# Stress

Stress in speaking means the sounds that we emphasize when we speak. A stressed sound is usually louder, higher, longer, and clearer. There are patterns that are important to follow to understand and be understood.

### Objectives

1. Recognize word and sentence stress
2. Produce correct word and sentence stress

## Word Stress

Word stress means the emphasis that is given to certain syllables in a word. A syllable is a group of sounds with one vowel.

For example, the word stress has one syllable, but the word syllable has three syllables.

The stressed syllable is the part of the word that is emphasized the most. For example, the word is pronounced SYL-la-ble. The first sound is louder, longer, higher, and clearer than the other sounds.

Word stress is important in English because sometimes the stress of the word changes to change the meaning or use of the word.

For example, the word RE-cord is a noun and the word re-CORD is a verb. The pronunciation is also different. Some words do not have pronunciation change, only the syllable stress tells you which word the person is saying. For example, PER-fect describes something that is excellent, there is nothing better. However, per-FECT is a verb for making something better.

Here is a list of word stress patterns and examples:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| First syllable is stressed in: | Second syllable is stressed in: | Third syllable from the end is stressed in | Second last syllable is stressed in: |
| 2 syllable nouns and adjectives | 2 syllable verbs | Most of the words ending in suffixes “-al”, “-cy”, “phy” and “ty” | 3 syllable words and the words ending in “ic”, “-sion” and “-tion” |
| AD-dress (n)PRE-sent (n)EX-port (n)SLEN-der (adj)PRE-ty (adj) | a-DDRESS (v)preSENT (v)exPORT (v)de-CID-ed (v)be-GIN (v) | PI-vo-tal (adj)de-MO-cracy (n)pho-TO-graphy (n)re-spon-si-BIL-i-ty (n) | geo-GRA-phictele-VI-sionreve-LA-tion |

Pronunciation Video

Rachel's English is a great YouTube channel for pronunciation help. Here is a helpful video where she explains how to stress syllables more naturally.

### Exercise 1: Listening

There is a list of words below. Listen to the recording and try to identify the stressed syllable. Your teacher will check the answers with you.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Practice Words |  |  |  |
| his-tor-i-cal | loy-al-ty | pro-duce | de-cen-cy |
| con-tact | cel-e-bra-tion | in-tel-lec-tu-al | con-nect |
| com-i-cal | bi-o-graph-y | an-cient | tel-e-scop-ic |

Answer Key

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Practice Words |  |  |  |
| his- **tor** -i-cal | **loy** -al-ty | **pro** -duce | **de** -cen-cy |
| **con** -tact | cel-e- **bra** -tion | in-tel- **lec** -tu-al | con- **nect** |
| **com** -i-cal | bi- **o** -graph-y | **an** -cient | tel-e- **scop** -ic |

### Sentence Stress

Sentence stress is very similar to word stress. Because a sentence has more parts, more than one word can be stressed. This is also true in longer words. In one word with many syllables, you have a primary stress and a secondary stress. Stress in a sentence helps your brain focus on the most important words.

The words that are stressed are what we call **content words** , meaning they are important information for meaning. Content words are the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs that give us the essential information in the idea. If I only have those bolded words, I can still understand the general meaning.

Example: **I went** to the **store** to **buy** some **new shoes** .

**Grammatical words** are not normally stressed but can be stressed if the meaning is very important. Grammatical words are auxiliary verbs, prepositions, pronouns and articles. This information helps and is important to get the full understanding. But if I only have those words, the sentence doesn't have any meaning.

Example: I went **to the** store **to** buy **some** new shoes.

However, sometimes we emphasize grammatical words. This usually happens when someone does not understand the first meaning.

Example: **Put** the **bag** on the **table** . No. **I said on** the **table** , not **next** to the **table.**

Stressing grammatical words can also be used to show emotion or attitudes (this is an important aspect of sarcasm for example), show the difference between a statement and a question, or to signal the type of question you're asking.

When the action is the main focus: **What** are you **doing?**

When the other person is the main focus: What are **you** doing?

To show surprise: **What are you doing** ?

When you give a close-ended answer: **Yes** , I'm doing the dishes.

When someone is interviewed: **Do** you do dishes?

Sentence stress and intonation are used together to make English like music. Sentence stress helps you notice the most important information, even if you can't understand everything the person says. Stress is what gives English a rhythm or beat.

English is what is called a **stress-timed language** . This means that the time it takes to say a sentence depends on the number of stressed

syllables, not the total number of syllables. This is often part of the reason students feel that native English speakers are speaking so fast.

The grammatical words are short and fast. Let's look at an example.

The **mouse ate** the **cheese** .

The **mouse** had been **eating** the **cheese** .

These two sentences would take the same time to say. There are more words in the second sentence, but the time is based on the stressed words. Since the number of content words is the same, the time to say the sentence is the same.

Poetry Example

Poetry and songs are the easiest way to listen for stress in words and sentences. Here is an example. You do not need to understand everything he says, focus on listening to the rhythm of stress.

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### Exercise 2: Word Stress

This activity is intended to practice your pronunciation skills, so no transcript is provided. If you are d/Deaf or hard of hearing, you can be excused from this activity or try to identify the stress patterns based on the rules above.

Watch this video about Cleopatra. As you watch the video, write the words that you hear stressed in the sentences. Are they content words or grammatical words? Why do you think those words are stressed?

Syllable Stress

Write these words down on a piece of paper. Watch the video again. When you hear these words, circle the syllable of the word that is stressed.

1. Power
2. Goddess
3. Embrace
4. Culture
5. Ancient
6. Languages
7. Intellectual
8. Mastery
9. Subjects
10. Extremely
11. Ambitious
12. Valuable
13. Images
14. Erase
15. Father

Answer Key

The stressed syllables are underlined

1. **Pow**er
2. **God**dess
3. Em**brace**
4. **Cul**ture
5. **An**cient
6. **Lan**guages
7. Intel**lec**tual
8. **Mas**tery
9. **Sub**jects
10. Ex**treme**ly
11. Am**bi**tious
12. **Val**uable
13. **Im**ages
14. Er**ase**
15. **Fa**ther

### Exercise 3: Imitation

Watch this video about Christopher Columbus. Use the subtitles or the transcript on YouTube (click the three dots next to "save video" to see the option "open transcript" so you can see the full text.

1. Choose a 30-second section of the video to practice with. Your partner should choose a different section.
2. Repeat the words along with the speaker. Try to match the stress patterns of the words. Don't worry as much about pronunciation.
3. Play the section of the video with NO sound and perform that section for your partner. Your partner will give you feedback on your imitation of the sentence level stress.
4. Listen to your partner perform his or her section. Then provide feedback on sentence level stress.

### Exercise 4: Listen for it

Here is a transcript. Listen to your teacher and circle/highlight/write the words that are stressed.

Each year, two million tourists visit the beautiful islands off the Australian coast. However most visitors just visit for a day. The tourism officials wanted more people to stay longer, so they decided to hire a person to live on an island and write about the area.

After you check your answers, try repeating the words with the correct stress.

Read this online at <https://edtechbooks.org/advanced_low_listening__speaking/stress>