# ESOL E3 – Sentence Stress

# 1 of 20 – Introduction

Welcome to this session on Sentence Stress.

In this session, you will learn how stress and intonation in spoken sentences is used to change the meaning or emphasis.

By the end of this session you will be able to:

* Know where to place stress in sentences
* Know where to place stress in words with more than one syllable
* Know where to place stress in words with multiple meanings
* Know where to place stress to emphasise meaning

# 2 of 20 – Sentence stress

Sentence stress means the way words or syllables in a sentence are emphasised. This means we say them more loudly to make them more obvious.

Sentence stress is important in English because it can change the meaning of a sentence, or how it comes across to someone you are speaking to.

For example, in the following sentence, changing which word is stressed can give the sentence a different emphasis:

“I asked **you** to buy me some milk.”

If we place the stress on **you** in this sentence, it emphasises that **you** were asked to buy milk, not someone else.

If we place the stress on **I**, this emphasises that **I** was the one that asked.

If we place the stress on **milk**, this emphasises that I wanted **milk**, not something else.

# 3 of 20 – Stress placement in sentences

In general, we stress **content words**, because they affect the meaning of a sentence. These include:

* Nouns (people, places and things)
* Verbs (actions and states)
* Adjectives (descriptive words that change nouns)
* Adverbs (words that modify verbs or adjectives)
* Negative words (not, never, neither etc.)
* Modals (should, could, might etc.)
* Yes and no
* Quantifiers (some, many, no, all, one, two, three etc.)
* Question words (what, where, when, why, how etc.)

For example, in the following sentence, the **verb**, **adjective**, and **nouns** are stressed:

“He **bought** a **blue ball** for his **son**.”

# 4 of 20 – Stress placement in sentences continued

Words which are not as important, or do not carry as much meaning are not stressed. These include:

* Articles (a, an and the)
* Prepositions (to, at, in, on, for, from etc.)
* Conjunctions (and, or, but, so etc.)
* Personal pronouns (I, you, we, he, she etc.) and possessive adjectives (my, your, our, his, her etc.)
* The ‘to be’ verb (am, are, is, was, were etc.)
* Will, can, be going to

For example, in the following sentence, the **nouns**, **verb**, and **adjective** are stressed, while the articles, “is going to”, preposition, conjunction, and ‘to be’ verb are not stressed:

“The **bus** is going to **arrive** at the **station,** but it is **late**.”

# 5 of 20 – Question 1

In the following statement, which of the words should be stressed?

“The kids are playing in the park, but Jared is going to do his homework.

The correct answers are: kids, playing, park, Jared, do and homework.

The words **kids**, **park**, **Jared** and **homework** are nouns, so should be stressed.

The words **playing** and **do** are verbs, so should be stressed.

The articles, prepositions, conjunctions, possessive adjectives and the ‘to be’ verb are not stressed.

# 6 of 20 – Question 2

Which of the following categories should be stressed, and which should be unstressed?

1. Nouns
2. Conjunctions – for example ‘and’
3. Modals – for example ‘should’
4. Negative words – for example ‘never’
5. Adverbs – for example ‘very’
6. Personal pronouns – for example ‘she’
7. Prepositions – for example ‘to’

The correct answers are:

The stressed categories are: a), c), d) and e)

The unstressed categories are: b), f) and g)

# 7 of 20 – Stress placement in words with more than one syllable

In words with more than one syllable, one of the syllables is usually stressed.

In most two syllable nouns, adjectives and adverbs, the first syllable is stressed, for example in the following words:

* **Hap**py
* **Pump**kin
* **Lu**cky
* **May**be
* **Po**land
* **Joy**ful

In most two syllable verbs and prepositions, the last syllable is stressed. For example, in the following words:

* En**gage**
* Bet**ween**
* For**get**
* With**out**
* Be**fore**
* De**cide**

There are some exceptions to these rules, but most words follow them.

# 8 of 20 – Stress placement in nouns with more than one syllable

There are rules we can follow for words which contain a specific set of letters to work out where the stress should go.

For nouns ending in **-sion, -tion, -graphy, -ency, -ancy, -ity,** or **-logy**, the syllable **before the ending** is stressed.

Examples of these are the words:

* Presen**ta**tion
* **Geo**graphy
* **Inf**ancy
* **San**ity
* Ge**o**logy
* **Dec**ency

# 9 of 20 – Stress placement in adjectives with more than one syllable

For adjectives ending in –**ic**, –**ical**, –**itial**, –**icia**l, and –t**ional**, the syllable **before the ending** is stressed as well.

Here are some examples:

* Botanical
* Crucial
* Traditional
* Electric
* International
* Atomic

# 10 of 20 – Stress placement in verbs with more than one syllable

Verbs ending in –**ify** follow the same rule again. The syllable before the ending is stressed.

Examples of this are:

* Notify
* Diversify
* Terrify
* Qualify

# 11 of 20 – Question 3

From the following words, identify which should have stress placed on the first syllable.

1. Mother
2. Language
3. Propose
4. Monthly
5. Never
6. Behind
7. Receive
8. Classical
9. Satisfy

The correct answer is: a). b), d), e), h) and i).

# 12 of 20 – More about stress placement in words with more than one syllable

There are rules we can follow, for words which contain a specific set of letters, to work out where the stress should be placed.

For words ending in -**ade**, -**ee**, -**ese**, -**eer**, -**que**, -**ette**, or -**oon**, the last syllable is usually stressed.

For example, in the words:

* Lemonade
* Afternoon
* Unique
* Sightseer
* Guarantee

# 13 of 20 – Compound nouns

Compound nounsare nouns made up of two separate words. For example, “bookshop” is made up of the words book and shop.

In compound nouns, the **first** syllable is usually stressed. For example, in the words:

* Bookshop
* Volleyball
* Seafood
* Toothpaste
* Sunglasses

# 14 of 20 – Question 4

For the following words, identify which have the first or last syllable stressed:

1. Balloon
2. Japanese
3. Football
4. Cowboy
5. Arcade
6. Butterfly

The correct answers are:

Words with stress on the first syllable are:

c) **Foot**ball

d) **Cow**boy

f) **Butter**fly

These are all compound nouns, so the stress goes on the first syllable.

Words with stress on the last syllable are:

a) Ball**oon**

b) Japan**ese**

e) Ar**cade**

Words ending in **-oon, -ese** or **-ade** have the stress on the last syllable.

# 15 of 20 – Stress placement in words with multiple meanings

There are some words which can have more than one meaning depending on where the stress is placed.

For example, the word **contest** can be a **noun** if the first syllable is stressed, and a **verb** if the last syllable is stressed.

In these cases, just follow the same rules as before. Remember - **nouns** usually stress the **first** syllable, while **verbs** usually stress the **last** syllable.

Here are some more examples where, if stress is placed on the first syllable, it is a noun, and if it is placed on the second syllable, it is a verb:

* Present
* Desert
* Record

# 16 of 20 – Question 6

In the following sentence, for the word in brackets, should the stress be placed on the first or last syllable?

“Carmen is going to (record) herself singing her favourite song.”

The correct answer is: Record is being used as a **verb** in this sentence, so the **last** syllable should be stressed.

# 17 of 20 – Question 7

In the following sentence, for the word in brackets, should the stress be placed on the first or last syllable?

“I went to a (protest) last week in London.”

The correct answer is: Protest is being used as a **noun** in this sentence, so the **first** syllable should be stressed.

# 18 of 20 – Question 8

In the following sentence, for the word in brackets, should the stress be placed on the first or last syllable?

“They’re going to (present) him with an award at the ceremony.”

The correct answer is: Present is being used as a **verb** in this sentence, so the **last** syllable should be stressed.

# 19 of 20 – Stress placement to emphasise meaning

Stress can be used to make it clearer what we mean when we are talking about something.

For example, when we are correcting someone’s question, stressing the new or misunderstood word helps us to tell them exactly what we mean. In the following example:

“Did you drive home after work?” … “No. I took the **train**.”

Putting extra stress on the word **train** helps to make it clear to the other person that we did not drive; we took the train instead.

This should also be used with **verbs**.

If we are changing the meaning of a sentence or question by changing the verb, the **new verb** should be stressed. For example, in the following:

“Did you see Miguel get home?” … “No, but I **heard** him come back.”

Putting extra stress on the word **heard** makes it obvious that we did not see Miguel, we heard him instead.

# 20 of 20 – Session conclusion

Well done, you have completed this session on Sentence Stress.

You should now be able to:

* Know where to place stress in sentences
* Know where to place stress in words with more than one syllable
* Know where to place stress in words with multiple meanings
* Know where to place stress to emphasise meaning

If you have any questions about anything covered in this session, please speak to your tutor for more help.