



Stress in Sentences

English is a **stress-timed language**, which means some syllables are said longer and louder, and some syllables are said shorter and softer. This gives English its rhythm and flow - long, short, loud, soft, stressed, unstressed. This also makes English different from other languages that are **syllable-timed languages**, like Mandarin Chinese and Italian, in which all syllables are given approximately an equal amount of stress.

In spoken English, only the important words will receive the stress in a sentence. Take for example the sentence *I finished it yesterday*. In normal intonation, the words *finished* and *yesterday* would receive the stress, and the words *I* and *it* would be unstressed.

The important words in a sentence are also called the **content words**, which are the words that carry the meaning in the sentence. Here's a chart that shows some of the most common categories of content words in English.

STRESSED - content words (meaning)
Nouns (but not pronouns)
Main verbs
Adjectives, adverbs
Negatives ("I can do it" vs. "I can't do it")
Wh-words (Who, What, Where, Why, etc)

Let's practice identifying the content words in sentences and the stress patterns that would normally accompany the sentences. (Note: It is ultimately up to the speaker to decide which words they want to stress in the sentence, so these examples will show the normal stress patterns of American English.)



Practice Sentences:

Sentence	Content Words	Stress Pattern
You must be joking!	must, joking	you MUST be JOK ing!
I'm excited to go to the concert.	excited, go, concert	i'm ex C ited to GO to the CON cert.
I'm cooking steak tonight.	cooking, steak, tonight	i'm COO king STEAK to NIGHT .
She bought a necklace.	bought, necklace	she BOUGHT a NECK lace.
What he wants is a mystery.	what, wants, mystery	WHAT he WANTS is a MYST ery.

Thanks for reading! Make sure you watch the video that goes along with this resource ([Stress in Sentences](#)) and contact me if you have any questions! Happy studying!

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