Stress and intonation

Stress

Stress is the relative emphasis that may be given to certain syllables in a word, or to certain words in a phrase or sentence. In English, stressed syllables are louder than non-stressed syllables. Also, they are longer and have a higher pitch.

English is a stress-timed language. That means that stressed syllables appear at a roughly steady tempo, whereas non-stressed syllables are shortened.

0:00 / 0:17

| holiday, alone, admiration, confidential, degree, weaker, nervous, parents |

In spoken language, grammatical words (auxiliary verbs, prepositions, pronouns, articles, …) usually do not receive any stress. Lexical words, however, (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, …) must have at least one stressed syllable.

There is no rule, however, about which syllable is stressed in a word with more than one syllable. You will need to learn the stress of words by heart.

Tip: You can look up the word in a dictionary that provides IPA transcript. The symbol ‘ in front of a syllable indicates that the following syllable is stressed. Look at some examples of IPA transcripts:

François: [ˈɡoːdɑ̃] ➞ garden ➞ the first syllable is stressed: garden

0:00 / 0:02
STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE

STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE

meadow

mushroom

thermometer

humidity
In the English language, there is one phenomenon concerning stress that you can observe: There are many verbs that consist of two syllables. Mostly, the stress is on the second syllable. Due to historical developments, the same word has become a noun. The noun, however, is stressed differently: the stress is on the first syllable. Look at the examples:

- to **record** → a **record**
  
  0:00 / 0:04

- to **permit** → a **permit**
  
  0:00 / 0:04

- to **address** → an **address**
  
  0:00 / 0:03

- to **export** → an **export**
  
  0:00 / 0:04
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**CHECK (1)**

**CHECK AND SHOW SOLUTIONS**

**Intonation**

lingoneo
The entire variation of pitch while speaking is called intonation. A very obvious difference in intonation can be observed when looking at statements and questions. Take for example American English:

- When someone utters an echo or asks declarative questions (like "He found it on the street?") or utters a statement (like "He found it on the street."), the intonation (i.e. the voice) is rising to a higher pitch at the end.
- When someone asks a wh-question (like "Where did he find it?") or utters a statement (like "He found it on the street."), the intonation (i.e. the voice) is falling to a lower pitch at the end.
- Yes or no questions ("Did he find it on the street?") often have a rising end, but not always.

Intonation also deals with the stress of words. Words are stressed to make a certain emphasis. A sentence can be spoken differently, depending on the speaker's intention.

- I did not read anything about the disaster.
- I did not read anything about the disaster.
- I did not read anything about the disaster.
- I did not read anything about the disaster.
- I did not read anything about the disaster.
- I did not read anything about the disaster.

Somebody else met Gary, not me.
I met Gary somewhere else.
I met someone else on the street, not Gary.