Stress

Why is word stress important?

Stress is one of the most important speech tools used by English speakers to communicate meaning. English speakers use stress to highlight information they think is important. In addition, every English word with more than one syllable or word part has a defined stress pattern. That is, you can look up a dictionary to see which syllable is stressed. English stress is as important as English sounds.

How does it work?

The English stress system is based on the CONTRAST between stressed and unstressed syllables, stressed and unstressed words. Stressed syllables are longer and louder than unstressed syllables. They also have some pitch change or movement of the voice up or down.

Basically, there are three levels of stress in English:

syllable stress in words	contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables in words eg **ma** ny **peo** ple be **lieve**
key word stress	stress in longer speech chunks, clauses or sentences eg / that in an in**crea**singly **glo**balised **world** /
focus word stress	the syllable in the stressed word which has the strongest pitch change in a speech chunk ↘ ↗ eg / that in an in**crea**singly **glo**balised <u>world</u> / ….

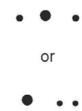**What will happen if I don't use stress?**

You may sabotage your communication and you may risk tiring and confusing listeners. Listeners may not be able to recognise even simple vocabulary if you stress syllables equally or use incorrect word stress. Listeners may not follow your meaning if you don't stress key words in information chunks.

Stress is essential for presenting key information clearly. Stressing information words at the end of a sentence or a speech chunk is also important because this is where new information often occurs in English.

Word Stress

Important

or

Only one way to stress a word

- Stressed syllables tend to be higher, longer and louder than unstressed syllables.
- Listeners generally perceive **loudness** more than anything else;
- Acoustic analysis registers **pitch** more.
- They also have full, clear vowels
- In *Unstressed* syllables the vowel is usually shortened or pronounced as a neutral vowel

Eg. **tea**cher

Exceptions:

There are only a few words in English whose word stress varies according to dialect or speaker.

i.	conTROversy	ii. CONtroversy
ii.	kiLOmetre	ii. KILometre
iii.	CANberra	iii. CanBERra

Syllables per word		% of total speech
1	eg dog	84
2	eg ta/ble	12
3	eg. yes/ter/day	3
4	eg. e/very/bo/dy	1

Forman, R. 2011, *'Module 5: Phonemic Level'*, UTS Subject 013107, UTS, Sydney

Word Stress

Two syllable words:

part of speech	1st syllable	2nd syllable
nouns	90%	10%
verbs	40%	60%
Total words	**80%**	**20%**

Nouns occupy a greater proportion of our speech than do verbs, and consequently contribute to total distribution falling strongly in favour of first syllable stress.

Why 1st syllable?
- reflects the Anglo-Saxon basis of the English language.
- Norman French integration into English from the Middle Ages added syllable-final stress. Still maintained in some nouns in British and Australian English:
  hotel, address

- Native speakers may find it difficult to perceive, because it is automatic.
- Word stress is always indicated in a dictionary:
e'lectric, re'lation, and *pre'senting.*
eLECtric, reLAtion, preSENting (books and teching resources)

People's names and titles
Stress surname, rather than first name or title.

Dusty SPRINGfield, Patrick WHITE, Doctor JONES, Lady GAga,

English place names
Stress is always on the first syllable for English place names in English-speaking countries, except those names beginning with North, South, East or West.
Eg. North Sydney; West Gosford

This rule will not apply to place names which are derived from other languages - such as French, Spanish, Aboriginal languages.
Eg. Turramurra; St Ives; La Perouse
Ask 3 students what suburb they live in – which syllable is stressed?

Forman, R. 2011, 'Module 5: Phonemic Level', UTS Subject 013107, UTS, Sydney

Other Languages and Word Stress?

- Many East and South East Asian languages are mostly monosyllabic (one syllable words) – eg. Chinese, Vietnamese

- Others which have polysyllabic words as well give equal weight to all syllables – Thai, Lao, Khmer, Indonesian/Malay, Japanese and Korean.

- European languages tend to use stress, but almost always in a regular and predictable position.

- German, Dutch, Czech and Finnish
  - o Stress on 1st syllable (except with prefixes)

- French, Turkish and Persian (Farsi)
  - o Stress on final syllable

- Spanish, Italian and Polish
  - o Stress on penultimate (2nd last)

Forman, R. 2011, 'Module 5: Phonemic Level', UTS Subject 013017, UTS, Sydney.

HELPS Pronunciation Fact Sheet

Summary of common word stress patterns

1. **Two - syllable words**

nouns and adjectives	**O o**	verbs	**o O**
	re cord (n)		re **cord** (v)
	pro duce (n)		pro **duce** (v)
	per fect (adj		per **fect** (v)

2. **Suffix words: pattern 1**   3. **Suffix words: pattern 2**

	O o		**O o o**
- sion	**vi** sion	- cy	de**mo** cra cy
- tion	so**lu** tion	- ty	**u** ni ty
- ssion	e**mi** ssion	- phy	ge**o** gra phy
- cian	mu**si** cian	- gy	physi**o** lo gy
- ic	eco**no** mic	- al	**me** di cal

4. **Primary and secondary stress in multisyllabic words**
   Many longer technical words have more than one stressed syllable. Many
   have a prefix and this usually has secondary stress.

```
                              primary stress
                                   ↓
   prefix with        →     ˌin ter ˈna tion al    ←  suffix with no stress
   secondary stress
                            ˌan ti bi ˈo tic

                            ˌsu per ˈvi sion
```

5. **Compound nouns**
   The most common stress pattern is stress on the first word, but there are
   exceptions.

stress on first word	**pod**cast, **clim**ate change, **da**ta base,
	think tank, **run**-up
stress on second word	Information tech**no**logy, global **war**ming,
	social se**cu**rity

UTS

Word Stress

_____

Word stress worksheet   Practising word stress patterns

In English, key vocabulary, or words that provide information to the listener, such as nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs, are usually stressed.
In addition, words of two or more syllables have one syllable which has the main stress and it is very important to get this right if you wish to be understood.

This worksheet will give you practice in using word stress correctly.

You can refer to the Fact Sheet, *Summary of common word stress patterns,* and check the word stress with a dictionary when completing this worksheet.

Stress patterns in 2-syllable words

Look at the following phrases from Kofi Annan's speech and the stress patterns of the 2-syllable words.

Pattern 1 **O o**	**Pattern 2** **o O**	**Mixed 1 and 2**
*fel*low *hu*man *be*ings *strug*gle	sur*vive*	*strug*gle to sur*vive*

Task 1

Put the following words into one of the two columns, according to their stress pattern. You will find that the stress pattern will vary according to what part of speech the word is a noun (n), verb (v) or adjective (adj). Then practise saying the words.

event (n)   *recall (n)*   *recall (n)*   *reform (n/v)*   *minute (n/adj)*
project (n)   *cancel (v)*   *project (v)*   *audit (n/v)*   *dispute (n/v)*

O o	**o O**

Stress in multisyllabic words

As explained in the fact sheet, multisyllabic words can have primary and secondary stress, especially if they have a prefix as in ˌunemˈployment.

Task 2

Mark the primary and secondary stress in the following words with / ˈ / for primary stress and / ˌ / for secondary stress:

compromise   reconstruction   recyclable   biological

integration   guarantee   expectation   individual   European

Task 3

Below are some presentation topics that students have been asked to speak on. All words are key words and should be stressed but you need to check the syllable stress before stating your topic. Mark the stress, then say the topics.

i) Environmental emissions   ii) Successful negotiations

iii) Indigenous health issues   iv) Infrastructure projects

v) Statistical methods   vi) Economic decision-making

Answers

Task 1

O o	o O
recall (n)	event (n)
project (n)	recall (v)
cancel (v)	reform (n/v)
audit (n/v)	minute (adj)
minute (n)	project (v)
	dispute (n/v)

Task 2

ˈcomproˌmise ˌreconˈstruction   reˈcyclable   ˌbioˈlogical

ˌinteˈgration   ˌguaranˈtee   ˌexpecˈtation   ˌindiˈvidual   ˌEuroˈpean

Task 3

i) Enˌvironˈmental eˈmissions

ii) Sucˈcessful neˌgotiˈations

iii) Inˈdigenous ˈhealth issues

iv) ˈInfraˌstructure ˈprojects

v) Staˈtistical ˈmethods

vi) Ecoˈnomic deˈcision-ˌmaking

Schwa

This is the most common vowel in English because it is used in syllables that are unstressed.

> eg. the vowel in the last syllable of the word 'Import**a**nt'
>
> or
> 'I want t**o** go'   the vowel in the word 't**o**' is pronounced as schwa because it is an unstressed word.

Schwa is NEVER in a stressed syllable.

Its use in connected speech is an important part of the rhythm of spoken English.

It is also very difficult to many learners, not because it is difficult to say, but because they do not realise how many syllables are unstressed in English.

When you don't use schwa appropriately in unstressed syllables, it can sound as if every syllable is stressed.

Example:

It's very difficult for learners of English to master the pronunciation of schwa.

It's very diff**icu**lt f**or** learn**er**s **o**f English t**o** mast**er** th**e** pr**o**nunciat**io**n **o**f schwa.

Word Stress Practice

Clarity English offers you online language support. It is free for all UTS students through the UTS Library. Go to http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/help/english-language and follow the links.

The following exercises on word stress are taken from Clarity English – **Clear Pronunciation 2.**

Listen to the words then tick the answer with the correct stress.

1. really	A:	**rea**lly	B:	rea**lly**		
2. report	A:	**re**port	B:	re**port**		
3. remember	A:	**re**member	B:	re**mem**ber	C:	remem**ber**
4. yesterday	A:	**yes**terday	B:	yes**ter**day	C:	yester**day**
5. exam	A:	**ex**am	B:	ex**am**		
6. revision	A:	**re**vision	B:	re**vis**ion	C:	revi**sion**
7. difficult	A:	**diff**icult	B:	diff**ic**ult	C:	diffi**cult**
8. opinion	A:	**op**inion	B:	o**pin**ion	C:	opin**ion**
9. possible	A:	**poss**ible	B:	po**ss**ible	C:	possi**ble**
10. business	A:	**bus**iness	B:	busi**ness**	C:	bus**i**ness

Look at the bold words and underline those that have the stress on the FIRST syllable. Then watch the video and check your answers.

1. What's the most **recent movie** you've seen?

2. Do you **enjoy romantic comedies**?

3. Who's your **favourite actor** or **actress**?

4. Do you **prefer eating popcorn** or **chocolate** in the **movies**?

5. Is **going** to the **movies expensive** in your **country**?

Now ask your partner the same questions.

Stress Practice

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The following exercises on word stress are taken from Clarity English – **Clear Pronunciation 2.**

Listen to the words below. In each group, three have the same stress pattern, and one is different. Tick the word that is different.

1. politics
   interesting
   sensible
   develop

2. opinion
   government
   important
   whenever

3. kangaroo
   instrument
   interrupt
   disappear

4. introduction
   photocopy
   complicated
   businesswoman

5. ridiculous
   technology
   experience
   sympathetic

6. application
   entertainment
   centimetre
   fundamental

Listen to the sentences and look at the syllables in bold. Are the vowel sounds in those syllables weak or strong?

1. She pro**mised** to **pro**vide eggs for breakfast	Weak	Strong
2. **Me**gan be**gan** swimming when she was seven	Weak	Strong
3. Put the po**ta**toes and **ca**rrots into the pot	Weak	Strong
4. A modern car en**gine** is a complex **ma**chine	Weak	Strong
5. She wants to be**come** a **be**tter musician	Weak	Strong
6. Most mu**si**cians can play the pi**a**no	Weak	Strong
7. We had to mea**sure** the height of a **ma**ture apple tree	Weak	Strong
8. We **ex**pect you to do ex**tra** work before the **ex**am	Weak	Strong

Stress Practice

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The following exercises on word stress are taken from Clarity English – **Clear Pronunciation 2**.

The suffixes –ion, -ic, -ical, -ial and –ity sometimes affect the stress on a word. Listen to each pair of words. When you add the suffix, does the stress stay on the same syllable or move to a different syllable? Write 'same' or 'different'.

1.	revise	revision	11.	permit	permission
2.	artist	artist	12.	history	historical
3.	public	publicity	13.	celebrate	celebration
4.	tropic	tropical	14.	Economy	economics
5.	inform	information	15.	Essence	essential
6.	minor	minority	16.	Possible	possibility
7.	practice	practical	17.	Decide	decision
8.	office	official	18.	Technique	technical
9.	operate	operation	19.	Science	scientific
10.	secure	security	20.	Describe	description

Frequently used Academic Words

For practice using these academic words, go to:

http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/academic-word-list-tool

> ## The Academic Word List (Averil Coxhead, 2000):
> **a list of 570 high-incidence and high-utility academic word families
> for Secondary School, Higher Education, Career**

There is a very important specialized vocabulary for learners intending to pursue academic studies in English at the secondary and post-secondary levels. The *Academic Word List*, compiled by Coxhead (2000), consists of 570 word families that are not in the most frequent 2,000 words of English but which occur reasonably frequently over a very wide range of academic texts. These 570 words are grouped into ten sublists that reflect word frequency and range. A word like *analyze* falls into Sublist 1, which contains the most frequent words, while the word *adjacent* falls into Sublist 10 which includes the least frequent (amongst this list of high incidence and high utility words). The following ten sublists contain the headwords of the families in the *Academic Word List.* In other words, the ten sublists contain the most frequent form of the word, more often a noun or verb form, although there may be one or more important related word forms. For example, the headword *analyze* would also include *analyst, analytic, analytical* and *analytically* in the word family.

The *Academic Word List* is not restricted to a specific field of study. That means that the words are useful for learners studying in disciplines as varied as literature, science, health, business, and law. This high utility academic word list does not contain technical words likely to appear in only one, specialized field of study such as *amortization, petroglyph, onomatopoeia,* or *cartilage.* Two-thirds of all academic English words come from Latin, French (through Latin), or Greek. Understandably, knowledge of the most high incidence and high utility academic words in English can significantly boost a student's comprehension level of school-based reading material. Secondary students who are taught these high-utility academic words and routinely placed in contexts requiring their usage are likely to be able to master academic material with more confidence and efficiency, wasting less time and energy in guessing words or consulting dictionaries than those who are only equipped with the most basic 2000-3000 words that characterize ordinary conversation.

Sources: Coxhead, Averil. (2000). *A new academic word list. TESOL Quarterly, 34*, 213-238.
Averil Coxhead's website: http://language.massey.ac.nz/staff/awl/index.shtml

1.   analyze approach area assess assume authority available benefit concept consist context constitute contract data define derive distribute economy environment establish estimate evident factor finance formula function income indicate individual interpret involve issue labor legal legislate major method occur percent period principle proceed process policy require research respond role section sector significant similar source specific structure theory vary

2.   achieve acquire administrate affect appropriate aspect assist category chapter commission community complex compute conclude conduct consequent construct consume credit culture design distinct equate element evaluate feature final focus impact injure institute invest item journal maintain normal obtain participate

perceive positive potential previous primary purchase range region regulate relevant reside resource restrict secure seek select site strategy survey text tradition transfer

3.   alternative circumstance comment compensate component consent considerable constant constrain contribute convene coordinate core corporate correspond criteria deduce demonstrate document dominate emphasis ensure exclude fund framework illustrate immigrate imply initial instance interact justify layer link locate maximize minor negate outcome partner philosophy physical proportion publish react register rely remove scheme sequence sex shift specify sufficient task technical technique technology valid volume

(Kinsella, San Francisco State University, 8/03)

Frequently used Academic Words

4. access adequacy annual apparent approximate attitude attribute civil code commit communicate concentrate confer contrast cycle debate despite dimension domestic emerge error ethnic goal grant hence hypothesis implement implicate impose integrate internal investigate job label mechanism obvious occupy option output overall parallel parameter phase predict prior principal professional project promote regime resolve retain series statistic status stress subsequent sum summary undertake

5. academy adjust alter amend aware capacity challenge clause compound conflict consult contact decline discrete draft enable energy enforce entity equivalent evolve expand expose external facilitate fundamental generate generation image liberal license logic margin mental medical modify monitor network notion objective orient perspective precise prime psychology pursue ratio reject revenue stable style substitute sustain symbol target transit trend version welfare whereas

6. abstract acknowledge accuracy aggregate allocate assign attach author bond brief capable cite cooperate discriminate display diverse domain edit enhance estate exceed expert explicit federal fee flexible furthermore gender ignorance incentive incorporate incidence index inhibit initiate input instruct intelligence interval lecture migrate minimum ministry motive neutral nevertheless overseas precede presume rational recover reveal scope subsidy tape trace transform transport underlie utilize

7. adapt adult advocate aid channel chemical classic comprehensive comprise confirm contrary convert couple decade definite deny differentiate dispose dynamic equip eliminate empirical extract file finite foundation globe grade guarantee hierarchy identical ideology infer innovate insert intervene isolate

media mode paradigm phenomenon priority prohibit publication quote release reverse simulate sole somewhat submit successor survive thesis topic transmit ultimate unique visible voluntary

8. abandon accompany accumulate ambiguous appendix appreciate arbitrary automate bias chart clarify commodity complement conform contemporary contradict crucial currency denote detect deviate displace drama eventual exhibit exploit fluctuate guideline highlight implicit induce inevitable infrastructure inspect intense manipulate minimize nuclear offset paragraph plus practitioner predominant prospect radical random reinforce restore revise schedule tense terminate theme thereby uniform vehicle via virtual visual widespread

9. accommodate analogy anticipate assure attain behalf cease coherent coincide commence compatible concurrent confine controversy converse device devote diminish distort duration erode ethic found format inherent insight integral intermediate manual mature mediate medium military minimal mutual norm overlap passive portion preliminary protocol qualitative refine relax restrain revolution rigid route scenario sphere subordinate supplement suspend team temporary trigger unify violate vision

10. adjacent albeit assemble collapse colleague compile conceive convince depress encounter enormous forthcoming incline integrity intrinsic invoke levy likewise nonetheless notwithstanding odd ongoing panel persist pose reluctance so-called straightforward undergo whereby

(Kinsella, San Francisco State University, 8/03)