally, **compounds which function as verbs** and have an **adverbial first element take final stress**:

Down-' grade

Back-' pedal

Ill-' treat

### Variable stress in compounds

1. It would be wrong to imagine that stress pattern is always fixed and unchanging in English words. Stress position may vary for one of two reasons: (i) either as a result of the stress on other words occurring next to the word in question, or (ii) because not all speakers of RP agree on the placement of stress in some words. The first case is an aspect of **connected speech**, therefore the main effect is that the stress on a final-stressed compound tends **to move to the preceding syllable if the following word begins with a strongly stressed syllable**. Thus, here are some examples from the previous section:

Bad-' **tempered** but a '**bad**-tempered '**teacher**

Half-' **timbered** but a '**half**-timbered '**house**

Heavy-' **handed** but a '**heavy**-handed '**sentence**

2. For the the second case of variable stress, it would be quite wrong to say that a given version of pronunciation is correct and another one is incorrect. A well-known example is 'controversy', which is pronounced by some speakers as 'kɒntrəvɜːsi and by others as kən'trɒvəsi, Other examples of different possibilities are 'ice- cream', 'kilometer' (either 'kɪləmi:tə or kɪ'lɒmɪtə) and 'formidable' ('fɔːmɪdəbl̩ or fə'mɪdəbl̩).

### Word-class pairs

There are several dozen pairs of two-syllable words with identical spelling which differ from each other in stress placement, apparently according to **word class** (noun, verb or adjective). All appear to consist of **prefix + stem**. These are treated as a special type of word and they are given the following rule: when a pair of **prefix+ stem** word exists, both members of which are spelt identically, one of which is a verb and the other is either a noun or an adjective, the stress will be placed on the second syllable of the verb but on the first syllable of the noun or adjective. Some common examples are given below (**V**= verb, **A** = adjective, **N** = noun):

'abstract' 'æbstrækt (A) æb'strækt (V)

'conduct' 'kɒndʌkt (N), kən'dʌkt (V)

'contract' 'kɒntrækt (N) kən' trækt (V)

'contrast' 'kɒntrɒːst (N) kən'trɒːst (V)

'desert' 'dezət' (N) dɪ'zɜːt (V)

'escort' 'eskɔːt (N) i'skɔːt (V)

'export' 'ekspɔːt (N) ɪk'spɔːt (V)

'import' 'ɪmpɔːt (N) ɪm'pɔːt (V)

'insult' 'ɪnsʌlt (N) ɪn'sʌlt (v)

**References**

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<https://www.englishclub.com/pronunciation/sentence-stress.htm>

**Exercise 1:** Transcribe and put the stress mark according to the word class.

1. import (v).....2. perfect (a).....3.permit (v).....  
 4. produce (v).....5. protest (v).....6. rebel (n).....

**Exercise 2:** Transcribe and put the stress mark on the following words; Attempt to put the secondary stress if possible.

- 1.shop-fitter.....2.birth-mark.....3.eight-sided.....  
 4.roof-timber.....5.open-ended.....6.anti-clockwise.....  
 7.fruit-cake.....8.Javanese.....9.Confirmation.....  
 10.defective.....11.working-class.....12.production.....

**Exercise 3:** Find out the place of the primary stress in the following words. Refer to the rules so far studied.

father, advice, argument, adventure, inhabitant, useful, atone, confidence, collection, relatively, original, colour, excuse, obviously, refusal, agriculture, comparison, weather, before, everywhere, encourage, legendary; second-hand, brightness, task-based, regardless, farthest, calamity, accuracy, left-shooted.

**Exercise 4:** Supply the primary stress in the following underlined words.

1. Most members of the association were punctual.      2. The teacher is responsible for the pupils' education.  
 3. His personality puzzled me and I couldn't penetrate his thoughts.      4. He took a personal interest in educating my children.

**Exercise 5:** Observe the two stress patterns, then put the words into the correct columns. (   = *stress on first syllable*,   = *stress on second syllable*). The words are : autumn ; advice ; alone ; annoy ; attack ; cartoon ; climate ; complains ; couple ; crazy ; Egyp ;t employ ; exam ; females ; final ; habit ; mirror ; police ; rarely ; repair ; report ; revise ; useful ; witness.

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## Introduction to Stress and Intonation

### Part II : Sentence stress

**Introduction :** to understand sentence stress, one has to consider the following exercise. Say the following sentence aloud and count how many seconds it takes.

*The beautiful mountain appeared transfixed in the distance.*

How much time did it take ? Probably about **five (5) seconds**.

Now, try speaking this sentence aloud :

*He can come on Sundays as long as he doesn't have to do any homework in the evening.*

It also took probably about **five (5) seconds**.

Yet on a first spot, the first sentence is much shorter than the second sentence!

*The beautiful Mountain appeared transfixed in the distance.* (14 syllables)

### Whereas

*He can come on Sundays as long as he doesn't have to do any homework in the evening.* (22 syllables)

How comes the two sentences are uttered within the same amount of time ?? 5 seconds.

### Explanation :

Even though the second sentence is approximately **30 percent longer than the first**, the sentences take the same time to speak (5 minutes). The reason is that there are **five stressed words in each sentence**. On the basis of this example one may deduce that what matters when pronouncing a given sentence is the focus/emphasis on words that are stressed, i.e., **the content words** ; these therefore require much concentration since **they vehicle the meaning** whereas the function words are just for the sake of the sentence's structure.

This simple exercise makes a very important point about how we speak and use English. Namely, English is considered a stressed language while many other languages are considered as syllabic languages. What does this mean? It means that, in English, **stress is given to certain words** while other words are quickly spoken (some students say eaten or swallowed). In other languages, such as French or Italian, each syllable receives equal importance (there is stress, but each syllable has its own length).

Many speakers of syllabic languages don't understand why native speakers of English peak quickly , or swallow, a number of words in a sentence. In syllabic languages, each syllable has equal importance, and therefore equal time is needed. English however, spends more time on specific stressed words while quickly gliding over the other, less important, words.

### Let's consider another example for more clarification :

Let's look at a simple example: The modal verb "can." When the positive form of "can" is used, we quickly glide over the 'can' and it is hardly pronounced. 1'8 They can *come on Friday*. (stressed words in *italics*)

On the other hand, when the negative form "can't" is used, we tend to stress the fact that it is the negative form by also stressing "can't". They *can't come on Friday*. (stressed words in *italics*)

It's worth noticing that "They can't come on Friday" is longer than "They can come on Friday" because both the modal "can't" and the verb "come" are stressed.

### Understanding Which Words to Stress

To understand which words are generally stressed and which are not, one should know that only **CONTENT** or **LEXICAL** words are stressed since these carry meaning within the sentence. *Content words* are :

- Nouns (e.g., kitchen, Peter)
- (Most) main verbs (e.g., visit, construct)
- Adjectives (e.g., beautiful, interesting)
- [Adverbs](#) (e.g., often, carefully)
- Negatives including negative helping verbs, and words with "no" such as "nothing," "nowhere," etc.
- Words expressing quantities (e.g., a lot of, a few, many, etc.)

**Whereas** the Non-stressed words, i.e., **FUNCTION** or **STRUCTURAL** words are not stressed since they do not carry **MEANING**. Function words are :

- Determiners (e.g., the, a, some, a few)
- Auxiliary verbs (e.g., don't, am, can, were)
- Prepositions (e.g., before, next to, opposite)
- [Conjunctions](#) (e.g., but, while, as)
- Pronouns (e.g., they, she, us)
- Verbs "have" and "be" even when used as main verbs

**Practising sentence stress** : Attempt to identify and stress the **content words** in the following sentences:

1. They've been learning English for two months.
2. My friends have nothing to do this weekend.
3. I would have visited in April if I had known Peter was in town.
4. Natalie will have been studying for four hours by six o'clock.
5. The boys and I will spend the weekend next to the lake fishing for trout.
6. Jennifer and Alice had finished the report before it was due last week.

### Let's now attempt to define what is meant by sentence stress

Sentence stress is the music of spoken English. Like word stress, sentence stress can help speakers to understand spoken English, even rapid spoken English. Sentence stress is what gives English its **rhythm** or "**beat**". In short, while word stress is accent on **one syllable** within a **word**, sentence stress is accent on **certain words** within a **sentence**.

As already mentioned, most sentences have two basic types of word:

- **content** **words**  
They are the key words of a sentence. They are the important words that carry the meaning or sense—the real content.
- **Function** **words**  
They are not very important words. They are small, simple words that make the sentence correct grammatically. They give the sentence its correct form—its structure.

Now, observe the following example so that you get the difference between the content words and their importance and the function words which do not really **2/8** matter as long as the meaning is concerned.

If the structure words are omitted/removed from a sentence, one would probably still understand the sentence ;whereas when the content words are removed from the sentence 99% no one can understand it. Simply because the sentence has no meaning or sense.

**General notions about sentence stress** : Imagine that an individual receives the following telegram/ message:

**SELL      CAR                      GONE      FRANCE**

This sentence is not complete. It is not a "grammatically correct" sentence. But one probably understands it. These 4 words communicate well, and they may mean that *Somebody wants you to sell their car for them because they have gone to France*. Let's add a few words:

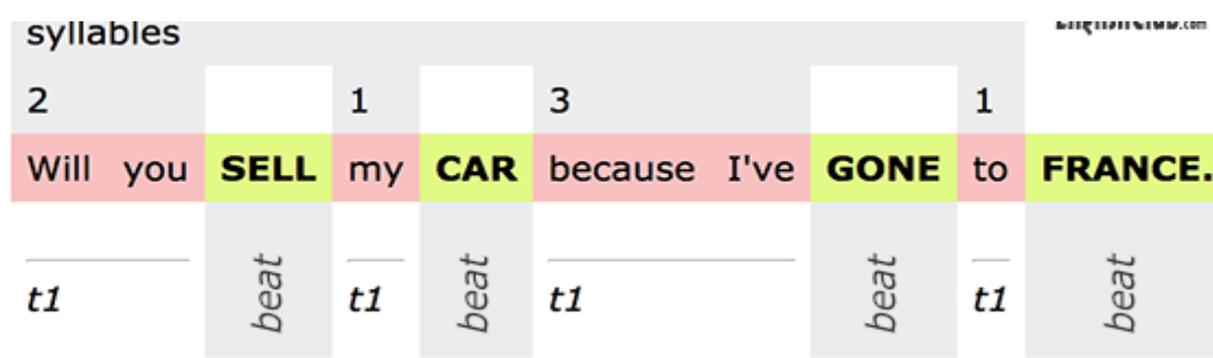
**SELL my CAR                      I've GONE to FRANCE**

The new words do not really add any more information ; but they make the message more correct grammatically. Some even more words may be added to make one complete, grammatically correct sentence. But the information remains basically the same:

content words									
Will	you	<b>SELL</b>	my	<b>CAR</b>	because	I've	<b>GONE</b>	to	<b>FRANCE.</b>
structure words									

In the above sentence, **only** the 4 **key words** (sell, car, gone, France) are accentuated or **stressed**.

Why is this important for pronunciation? It is important because it adds "music" to the language. It is the **rhythm** of the English language. It changes the speed at which we speak (and listen to) the language. **The time between each stressed word is the same.** There is **1 syllable** between SELL and CAR and **3 syllables** between CAR and GONE. But the **time (t)** between SELL and CAR and between CAR and GONE is the same. The 'beat' is constant the stressed words. To do this, we say "my" more **slowly**, and "because I've" more **quickly**. We change the speed of the small structure words so that the rhythm of the key content words stays the same.



The basic rules of sentence stress are:

1. **content words** are **stressed**
2. **function words** are **unstressed**
3. the **time between stressed words** is always the same

See exercises on the next page

**Exercise 1:** Content or Function? Put next to each word ‘C’ or ‘F’, and justify it..

<b>Went</b>	<b>for</b>	<b>most</b>
<b>With</b>	<b>information</b>	<b>already</b>
<b>Just</b>	<b>difficult</b>	<b>in</b>
<b>Quickly</b>	<b>to</b>	<b>escape</b>
<b>The</b>	<b>exact</b>	<b>great</b>
<b>Hard</b>	<b>back</b>	<b>would</b>
<b>Open</b>	<b>can</b>	<b>lovely</b>
<b>At</b>	<b>do</b>	<b>from</b>
<b>Had</b>	<b>front</b>	<b>entrance</b>

**Exercise 2:** Identification and Practice. Mark the stressed words in the following sentences. After having put the stress mark on the appropriate syllable, attempt to practice reading the sentences aloud.

1. John is coming over tonight. We are going to work on our homework together.
2. Ecstasy is an extremely dangerous drug.
3. We should have visited some more castles while we were travelling through the park.
4. Jack bought a new car last Friday.
5. They are looking forward to your visiting them next January.
6. Would you like to come over and play a game of chess.
8. They have been working hard these last few months.
9. As you might have expected, he has just thought of a new approach to the problem.
10. She has not been a nurse in that hospital. She has worked as an assistant nurse.

**Exercise 3:** Model the following examples by pronouncing the following sentences aloud. The words (or syllables when the word has more than one) that should be stressed are in **bold type**.

- The **kids** are at the **park**.
- Do you **have** any **brothers** or **sisters**?
- **Why aren't** you **doing** your **homework**?
- He **bought** a **red car** for his **daughter**.
- I am **Brazilian**.
- We are **not** **familiar** with this **new computer program**.
- The **athlete ran quickly** and **won** the **competition**.
- She does **not know** the **answer**.
- I **don't know** the **answer**, **either**.
- We **aren't sure**.
- I've **never heard** of **that** **before**, but it **makes sense**.
- They'll **ask** the **teacher** for **help**.
- **Some people prefer Macs**, but **many others prefer PCs**.
- She is going to **study tonight**.
- I can **speak French**.
- I **can't speak Japanese**.
- **Yes, I can.** / **No, I can't.**

## Stress in connected speech

This section addresses the notion of stress in words as perceived in connected speech. In addition, the existence and discovery of tonic stress is discussed, and the major types of stress are explained. Four major types of stress are identified:

- unmarked tonic stress
- emphatic stress
- contrastive stress
- new information stress

Nonetheless, let's introduce and explain the notion of **Tonic Stress** before dealing with the four types of stress mentioned earlier.

An **intonation unit** (also called **tone unit** or **tone group**) has **ONE** and only **ONE** tonic syllable ; this simply means that the tonic syllable is an obligatory component of the intonation unit. In other words, the intonation unit has almost always one 'peak of stress', which is called 'tonic stress', or 'nucleus'. Because stress applies to syllables, the syllable that receives the tonic stress is called '**tonic syllable**'. The tonic stress is usually a term that refers to such a type of stress in **referring, proclaiming, and reporting** utterances. The tonic stress is almost always included in a **content word** and found in final position of an utterance. It's, however, important to remember that a sentence can have **more than one intonation unit**, and therefore have **more than one tonic stress**. It is also worth noting that the **tonic stress placement** here is said to be **neutral, unmarked** or **default type** ; i.e., it does not express **emphasis** or **contrast**. This is called **neutral tonic placement** or **neutral tonicity**. The neutral tonic is normally placed on **the last content word** but in some exceptional cases it may fall on an earlier content word or on a function word. Here are some examples where **the tonic stress is on the last content word** : to explain such aspect (tonic stress) let us consider the following examples : where the tonic syllable is underlined:

- I'm going.
- I'm going to London.
- I'm going to London for a holiday.

What happens to the previously tonic assigned syllables. They are still stressed, yet, not as much as the tonic syllable, producing therefore a three level stress for utterances. To the question of where is the tonic syllable, one may say that generally, the final tonic stress in a sentence receives the most stress. In the above example, 'holiday' receives the strongest stress (the capitalized syllable).

Here are some more illustrations where the tonic stress is on the last content word :

- 'Everyone was 'there
- We 'didn't ' want to 'talk a'bout the 'details.
- He was ' finally ad ' mitted to uni'iversity.

And here are some examples where **the tonic stress is on an earlier content word** (the skipped last content word is italicized).

He 'bought a 'new '**mountain** *bike*.————→ No tonic on 2nd part of initially stressed compound.

It was '**nice**, I *think*.————→ No tonic on afterthoughts, appended remarks.

We'll just '**stay** *here*. —————→ No tonic on common adverbs.

That's what the '**book** *says*.————→ No tonic on "obvious predicates". 5'/8

## Tonic on a function-word

No, you 'can't. —————> Tonic on an auxiliary if no other stressable word.

Where are you 'from? —————> Tonic on Prep in short sentences without main verb.

This is 'mine. —————> Tonic on possessive pronoun.

In the second major type of tonic placement the speaker wishes to **emphasize some part** of the utterance, **contrast a part** of it with something or **focus on some new information**, which may be achieved by placing the tonic stress at a different place from where it would normally appear.

## Emphatic Stress

To achieve emphatic stress, the tonic stress may be shifted from its utterance final position to assign an emphasis to a content word, which is usually a modal auxiliary, an intensifier, an adverb, an adjective, etc. Here are two examples to illustrate emphatic stress. The first two examples are adapted from Roach (1991:).

i. It was very Boring. (unmarked)

ii. It was VEry boring. (emphatic)

i. You mustn't talk so LOUDly. (unmarked)

ii. You MUSTN'T talk so loudly. (emphatic)

In simpler words, when something is to be emphasized, stress placement should be changed from the major noun to another content word such as an adjective (big, difficult, great, enormous, bright, etc.), intensifier (very, extremely, completely, utterly, especially, particularly, evenly, etc.) Doing so is achieving emphasis in the right place or aspect of the utterance. For example:

- That was a difficult **test**. - *Standard statement*
- That was a **difficult** test. - *Emphasizes how difficult the test was*

There are a number of adverbs and modifiers (or their derivatives) which tend to be used to emphasize in sentences that receive emphatic stress:

indeed, utterly, absolute, terrific, tremendous, awfully, terribly, great, grand, really, definitely, truly, literally, extremely, surely, completely, barely, entirely, very (adverb), very (adjective), quite, too, enough, pretty, far, especially, alone, only, own, -self.

## Contrastive Stress

In contrastive contexts, the stress pattern is quite different from the emphatic and non-emphatic stresses in that any lexical (or content) item in an utterance can receive the tonic stress **provided that the contrastively stressed item can be contrastable in that universe of speech**. It's important to mention that there should not be any distinction between content and function words with regard to this notion. Otherwise said, contrastive stress is used to point out the difference between one object and another. Contrastive stress tends usually to be used with determiners such as 'this, that, these and those'. The contrasted item receives the tonic stress provided that it is contrastive with some lexical element (notion) in the stimulus utterance. Consider the following examples: a. Do you like this one or THAT one? b. I like THIS one.

a. I think I prefer **this** color.

b. Do you want these or **those** curtains?

Contrastive stress is also used to bring out a given word in a sentence which will also slightly change the meaning. Consider this first set of sentences:

\* She played the piano yesterday. (It was her who...)

\* She played the piano yesterday. (She only played (not. harmed) ...) 6/8

\* She played the **piano** yesterday. (It was the piano that...)

\* She played the piano **yesterday**. (It was yesterday...)

Observe again in the sentences below how the meaning changes according to the contrastive stress :

\***He** came to the party yesterday. (It was he, not someone else.)

\*He **walked** to the party yesterday. (He walked, rather than drove.)

\*He came to the **party** yesterday. (It was a party, not a meeting or something else.)

\*He came to the party **yesterday**. (It was yesterday, not two weeks ago or some other time.)

### New Information Stress

In a response given to a **wh-question**, the information supplied, naturally enough, is stressed ; i.e., it is pronounced with **more breath force**, since it is **more prominent** against a background given information in the question. Simply said, When asked a question, the requested information is naturally stressed more strongly.

For example:

a. **What's your NAME ?**

b. My name's **GEORGE**.

a. **Where** are you **FROM?**

b. I'm from **WALES**.

a. **Where** do you **LIVE ?**

b. I **live** in **BONN**

a. **When** does the **school** term **END ?**

b. It **ends** in **MAY**.

a. **What** do you **DO ?**

b. I'm a **STUDENT**.

### More illustrations :

- **Where** are you from? - I come from **Seattle**, in the USA.
- **What** do you want to do? - I want to go **bowling**.
- **When** does class begin? - The class begins at **nine o'clock**.

The questions given above could also be answered in short form except for the last one, in which case the answers are:

- **George**,
- **Wales**,
- **in Bonn**
- **in May**

In other words, 'given' information is omitted, not repeated. In the exchange:

a. **What's your name?**

b. (My name's) **George**.

The '**new**' information in this response is '**George**.' The part referring to his name is given in the question, so it may be omitted/dropped.

**Practice 1:** where does the tonic stress fall? Has it shifted or not?

- 1- A: We need tomatoes.      B: We've got tomatoes!      4- A: Where do you live?      B: I live in Berlin.  
2- A: What's your name?      B: My name's George.      5. A: When does the school term end?  
3- A: Where are you from?      B: I'm from Wales.      B: It ends in May.

**Practice 2:**

**a.** The following example demonstrates the concept of prominence. Identify the main idea, i.e., the most meaningful piece of information, old information, new information, classification of emphasis.

Teacher: we're studying phonetics in this class.

There are weekly exams.

The exams are every Thursday.

Student: Did you say Tuesday or Thursday Sir?

Teacher: I said Thursday.

**b.** When the speaker intentionally wishes to highlight some other elements in the utterance:

1. John's car is white. (unmarked)
2. John's car is white. (contrast: not some other colour)
3. John's car is white. (contrast: not Albert's car)
4. John's car is white. (contrast; not his truck)
5. John's car is white. (emphatic assertion: why do you say it's not)

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