

The most important rules for English word stress

Definition: Stress is an extra force used when pronouncing a particular word or syllable.

A syllable is any of the units into which a word may be divided. It usually consists of a vowel sound. This vowel sound can be alone as in “A”, or can be preceded by a consonant sound as in “To”, or can be followed by a consonant sound as in “Eat”, or it can be between two consonant sounds or more as in “Take”, “Shock”, “Sleep”, etc. So, a syllable equals (=) a vowel sound (=) one vowel sound or a diphthong. For example, in the word “Sleep” we have one vowel sound /i:/, but in the word “Take” we’ve got the diphthong (two vowel sounds) /e/

The weakest vowel sound in the English language is /ə/, and this sound is never stressed. It is called Schwa.

The Rules

1. A word of one syllable has stress on the first letter. E.g. 'Go - 'Hot - 'Long - 'Teach.
2. A word of two syllables:
 - a. A noun of two syllables has stress on the first syllable. N = '1 + 2 stress on 1
E.g. 'En/glish - 'Fa/ther - 'teach/er - 'Act/or - 'Pres/ent
But in “Be/'lief” stress is on syllable two because the first contains /ə/.
 - b. An adjective of two syllables has stress on the first syllable. Adj. = '1 + 2 stress on 1.
E.g. 'Hap/py - 'Sun/ny - 'Hot/ter - 'Ug/ly - 'Stu/pid.
But in “Cor/'rect” stress is on the second syllable because the first contains /ə/.
 - c. An adverb or a preposition of two syllables has stress on the first syllable.
Adv. = '1 + 2 E.g. 'Un/der - 'O/ver - 'Ne/ver - 'Af/ter.
But in “Be'low”, “Be'neath”, “A'bove”, “A'go” stress is on the second syllable because the first contains /ə/.
- A verb of two syllables has stress on the second syllable. V = 1 + '2
E.g. Cor/'rect - Pre/'sent - Be/'lieve.
But in “'La/bel”, “'O/pen” stress is on the first syllable because the second syllable contains /ə/.
3. A compound noun = 'N1 + N2 takes stress on the first noun (N1)
E.g. 'Lady-bird, 'Taxi-driver, 'School-bag, 'Silk-worm, 'Pencil-case, 'Suit-case.
4. A compound noun = 'Adj. + N takes stress on the adjective (Adj.)
E.g. 'Black-board, 'Green-house, 'Round-table, 'Black-smith, 'White-house.
5. A compound adjective = Adj. + 'V(pp) takes stress on the verb (V (pp)).
E.G. Well-'done, Well-'known, Old-'fashioned, Narrow-'minded.
6. A compound verb = Preposition + 'V takes stress on the verb (V).

E.g. Under-'stand, Over-'do, Over-'flow, Under-'estimate.

7. A phrasal verb (V + 'Prep/or 'Adv) takes stress on the Prep/or Adv.

E.g. Sit 'down, Fly a'way, Stand 'up, Climb 'up, Run a'way, Go 'into.

8. A word that ends (finishes) with one of these five (5) endings takes stress on the second syllable from end.

The endings are (-ic(s), -sion(s), -tion(s), -ive, -ant)

E.g. 'Graph/ic – 'Ma/gic – Me/'chan/ic – 'Pan/ic – 'Pub/lic.

'Vi/sion – Di/'vi/sion – Con/'clu/sion – Tel/e/'vi/sion or 'Tel/e/vi/sion

In/tro/'duc/tion – Si/tu/'a/tion – In/'ten/tion.

Ex/'pens/ive – Ef/'fect/ive – Com/'puls/ive (But : In/'quis/i/tive)

Im/'por/tant – Re/'sis/tant – As/'sis/tant.

9. A word that ends (finishes) with one of these thirteen (13) endings takes stress on the third syllable from end. (Words of 3 syllables or more.)

The endings are (-cy, -ty, -phy, -gy, -al, -er, --ful, -less, -ous, -fy, -ible, -able, -ist, -ness, -ize, etc...)

E.g. U/ni/'ver/si/ty, Sim/i/'lar/i/ty, Re/'al/i/ty

Phi/'los/o/phy, Pho/'tog/ra/phy

Ge/'ol/o/gy, Tech/'nol/o/gy, Bi/'ol/o/gy

'Phys/i/cal, 'Man/u/al, Me/'chan/i/cal

Pho/'tog/ra/pher, Ki/'lo/me/ter, 'Car/pen/ter (But: Com/'put/er)(2nd)

'Beau/ti/ful, 'Plen/ti/ful (But: Re/'spect/ful, De/'light/ful) (2nd)

'Col/our/less,

'Dan/ger/ous, 'Mar/vel/lous (But: Cou/'ra/geous, De/'li/cious) (2nd)

'Beau/ti/fy, 'Sim/pli/fy, 'Rec/ti/fy, 'Fal/si/fy

'Hor/ri/ble, 'Cre/di/ble, In/'cre/di/ble

Re/'spect/a/ble, 'Ca/pa/ble, De/'pend/a/ble

'Jour/nal/ist, 'Sci/en/tist, 'Phys/is/ist, Bi/'o/log/ist

'Help/less/ness, 'Care/less/ness, 'Clev/er/ness

'Civ/i/lize, 'So/siol/ize, 'Ang/li/cize. But: 'Gen/e/ra/lize (2 and 3 contain /ə/)

« It is never late to learn »

“A word a day keeps ignorance away”

“A sound or a letter, learning is better

Say your word or write you letter”

“Utter it now, or utter it then,

You’ll put it down using your own Pen”