

# Word Stress

## Let's Learn!

### What is word stress?

In English, we do not say each syllable with the same force or strength. In one word, we accentuate one syllable. We say one syllable very **loudly** (big, strong, important) and **all the other syllables very quietly**.

Let's take these 3 words as example: **photograph**, **photographer** and **photographic**. Do they sound the same when spoken? No. Because we accentuate (stress) one syllable in each word. And it is not the same syllable. So the '**shape**' of each word is different.

Say these words.

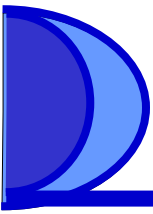
- **PHO**-to-graph = 3 syllables, stress on #1
- pho-**TO**-graph-er = 4 syllables, stress on #2
- pho-to-**GRAPH**-ic = 4 syllables, stress on #3

This happens in all words with 2 or more syllables: **TEACH**er, Ja**PAN**, **CH**ina, a**BOVE**, conver**SA**tion, **IN**teresting, im**PORT**ant, de**MAND**, et**CET**era. The syllables that are not stressed are **weak** or **small** or **quiet**.

There are two very important rules about word stress:

1. **One word, one stress.** (One word cannot have two stresses. So if you hear two stresses, you have heard two words, not one word. Two stresses cannot be one word. It is true that there can be a "secondary" stress in some words. But a secondary stress is much smaller than the main stress, and is only used in long words.)
2. **The stress is always on a vowel.**

Here are some more, rather complicated, rules that can help you understand where to put the stress. But do not rely on them completely because there are many exceptions.



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## A. Stress on the first syllable

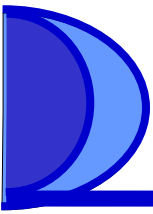
rule	examples
Most 2-syllable nouns	<b>PRE</b> sent <b>EX</b> port <b>CH</b> ina <b>T</b> able
Most 2-syllable adjectives	<b>PRE</b> sent <b>SLE</b> nder <b>CLE</b> ver <b>HAP</b> py

## B. Stress on last syllable

rule	examples
Most 2-syllable verbs	pre <b>SENT</b> ex <b>PORT</b> de <b>CIDE</b> be <b>GIN</b>

## C. Stress on penultimate syllable (penultimate = second from end)

rule	examples
Words ending in -ic	<b>GRAPH</b> ic geo <b>GRAPH</b> ic geo <b>LOG</b> ic
Words ending in -sion and -tion	tele <b>VI</b> sion reve <b>L</b> ation



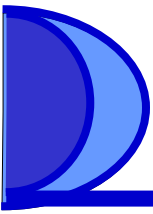
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D. Stress on ante-penultimate syllable (ante-penultimate = third from end)

rule	examples
Words ending in <b>-cy, -ty, -phy</b> and <b>-gy</b>	de <b>MO</b> cracy dependa <b>BI</b> lity pho <b>TO</b> graphy ge <b>OL</b> ogy
Words ending in <b>-al</b>	<b>CR</b> itical geo <b>LO</b> gical

E. Compound words (words with two parts)

rule	examples
For compound <b>nouns</b> , the stress is on the first part	<b>BLACK</b> bird <b>GREEN</b> house
For compound <b>adjectives</b> , the stress is on the second part	bad- <b>TEM</b> pered old- <b>FASH</b> ioned
For compound <b>verbs</b> , the stress is on the second part	under <b>STAND</b> over <b>FLOW</b>



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## Let's Try!

For each question, the correct choice is the one in which the stressed is capitalized. Read each sentence and choose the letter of the right answer.

1. She looks amazing in this photograph.
  - a. PHO-to-graph
  - b. pho-TO-graph
2. Whose computer is this?
  - a. com-PU-ter
  - b. com-pu-TER
3. Can you pass me a plastic spoon?
  - a. PLAS- tic
  - b. plas-TIC
4. Couldn't you understand what he was saying?
  - a. un-DER-stand
  - b. un-der-STAND
5. I was born in Brazil.
  - a. BRA-zil
  - b. bra-ZIL
6. Voting in elections is one of your most important duty.
  - a. im-POR-tant
  - b. im-por-TANT
7. I can't decide which book to buy.
  - a. DE-cide
  - b. de-CIDE
8. How do you pronounce this word?
  - a. PRO-nounce
  - b. pro-NOUNCE
9. My brother wants to become a photographer.
  - a. PHO-to-graph-er
  - b. pho-TO-graph-er
10. We had a really interesting conversation last night at the bar.
  - a. con-VER-sa-tion
  - b. con-ver-SA-tion