



Sentence Stress and Rhythm

Sentence stress

Sentence stress is the governing stress in connected speech. All words have their individual stress in isolation. When words are connected into sense groups, and sense groups are connected into sentences, content words keep their stress, and function words lose their stress. The most important words in the sentence receive stronger stress. The last stressed word in the sentence receives the strongest stress with the help of a fall or a rise.


Example

ANN is READING a NEW \BOOK.


WHAT BOOK is she \READING? Does she
LIKE the /BOOK?

Note:

In this material, capital letters indicate stressed syllables and stressed one-syllable words; the backslash indicates the falling tone; the forward slash indicates the rising tone. Sentence stress is indicated according to the American variant of pronunciation.




Unstressed function words make sentences grammatically correct. They are not very important in terms of the information that they provide, and their meaning is usually understandable from their immediate surrounding in a sentence. Even if you don't get some quickly pronounced function words, the meaning of the whole sentence will be clear to you.

- 
- For example, a message from your friend says, "Missed train back Sunday." You will understand that it means "I missed my train. I will be back on Sunday", right? Only content words are written in the message, but the meaning is clear. In the same way you should listen for stressed content words in speech to understand the meaning of the whole utterance.



Sentence stress and rhythm



Sentence stress is the main means of providing rhythm in speech. Rhythm is the key to fluent English speech. Imagine a metronome beating the rhythm. The stressed syllables are like the beats of the metronome: regular, loud, and clear. The unstressed syllables between the beats are shortened, obscured, and joined together.




Look at this sentence:

Look at this sentence:

Kevin sent a letter.

Let's mark the stressed syllables:

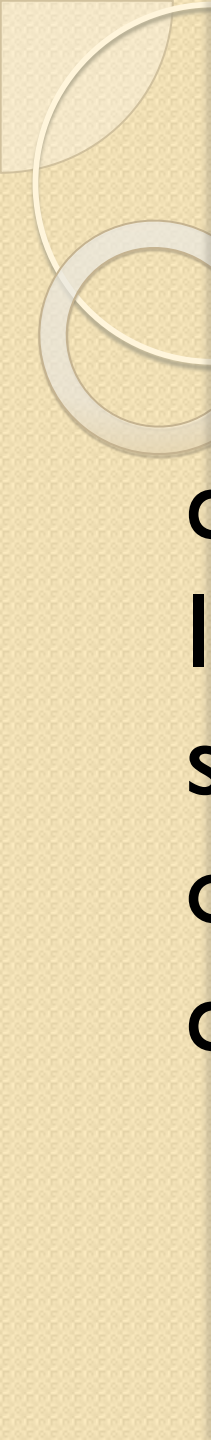
KEVin SENT a \LETter.



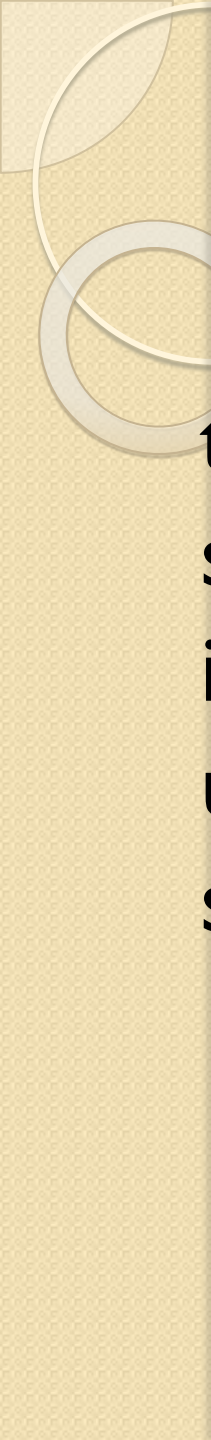
The pattern of stress in this sentence is stressed – unstressed – stressed – unstressed – stressed – unstressed, with equal number of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables.




Sentence stress and intonation



Sentence stress is the key component of English intonation. Intonation organizes words into sentences, distinguishes different types of sentences, and adds emotional coloring to utterances.



Sentence stress organizes the words in the sentence rhythmically, making the stressed syllables occur at regular intervals and jamming together the unstressed syllables between the stressed syllables.

- 
- Sentence stress organizes the words in the sentence into sense groups by joining the unstressed syllables to the main stressed syllable in the group and marking the end of the sense group with a slight pause if necessary.