

Sentence Stress

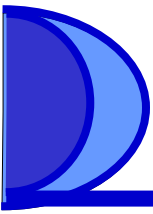
Let's Learn!

Sentence stress is another valuable key for speaking and understanding English. Sentence stress occurs when we say certain words more loudly and with more emphasis than others. In English, we stress **content words** because they are essential to the meaning of the sentence. In general, shorter words or words that are clear from the context don't get stressed.

What words are stressed?

Content words include nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Negative words such as *not* or *never* also get stressed because they affect the meaning of the sentence. Modals, too, can change the meaning of a sentence. Here is a list of words to stress in an English sentence:

- nouns (people, places, things)
- verbs (actions, states)
- adjectives (words that modify nouns)
- adverbs (words that modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, or entire sentences)
- negative words (*not, never, neither, etc.*)
- modals (*should, could, might, etc.* but not *will* or *can*)
- *yes, no*, and auxiliary verbs in short answers (e.g. **Yes**, she **does**.)
- quantifiers (*some, many, no, all, one, two, three, etc.*)
- Wh- Question words (*what, where, when, why, how, etc.* – note that *what* is often unstressed when speaking quickly because it's so common)



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What words are not stressed?

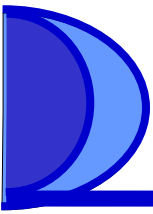
Some words don't carry a lot of importance in an English sentence. Short words such as articles, prepositions, and conjunctions don't take stress. Pronouns don't usually get stressed either because the context often makes it clear who we're talking about. The BE verb and all auxiliary verbs don't carry much meaning – only the main verb does. Here is a list of words that shouldn't be stressed in an English sentence.

- articles (*a, an, the*)
- prepositions (*to, in, at, on, for, from, etc.*)
- conjunctions (*and, or, so, but, etc.*)
- personal pronouns (*I, you, he, she, etc.*)
- possessive adjectives (*my, your his, her, etc.*)
- Be verb (*am, is, are, was, were, etc.*)
- auxiliary verbs (*be, have, do* in two-part verbs or questions)
- the modals *will* and *be going to* (because they're common, and the future tense is often clear from the context)
- the modal *can* (because it's so common)

In the sentence; *I want to go.*

We do not say every word in the sentence with the same stress or force. We make the important words BIG and the unimportant words small. The important words in this sentence are **WANT** and **GO**.

- I **WANT** to **GO**.
- I **WANT** to **GO** to **WORK**.
- I **DON'T WANT** to **GO** to **WORK**.
- I **DON'T WANT** to **GO** to **WORK** at **NIGHT**.



Sentence Stress

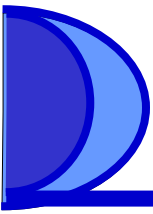
More examples:

Listen and repeat the following examples. The words (or syllables when the words has more than one) that should be stressed are in **bold**.

- He **can't speak Spanish**.
- I can **speak Japanese**.
- **Yes, I can**.
- **No, I can't**.
- They **aren't sure**.
- We are going to **study tonight**.
- I'll **ask the teacher for help**.
- She does **not know the answer**.
- I **don't know the answer, either**.
- I am **German**.

Note that the stress on modals such as can, might, and will and auxiliary verbs such as be, have, and do is only dropped when the modal or auxiliary is followed by something. So in a positive sentence or a question, we don't stress the modal or auxiliary (e.g. **I can ski.** / **Can you ski?** / **You are cold.** / **Are you cold?**)

However, in a short answer with nothing after the modal or auxiliary, we must stress it because it would be awkward to finish a sentence without stress in English (**Yes, I can.** / **No, I can't.** / **Yes, you are.** / **No, you aren't.**).



Sentence Stress

Let's Try!

A. Underline the words that should be stressed in the following sentences. If a word has two or more syllables, underline the syllable that should be stressed. Then, read your answers to your teacher putting emphasis on the words or syllables that are stressed.

Ex. We don't need to register for the next session.

1. He is not familiar with this new computer program.
2. The kids are at the park.
3. Do you have any brothers or sisters?
4. Do you prefer tea or coffee?
5. He said he has a dog, not a cat.
6. The boys are playing a video game.
7. Are they going to come to the party?
8. They bought a red car for their daughter.
9. Why aren't you doing your homework?
10. She doesn't like bread.
11. Where are you going after class?
12. My sister wants to buy a black car.
13. His computer is broken.
14. I've never heard of that before, but it makes sense.
15. The athlete ran quickly and won the competition.
16. They've been writing the test for a long time.
17. What are you doing tonight?
18. They are Brazilian.
19. Some people prefer Macs, but many others prefer PCs.
20. My dad works for a big accounting firm.