# Suprasegmentals

When many people think about speaking in a new language, they focus on pronunciation of individual words. Although pronunciation of words is important, suprasegmentals can have a bigger impact on someone's ability to understand you when you speak. Suprasegmental A feature of speech that is not limited to a single syllable, such as intonation and stress, also known as prosody Pitch The relative highness or lowness of sound

### Objectives

1. Define three major suprasegmentals in English
2. Correctly identify each of the suprasegmentals in a controlled context
3. Use suprasegmentals to express meaning
4. Use suprasegmentals to improve intelligibility and fluency

## Rhythm

In other sections, we talk about pausing and stress. Take some time to review that information if you need a reminder of pausing and stress patterns.The two most important points from those sections that you should remember are the definition of thought groups and the difference between content and function words.

Thought groups are groups of words that are very connected in meaning. You can pause before or after this group, but pausing in the middle of a thought group can cause issues with understanding and with perceived fluency.

When it comes to emphasizing words, English speaker normally stress the most important words for understanding. These are called content words. The words that help connect those content words are function words and are typically focused on grammar functions.

Now, rhythm is what you get when you put these pieces together. Rhythm is a strong pattern of sound. As explained in the other sections, English is stress-timed which means the strong sounds are stressed in this rhythm, and unstressed sounds are between them. This means that some syllable (or words) get more time, while many of those content words are given less time and focus. Additionally, the pausing patterns add to the rhythm of English.

Here is a review video on these patterns if you want the extra explanation.



We will talk more about how rhythm impacts speaking in the section about reductions and linking.

## Intonation

Intonation is the rise and fall of your voice when you speak. Think of how your voice changes when you sing — this is intonation. Intonation is crucial in english because it portrays the speaker's feelings or attitude toward something. For example, if the pitch of your voice is too low, this may indicate that you are bored or tired. Intonation can also provide the speaker with some information about how to respond to what you said. We will focus on the use of intonation to express structural information rather than emotional information.

#### Statements

A statement is a typical sentence. Where you would put a period at the end of a sentence instead of a question mark or exclamation mark, the intonation is falling. This signals the end of an idea. While this is the typical pattern, it can vary if there is a strong emotion connected to the idea.

Examples:

I finished my homework.

You work at the restaurant.

We learned that yesterday.

#### Questions

The intonation you use will depend on what type of response you want from the listener.

**Yes/No Answers:**

If you want a simple yes/no answer to your question, you will use a rising intonation. This means that the last syllable in your question will be a higher pitch than in the previous words.

Examples:

Do you want to go to lunch?

Are you taking an English class?

Have you tried Thai food before?

**Longer Answers:**

If you ask a question using who, what, where, when, why, or how (also known as wh- questions), you are expecting a more specific answer. This type of question has a falling intonation pattern, like in a typical statement.

Examples:

When is your class?

Where do you live?

How did you learn to play the piano?

**Tags:**

A tag is a word or phrase we put at the end of a statement to make it a question. This is more common in conversational English. The statement part of the sentence will be falling, with the tag in a rising intonation.

Examples:

Your favorite color is blue, right?

You haven't seen my pen, have you?

I'm just too busy, you know?

### Example

Here is a humorous example of how the incorrect intonation patterns can be problematic.



**Clarification Statements:**

Sometimes a statement is used as a question. This is usually when the listener repeats the sentence with rising intonation to check that they heard it correctly. There is usually additional stress on the word the listener is unsure about as well.

Examples:

1: I started working at that store. 2: You work atthatstore.

1: Oh no! The store is closed. 2: It'sclosed.

1: The package will arrive today. 2: I thought it was arriving tomorrow.

### Exercise 1: Intonation

Watch the video and listen for the questions listed below. Do they rise or fall?



Intonation Check

Does the intonation rise or fall for these questions?

1. (0:00) How many continents are there?
2. (0:22) Then why are they two different continents?
3. (1:50) Is Australia really a dinky continent or is it king of islands?
4. (1:53) Why not make Greenland the smallest continent?
5. (3:27) How many do you want there to be?

Answer Key

1. Falling
2. Falling
3. Rising
4. Falling
5. Falling

## Reductions & Linking

As stated earlier, one of the impacts of the rhythm of English is the occurrence of reductions and linking. These suprasegmentals are part of the reason that new English language learners feel like there is a big difference between the English they hear in class and the English they hear in authentic situations.

#### Reductions

Reductions are when the speaker does not say a word the way it is spelled.

For example:

Instead of saying “I want to go to the store”, the speaker will say “I wanna go to the store”.

Reduction is also important in English as it conveys one’s feeling in the conversation. If you say word for word “I want to go to the store”, the listener might think that you are demanding to go to the store. It might leave a negative feeling between you and the other person. However, by saying “I wanna go to the store” gives the impression that you will be ok if you do not end up going to the store. Reduction usually occurs verbally and informally.

Reduction usually involves function words. The most commonly reduced words are of, to, have, and the -ing ending.

The reduction usually turns these words into the schwa sound.

For example:

Some of them are from Mexico. Some-a them are from Mexico.

I saw most of it. I saw most-a it.

I'm out of paper. I'm outta paper.

He's going to swim. He's gonna swim.

We're coming to the house. We're coming-ta the house.

I have to finish my homework. I hafta finish my homework.

You should have been there! You shoulda been there!

It would have been more interesting. It woulda been more interesting.

She is writing a paper. She's writin a paper.

You were studying all day. You were study-n all day.

These are some of the most common reductions. Another example would be "What are you doing?" as "Whatcha doin?" As you continue to listen and practice, try to notice when speakers reduce sounds. This helps them to keep the natural rhythm of English by reducing the time on these function words.

#### Linking

Linking happens when the end of the word is said connected with the following word.This action is also called connected speech. It is the idea that you join one word to another to be able to say them easily, to give a “flow” to the sentence.

This is most common when a word ends with the same sound as the beginning of the next word.

For example:

some might = sommight

hot today = ho-today (you hold the o sound a little longer, but the t is only in today)

what's up = wha-tsup

nine hours a day = ni-nour-sa day

Here are some videos explaining the different linking patterns:

[Linking Consonant to Vowel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tsljuK4f2E)

[Linking Consonant to Consonant](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ziKkSig0jM)

### Exercise 2: Reductions & linking

Here is some practice with reductions and linking.



Transcript Marked

**reductions**

and

intonation

(0:32) What did Itell you about only using purple? falling

(0:35) Are we **gonna** do this again? falling

(0:36)

Why is everything purple?

falling

(0:37) **Cause** you hide

the purple from me, and I find it. falling

(0:40) Are you

finger-painting? rising

(00:49) Today's assignment was the doorways of New York. You were asked to specifically focus on unique doorknobs and paint it from memory. falling

Speaking Practice

* Do you have any artistic hobbies? How did you develop that skill?
* Find a piece of art in your home. Practice asking different types of questions about that art. Focus on your intonation.

### Exercise 3: Music of English

1. Choose a song you like in English.
2. Listen to the song with the lyrics (the words) visible.
3. Choose a section of the song (your teacher will tell you how long the section can be) to share with the class.
4. Use that section to explain one or more of these suprasegmental features.

### Exercise 4: Mini-Presentation

1. Your teacher will assign you a reduction or linking pattern.
2. Think or find example sentences that would use this suprasegmental.
3. Give a short explanation (2-3) sentences of how to pronounce it and what it means or why it happens.
4. Share two example sentence that use that reduction or linking pattern.

### Exercise 5: Mad Gabs

1. Your teacher will show you a card (or PowerPoint slide) with some words.
2. When you say the words out loud, it will sound like different words when they are reduced or linked.
	* Ex. know sayer sounds like nose hair. The S links onto the second word in the place of the h sound.
3. Read the phrases as a class and try to listen and guess what the reduced/linked word/phrase are.

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