

Stress – pronunciation

Stress is one of the most important speech strategies used by English speakers to communicate meaning. English speakers use stress to highlight information they think is important. English stress is as important as English sound. Every English word of more than one syllable has a dictionary-defined stress pattern.

How does it work?

The English stress system is based on the CONTRAST between stressed and unstressed syllables, stressed and unstressed words. This contrast is fundamental to English speech, and if you know how to produce this contrast, and when to produce it, you will be well on the way to communicating your meaning effectively. Generally, stressed syllables are longer and sometimes louder than unstressed syllables. They also have some pitch change or movement of the voice up or down.

There are three basic levels of stress in English:

syllable stress in words	contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables in words e.g. many people believe
key word stress	stress in longer speech chunks, clauses or sentences e.g. / that in an incre as ingly glo balised world /
focus word stress	the syllable in the stressed word which has the strongest pitch change in a speech chunk e.g. / that in an incre as ingly <u>glo</u> balised <u>world</u> /

Please note:

- speech chunks and pauses are marked with a slash / or // for a longer pause
- stressed syllables in key words are marked in **bold**
- focus words (the most important key words) have an **underlined** stressed syllable
- arrows mark the direction of pitch movement of the voice (e.g. ↘ for falling intonation; ↗ for rising intonation)

What will happen if I use equal stress or if I stress words incorrectly?

You may seriously interfere with your communication with your listener. Listeners may not be able to recognise even simple vocabulary and may not know which information you want to highlight. You also risk tiring listeners if you stress all or most syllables in words equally because they will have to make too much effort trying to recognise words when they should be paying attention to key and focus words.

Lack of stress on key words can seriously impair your effectiveness when giving a report or a presentation on new or unfamiliar material, such as the results of research.

