

Word Stress (Simple Words)

1- The nature of stress:

In English, when a word has more than one syllable, one of the syllables will be produced with more force, energy, and prominence than the rest, this emphasis is called stress. We mark a stressed syllable in transcription by placing a small vertical line (') high up before the syllable, and the stress may fall on the first, second, third or fourth syllable.

2- Factors of stress placement

1. **Loudness:** Stressed syllables seem to be louder to the listener's ear than unstressed ones.
2. **Duration or Syllable length:** Stressed syllables are longer than unstressed ones and take more time to pronounce than the vowel of the unstressed syllables, which is reduced in length.
3. **Vowel quality:** the stressed syllable mostly have strong vowels /e, æ, ɒ, a:, i:, ɔ:, ɜ:, əʊ, aɪ, aʊ.../ , whereas the weak vowels /ə, ɪ, ʊ/ are frequently unstressed in polysyllable words.
4. **Pitch of the voice:** it is the most efficient factor for recognizing the prominence of stressed syllable, in which the stressed syllable is pronounced with a higher pitch than unstressed ones.

One word cannot have two stresses. If you hear two stresses, you hear two words. It is true that there can be a "secondary" stress in some words. But it is much smaller than the primary (main) stress, and it is only used in long words containing more than two syllables.

- Stress in the monosyllable words (it is not marked in dictionary) E.g: Far /fa:/, Post /pəʊst/.

- Stress in polysyllabic words is marked with ('). E.g: Correct /kə'rekt/, dictionary /'dɪkʃənri/.

3- Levels of stress

- **1st Level: The primary stress** or (the accent) is strongest type of stress in prominence, that is, (longer, louder, and higher in pitch). E.g: fashion /'fæʃn/, event /ɪ'vent/, language /'læŋgwɪdʒ/.
- **2nd Level: The secondary stress** is weaker than the primary stress in prominence (without pitch). E.g : Examination /ɪg,zæmɪ'neɪʃn/ ; Photographic /fəʊtə'græfɪk/ ; Rewrite /,ri:'raɪt/.
- **3rd Level: Unstressed or zero stress** which is the absence of stress. It can be found in the weak syllables /ə,ɪ,ʊ/ and syllabic consonants. E.g: Money //, Design //, Enter //.

The choice of stress placement in the two-syllable words is either the first syllable or the second will be stressed according to the rules of stress placement on each one of them.

4- Two syllable words

- **Stress on first syllables:** Mostly in two-syllable nouns & adjectives the stress falls on the first syllable. E.g: PRESENT /'preznt/, Export /'ekspɔ:t/, CHINA /'tʃaɪnə/, Table /'teɪbl/, Camera /'kæmərə/. But there are some exceptions such as: HeaTHROW /,hi:θ'rəʊ/.
- **Stress on last syllable:** Most of two-syllable verbs receive the stress on the second syllable; To preSENT /prɪ'zent/, export /ɪk'spɔ:t/, deCIDE /dɪ'saɪd/, beGIN /bɪ'gɪn/, reCORD /'rekɔ:d/.

4.1- Verbs: We look first at verbs, the basic rule is that the second syllable receives stress if this second syllable of the verb contains a long vowel, diphthong, or if it ends with more than one consonant – that is, consonant cluster. E.g: Apply / ə'plai /; Attract /ə'trækt/; Arrive /ə'raɪv/; Begin /bɪ'gɪn/.

If the second syllable contains a short vowel and one final consonant or no one, the first syllable is stressed. E.g: Enter /'entə/; Open /'əʊpən/; Equal /'i:kwəl/; Envy /'envi/.

N.B: A final syllable is unstressed if it contains /əʊ/ (e.g: Follow/'fɒləʊ/, swallow /'swɒləʊ/).

4.2- Adjectives: Two-syllable simple adjectives are stressed on the first syllable. But sometimes is stressed on the second syllable if the second syllable contains a short vowel and one final consonant or no one. E.g: Lovely/'lʌvli/; Even /'i:vən /; Hollow /'hɒləʊ/; Divine /dɪ'vaɪn/; Direct / dɪ'rekt/; Alive /ə'laɪv/, Exact /ɪg'zækt/, Concise /kən'saɪs/, Precise /prə'saɪs/.

As with most of stress rules, there are some exceptions. For example: Honest/'ɒnɪst/; Perfect /'pɜ:fɪkt/ or /'pɜ:fekt/, both end with two consonants but are stressed on the first syllable. *Other two-syllable words such as adverbs and prepositions seem to behave like the nouns and adjectives in most of the time. E.g: Almost/'ɔ:lməʊst/; Obvious/'ɒbvɪəs/; Below /bɪ'ləʊ/; Alright /ɔ:l'raɪt/; Inside /ɪn'saɪd/.

4.3- Nouns: Nouns require different rules: if the second syllable contains a short vowel, the stress will usually fall on the first syllable; Otherwise, it will be on the second. E.g: Money /'mʌni/; Product/'prɒdʌkt/; Jacket /'dʒækt/; Balloon /bə'lu:n/; Design/dɪ'zaɪn/.

N.B: The syllable which contains the schwa /ə/ is often unstressed.

If a two-syllable word contain /ə/ in the 1st syllable, the stress will be on the 2nd syllable: Ahead / ə'hed/, Again / ə'gen/, Oppose / ə'pəʊz/, Suggest /sə'dʒest/, Forget /fə'get/, Forsake / fə'seɪk/; Percent/ pə'sent/, Perceive/ pə'si:v/; Survive/ sə'vaɪv/, Surprise/ sə'praɪz/.

If a two-syllable word contains /ə/ in the 2nd syllable, the stress will be on the 1st syllable: Ballad /'bæləd/, Alan /'ælən/; Purpose / 'pɜ:pəs /; Open /'əʊpən/; Circus /'sɜ:kəs/; Autumn / 'ɔ:təm/; Standard /'stændəd/; Major /'meɪdʒə/; Eastern /'i:stən/ ; Creature /'kri:tʃə/