

Syllable Stress Rules

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Lesson Outcome: To become more aware of syllable stress rules.
To understand that syllable stress rules are unreliable.

Remember that the best way to learn syllable stress is by paying attention to the syllable stress that native speakers use.

Learning by listening is better than trying to follow rules because:

- 1] there are many rules
- 2] there are many exceptions to each rule.

There are many exceptions to pronunciation rules in English because over many years English has borrowed words from other languages resulting in varying spelling patterns and pronunciation. So remember not to rely on the rules. You can check the word stress with the IPA at <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

Rules that are always true:

In every multi-syllable English word there is one stressed syllable.

Rules that are often true but not always:

1] When a multi-syllable word has a long vowel, usually this is stressed.
Exceptions include the words 'colleague' and 'suburb'.

2] Stress is usually on the first syllable of 2 syllable nouns

'pen/cil	'a/pple	'prin/ter	'Chi/na
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and 2 syllable adjectives

'o/pen	'fa/mous	'cle/ver	'clum/sy
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3] Stress is usually on the last syllable of 2 syllable verbs.

to re/'view	to de/'cide	to be/'gin	to o/'bey
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Exceptions include 'to answer', 'to borrow'.



Syllable Stress Rules

4] Stress is on the penultimate syllable (penultimate means 'second from end') for words with the endings below:

Words ending in -ic	' gra /phic, ge/o/' gra /phic, a/' ll er/gic, e/' cc en/tric, al/co/' ho /lic
Words ending in -sion and -tion	de/mon/' stra /tion, e/du/' ca /tion, in/for/' ma /tion, re/ve/' la /tion, so/' lu /tion, a/' do p/tion, ex/' cur /sion, dis/' cu /ssion
Words ending in -ious	de/' li /cious, ' glo /rious, ' con /scious, re/pe/' ti /tious, in/' fec /tious

5] Stress on ante-penultimate syllable (ante-penultimate means 'third from end') for words with the endings below:

Words ending in -cy , -ty , -phy and -gy	de/' mo /cra/cy, de/pen/da/' bi /li/ty, pho/' to /gra/phy, ge/' o /lo/gy, ' sa /ni/ty
Words ending in -al	' cri /ti/cal, ge/o/' lo /gi/cal, ' e /thi/cal
Words ending in -ise	' su /per/vise, ' or /ga/nise, ' e /xer/cise, ' ad /ver/tise, ' re /cog/nise
Words ending in -ate	co/' mmu /ni/cate, ' re /gu/late, a/' ppre /ci/ate, ' cal /cu/late, ' con /cen/trate

See these endings in a pattern:

' e /qual	e/' qua /li/ty	' e /qua/lise	e/qua/li/' sa /tion
' fi /nal	fi/' na /li/ty	' fi /na/lise	fi/na/li/' sa /tion
' neu /tral	neu/' tra /li/ty	' neu /tra/lise	neu/tra/li/' sa /tion



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6] Compound nouns usually have the most stress on the stressed syllable of the first word:

'class / room	'post / o / ffice	'air / port
'Char/tered/A/ccoun/tant	'le / gal / ad / vice	'bus/ness / re / port

7] Phrasal verbs usually have the most stress on the stressed syllable of the second word:

call / 'off	carry / 'on	look / 'up
o / ver / 'flow	up / 'grade	break / 'up

8] Compound adjectives usually have the most stress is on the stressed syllable of the second word.

bright / 'red	old / 'fa / shioned	well / 'dressed
ea / sy / 'go / ing	light / 'green	bad / 'tem / pered

9] Homographs.

Homographs are words that are spelled the same yet have different meaning and possibly different pronunciation. A number of common homographs were covered in Lesson 3 on Word Stress.

At least 170 verb–noun (or adjective) pairs exist. This can be overwhelming so just check that you are pronouncing the most common ones correctly. You can see a full list here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_homographs

Homographs often have the stress on the first syllable of a noun /adjective and the second syllable of a verb but there are many exceptions to this. It is important to note that there are a number of homographs that native speakers vary where they put the stress. For example, some native speakers say te/le/'vi/sion and others say 'te/le/vi/sion, some say 'con/tro/ver/sy and con/'tro/ver/sy, some say 'an 'a/ddress' and some say 'an add/'ress'.

A few homographs are pronounced differently depending on region. In Britain, and Australia speakers say “a **pro**test” but in America they say “a **pro**test”. For a detailed description of differences in British and American pronunciation http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_and_British_English_pronunciation_differences

