Sentence Stress Summary (part 2)

*Using the correct stress patterns in English gives you the rhythm and fluency of English.*

Every language has predictable patterns that are used and expected by native speakers. When you don’t use these predictable patterns, it is difficult for your listener to understand you. Sentence Stress is one of these predictable patterns.

The combination of stressed & unstressed syllables and words creates the rhythm of English.

Just like there are specific syllables we stress in words, there are also specific words we stress in our sentences.

You can generally divide words into two categories:

**Content Words** (stressed) & **Function Words** (unstressed)
(see sentence stress part 1)

Content words carry the most meaning in a sentence. If you were only to say the content words, your listener would still be able to understand the general idea of your message.

Ex: If I said, “horse, ran, field, jumped, mud”, you probably would understand the general idea of my sentence, which was “The horse ran across the field and jumped into the mud”.

The function words are all the extra words I didn’t say, which were ‘the, across, the, and, into, the’. They *don’t* get the stress or emphasis in pronunciation.

Stress patterns change in a sentence depending on the meaning.

**Basic Sentence Stress Rules**

1. **New Information**: when new information is being communicated, then stress the word that conveys the new information.
   
   A: Are we going to the restaurant?
   
   B: Yes, we’re going to the Italian restaurant.
   
   A: I thought we were going to the Mexican restaurant.

2. **Contrasting ideas**: stress the words that are being contrasted.
   
   Ted *likes* sports, but he doesn’t *love* them.
   
   The *black* shoes are nice, but the *red* shoes are better.
   
   I said *Wednesday* not *Thursday*.
3. **Shifting stress**: change the meaning of a sentence by shifting the stressed word.

When you stress a specific word in a sentence then it communicates to your listener that the stressed word is the most important information in the message.

Who is going to the party?: **She**’s going to the party tonight.
Are you sure she is going?: She **is** going to the party tonight.
What is she doing tonight?: She’s **going** to the party tonight.
Where is she going tonight?: She is going to the party **tonight**.
When is she going: She is going to the party **tonight**.

4. **Negation**: always stress the negative word in a sentence.

I will **NOT** answer that question.
He’s **NOT** coming.
She **DOES**n’t care for Sushi.
There’s **NO WAY** I’m touching that spider.

5. **Clarification**: always stress the word that needs clarification.

Did you say **THIRty**?
No, I said **THURS**day.
So it’s not thir**TEEN**?
Sentence Stress Worksheet (part 2)

New Information
A: Are we going to the restaurant?
B: Yes, we’re going to the Italian restaurant.
A: I thought we were going to the Mexican restaurant.
B: No, Sally likes Italian best.

A: Are we going to the restaurant tonight?
B: No, we’re going to the restaurant tomorrow night.

Contrasting ideas
Ted likes sports, but he doesn’t love them.
The black shoes are nice, but the red shoes are better.
I said Wednesday not Thursday.

Shifting stress
Who is going to the party?: She’s going to the party tonight.
Are you sure she is going?: She is going to the party tonight.
What is she doing tonight?: She’s going to the party tonight.
Where is she going tonight?: She is going to the party tonight.
When is she going: She is going to the party tonight.

1. “I didn’t say he took my car”: it wasn’t me, it was someone else.
2. “I didn’t say he took my car”: it’s not true that I said that.
3. “I didn’t say he took my car”: it wasn’t said, but it might have been suggested.
4. “I didn’t say he took my car”: it might have been someone else.
5. “I didn’t say he took my car”: he might have just borrowed it.
6. “I didn’t say he took my car”: it was someone else’s car.
7. “I didn’t say he took my car”: he took something else besides my car, maybe a wallet.

Negation
I will NOT answer that question.
He’s NOT coming.
She DOESN’T care for Sushi.
There’s NO WAY I’m touching that spider.

Clarification
Did you say THIRty?
No, I said THURSday.
So it’s not thirTEEN?