



Summary: *What is stress?*

1. Word stress

A stressed syllable is pronounced with relatively more force than unstressed syllables, a more exact articulation of the consonants and a clearer articulation of vowels.

Compared to unstressed syllables, **stressed syllables are:**

1. louder
 2. different in pitch (usually higher, possibly lower)
 3. relatively longer
 4. articulated with purer vowels
 5. accompanied by an increase in muscular movement
- = 5 interrelated variables that constitute word stress

Unstressed syllables, on the other hand, are produced with less force and less clarity of articulation, their consonants are more weakly articulated or even left out [elision] and the vowels lose their clarity because they are reduced to a greater or lesser degree [reduction].

(adapted from Underhill 2008: 52ff.)

Exercise: Please indicate the stressed syllable and where you can find elisions or reductions in the word!

1. immediately
2. pleasant
3. closely
4. argument

- unstressed monophthongs (=single vowel sounds) reduce towards the central, neutral **Schwa-sound [ə]** (exceptions: [i:] often reduces to [ɪ] and [u:] often reduces to [ʊ])
- unstressed diphthongs (= two vowel sounds joined in one syllable to form one speech sound) often lose their energy and glide quality and merge into one 'greyish' monophthong

2. Sentence stress

The speaker uses stress in a sentence or *thought group* **to highlight the intended meaning**. In natural speech, isolated words are connected and melt into a **stream of speech**, with final and initial sounds of neighbouring words joining together [linking]. In connected speech, the English rhythm is mainly formed by the speaker's choice of sentence stress. This main stress within a thought group plays a more important role than word stresses.

Before reading a text aloud, try and **follow the steps** below:

1. Decide where a **thought group** starts and finishes (often indicated by a pause and/or fall of pitch)!
2. Identify the **focus word** of each thought group (which is usually a content word, provides new or important information and can often be found at the end of a thought group)!
3. Indicate the **word stress** in each focus word!
 - Remember that the stressed syllable of each focus word is pronounced louder and more clearly than all other unstressed syllables, has a different (usually higher) pitch and is formed with relatively longer and purer vowel sounds) !
4. **Practise reading** the text **aloud** by connecting the words of each thought group together, using pauses and pitch changes to indicate when a new thought is about to start.

(adapted from Gilbert 2005, 137ff.)