

Speak Easy #005 – Sentence stress: Part 1

AD-FREE

Episode description

Knowing which words to stress in a sentence (and which words not to stress) is an extremely important part of English pronunciation. In this episode, Suzanne and Andrew teach you all you need to know about sentence stress. Take a listen and make your English pronunciation sound more natural.

Fun fact

English is a stressed-timed language, which means that stressed syllables occur in a systematic pattern in a sentence. Shorter, unstressed syllables fill in the gaps between stressed syllables and a regular, rhythmic pattern is created.

Material included in the study guide

- Transcript
- Practice exercises
- Bonus audio downloads



Transcript

Andrew: Speak Easy #05. Hey, Suzanne.

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew. How's it going?

Andrew: I'm good, and you?

Suzanne: I'm so excited that we're doing Speak Easy episode number 5. How about that?

Andrew: Speak Easy number 5, wow. We're moving right along with this series and, of course, Speak Easy is our pronunciation series where we tell you lots of tips and tricks you can use to make your English sound clearer and more understandable.

Suzanne: Yes.

Andrew: Today, Suzanne, we are going to look at a really, really important factor, really important element of English pronunciation, that is, stress.

Suzanne: Yes, in English, we're all about the stress. That's how it works.

Andrew: We're stressed out.

Suzanne: We're totally stressed out all the time. Today, we're gonna be talking about sentence stress. And this is actually Part 1 in a series of Speak Easy episodes that we will do addressing stress. So we're dealing with sentence stress, which is super important because sentence stress is when you emphasize certain words in your thought group—so your, like, your thought or your sentence in order to convey your message more effectively. So you're stressing, like, the important words so that your message is really understandable.

Andrew: Yeah, the grouping of stressed and unstressed words within the context of a sentence. I think this is what we mean by sentence stress, right? The combination of stressed and unstressed words together.

Suzanne: Exactly. It's kind of, like, you know, you put your foot on the gas pedal for some words and some you take your foot off. So, basically, there are four main things that we do with our voice in order to make a word more emphasized or stressed in a sentence.

Andrew: OK, Suzanne, so let's get into it. The four elements of sentence stress. I'm dying to know—what are they?

Suzanne: I know. It's so exciting. So the first one is volume change.

- Andrew: Volume change.
- Suzanne: Yeah, so when you stress a word, you might add volume like, “Where you going?” Right? Or, “Hey, hey Andrew!” Right? I might change my volume, make it louder, or I might make it quieter as well.
- Andrew: OK.
- Suzanne: So you can change your volume on the word. The second thing you can do, and this is the most common, is to change your pitch.
- Andrew: Pitch?
- Suzanne: Pitch change, yeah.
- Andrew: What is pitch?
- Suzanne: So pitch is when you change the note of your voice. For example, you might be speaking down here and kind of low. And then you might go, “Oh, right.” And you might change your note or pitch in your voice, right? It might go up. Like, you might say, “Where are you going?” “Where are you going?” Right? This is going to emphasize that word that you change the pitch on.
- Andrew: OK. So, the second element is pitch change. We have volume change and pitch change. What is the third element?
- Suzanne: The third thing you can do is to elongate or stretch out your vowels.
- Andrew: OK.
- Suzanne: Exactly, exactly. For using the same example, you could say, “Where are you going?” “Where are you going?” Right? So you’re really making that go a little bit longer.
- Andrew: The vowels are just getting stretched out really long.
- Suzanne: Yeah. “Really like that movie,” for example, right?
- Andrew: OK.
- Suzanne: The fourth and final thing you can do is you can add articulation on your consonants. So our consonants, right, like /p/, /t/, /k/, and /b/, /d/, /g/. You can maybe add more emphasis, more intensity, more articulation on those sounds.
- Andrew: OK, so you’re manipulating a consonant sound to add stress?

- Suzanne: Yeah, so let's say if we have the same sentence, like, "Where are you going?" You might more /g/, /g/ on the "G." Like more force, more push on the "G." Like, "Where are you going?" "Where are you going?" /g/, right? And that's more air, more intensity. And that can add stress to the word.
- Andrew: I was just thinking of an example of where I was stuck in traffic and I was really frustrated and somebody cut me off, and I said, "Oh come on! Come on!"
- Suzanne: Exactly.
- Andrew: Really strong "K" sound. Come on!
- Suzanne: Yes, and that's a great place to add articulation, right? When you're angry, right?
- Andrew: Yeah, yeah.
- Suzanne: That's a good time, and volume. You might change your volume, too. Usually you don't change your pitch so much when you're angry, but more volume and added articulation.
- Andrew: Yeah. For example, if I was talking on my cell phone to my friend who was waiting for me at the café, and maybe my friend said, "Well, where are you? You're late." And I would say, "Oh, I'm coming right now," right? I wouldn't use this same emphasized "K" sound in that context.
- Suzanne: Exactly.
- Andrew: But it's the same word, so, yeah. This is just an example of that added articulation on a consonant sound.
- Suzanne: Yes, perfect.
- Andrew: OK, Sue, so the plan for today is that we are going to listen to a conversation example between two roommates. And they're deciding about what they should eat for dinner, actually. So we will listen to that example and then we're going to pick it apart and really look at where the stress was in their speech and talk about it and describe how our listeners can also incorporate these elements into their own speech when they are speaking English. Does that sound good?
- Suzanne: Sounds awesome.
- Andrew: Cool. So let's listen to the example right now.

Roommate 1: Hey, roomie. Let's go get a bite, I'm starved.

Roommate 2: Good idea. Where do you wanna go?

Roommate 1: There's a nice Italian place about a block from here.

Roommate 2: Are you set on Italian? What about a Thai place?

Roommate 1: Oh, do you know one?

Roommate 2: I sure do. It's new, the food is delicious, and they deliver!

Roommate 1: Great. Let's order.

Suzanne: Now that we've heard the example, Andrew, I wanted to ask you if maybe you can point out any examples of volume change on the words that were emphasized?

Andrew: So in this conversation, we heard two roommates talking about getting a bite to eat, and one of the roommates suggested, hey, let's eat, I'm hungry. And one of the roommates said great idea, good idea. I think this was an example of volume change. We heard this articulated a little bit louder when she agreed with him.

Suzanne: Yeah, because I think she was really thinking that's a great idea, almost, like, so glad you said that, you know?

Andrew: Let's listen to that part of the conversation again one more time.

Good idea. Where do you wanna go?

Good idea. Where do you wanna go?

Andrew: Yeah, so we definitely hear some volume change there, and also I heard the volume change at the very end of the conversation, when the two roommates decided about eating at a Thai place instead of an Italian place. Now let's listen to that part of the conversation, at the very end, one more time.

Great. Let's order.

Great. Let's order.

Andrew: So, yeah, Sue. Did you hear the volume change there?

Suzanne: Yeah, so, I think at the end the roommate says, "Great. Let's order." I think the volume was slightly louder.

- Andrew: OK, so the second element of sentence stress is pitch change, pitch change. Sue, where did you hear pitch change in this conversation?
- Suzanne: Now, pitch change is one of the most common, if not the most common, element of stress. When the roommate that is hungry offers a nice Italian place, Ital-, Italian place, there's a bit of a pitch change. I think then when the other roommate offers, what about a Thai place, a Thai, and she goes up a little bit in her pitch as well.
- Andrew: Right, because these are questions, right? Also, like, where do you wanna? Where do you wanna go? You have that rising intonation, that rising pitch when we're asking a question.
- Suzanne: Exactly. And also, when she asks, are you set on Italian? What about a Thai place? Because if you think about it, she's kind of comparing and contrasting those two kinds of food. So she's really emphasizing those by using a comparison-contrasting tone, right? Set on Italian? What about a Thai place?
- Andrew: I mean, I wish almost I had a piano here to illustrate, but what about a Thai place? "Da da da da da daa da," right?
- Suzanne: Exactly, exactly. So you're hitting on another concept that we're going to talk about soon, and that's intonation. Right now, intonation is just one element of stress, but when we get more in-depth about intonation, we're gonna talk about the different notes that occur within English pitch change. So we'll get into that.
- Andrew: So we'll save that for a later time.
- Suzanne: Yeah. But you're very astute, Andrew. That's good.
- Andrew: Getting ahead of myself here.
- The third element that we're talking about today, though, is elongated vowels, stretching vowels. And so did you hear any stretched vowels in this conversation?
- Suzanne: Yeah, I definitely heard a stretched vowel on, "Oh, do you know one?"
- Andrew: Oh. Yeah let's listen to that part of the conversation one more time.

Oh, do you know one?

Oh, do you know one?

- Andrew: So, it wasn't just "oh," right? It's not "oh," it's "oh," do you know one?

- Suzanne: “Oh,” yeah, exactly. So it’s a longer vowel.
- Andrew: I also think the very first word that we heard, “Hey, roomie.” “Hey,” “hey,” right? Not “hey,” “hey,” but “hey.”
- Suzanne: Yeah. Totally. Let’s look at the fourth and final element. So we have added articulation on consonants. I don’t know about you, Andrew, but I heard the /st/, /st/ when the roommate said, “I’m starved,” “starved,” right?
- Andrew: Right. “I’m starved.” Really prolonging that release of the “S” sound, right? “I’m starved,” “I’m starved.”
- Suzanne: Yes, the /st/ combination, exactly. And also when the other roommate said, offered about the Thai place, she said, “The food is delicious,” “delicious, and they deliver,” right? Like “delicious,” really, really milked those consonants.
- Andrew: Exactly.
- Suzanne: Cool, Andrew. So, that about wraps up our fifth Speak Easy episode on sentence stress, how to stress a word. In our next, Part 2 episode, we’re going to look at what to stress, now that we know how to stress a word, now we need to know what word to stress.
- Andrew: So stay tuned for our next Speak Easy episode, everyone. And if you have any questions or comments or feedback for us, we would definitely love to hear from you. The best way to get in touch with us is through email. You can send us an email to contact@Culips.com, C-O-N-T-A-C-T@Culips C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Practice exercises

The audio file for all exercises can be downloaded here: <https://goo.gl/QQSJ3n>

1. Listen to the following words and write down what kind of stress element you hear, e.g., volume change (VC), pitch change (PC), added articulation (AA), or elongated vowels (EV).

Crazy –	Let’s go –	Eventually –
What –	Anywhere –	No –
Really –	Oh –	Where –
Weird –	Why –	OK –

2. In the following phrases, underline the word you think should be stressed. Listen to the recording and see if you are correct! Then, write above the stressed word whether you hear volume change (VC), pitch change (PC), added articulation (AA), or elongated vowels (EV).

Where’s Mike?	I hated that movie.	Would you like sugar?
He said that?	I have so much work to do.	Join the club!
I only have one left.	That’s crazy!	Very interesting.

3. Try it! Try speaking the following phrases. Make sure you stress the underlined word(s) and add the corresponding stress elements next to each phrase. Listen to the recording to hear our version!

1. Did you want the <u>fries</u> or <u>salad</u> with your meal?	4. I’m gonna head to the <u>store</u> .	7. Where’s <u>Sam</u> ?
2. If you <u>lose</u> your <u>ID</u> , you’ll have to <u>pay</u> more <u>money</u> .	5. Can I <u>borrow</u> a <u>pen</u> ?	8. Oh <u>no</u> ! I <u>broke</u> it!
3. That movie was <u>so</u> good!	6. I need to make an <u>appointment</u> .	9. I <u>wish</u> I could <u>come</u> . I have to <u>file</u> this <u>report</u> .

Answers

The audio file for all exercises can be downloaded here: <https://goo.gl/QQSJ3n>

1. Listen to the following words and write down what kind of stress element you hear, e.g., volume change (VC), pitch change (PC), added articulation (AA), or elongated vowels (EV).

Crazy – PC	Let's go – VC, PC	Eventually – AA, PC
What – VC	Anywhere – VC	No – EV, PC
Really – PC	Oh – PC, EV	Where – PC
Weird – EV	Why – PC	OK – EV, PC

2. In the following phrases, underline the word you think should be stressed. Listen to the recording and see if you are correct! Then, write above the stressed word whether you hear volume change (VC), pitch change (PC), added articulation (AA), or elongated vowels (EV).

Where's <u>Mike</u> ? PC, VC	I <u>hated</u> that movie. EV AA PC	Would you like <u>sugar</u> ? PC
He <u>said</u> that? VC PC AA	I have <u>so</u> much <u>work</u> to do. EV PC	Join the <u>club</u> ! VC PC
I only have <u>one</u> left. EV PC	That's <u>crazy</u> ! AA EV PC	<u>Very</u> interesting. EV

3. Try it! Try speaking the following phrases. Make sure you stress the underlined word(s) and add the corresponding stress elements next to each phrase. Listen to the recording to hear our version!

1. Did you want the <u>fries</u> or <u>salad</u> with your meal? PC	4. I'm gonna head to the <u>store</u> . VC	7. Where's <u>Sam</u> ? VC
2. If you <u>lose</u> your <u>ID</u> , you'll have to <u>pay</u> more <u>money</u> . PC	5. Can I <u>borrow</u> a <u>pen</u> ? PC	8. Oh <u>no</u> ! I <u>broke</u> it! PC, VC, AA
3. That movie was <u>so</u> good! EV	6. I need to make an <u>appointment</u> . PC	9. I <u>wish</u> I could <u>come</u> . I have to <u>file</u> this <u>report</u> . PC, VC, EV

Episode credits

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