

# IIT Madras

## ONLINE DEGREE

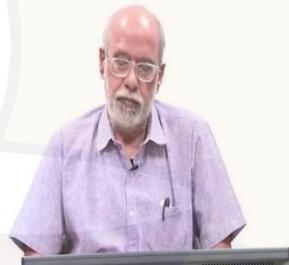
**Basic English**  
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**Lecture - 37**  
**Word Stress - 1**

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## **WORD STRESS - 1**

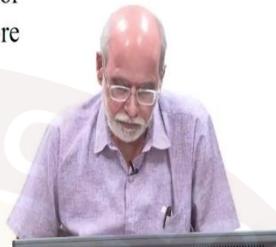
Prof. SHREESH CHAUDHARY



Good afternoon. Today, we will talk about perhaps the most important element of the pronunciation of English, namely stress assignment on long English words.

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- In plays, films and theatres, artistes produce sounds in any manner.
- But in natural languages, no two sounds are produced equally loud or long.
- No two syllables are produced equally loud or long; one sound or one syllable is more prominent than others.
- This is true of all languages.



Human beings can achieve anything. Nature has given them the flexibility with which they can live in very hot climates, in very cold climates, in thin air, underwater, anywhere. So this flexibility also can be used, and some people do it in speaking. You can speak at the same tone, which is called monotone, for as long as you like. That is what actors and artists do in plays, films, and theatres, in stand-up comedies, in mimes, in caricatures. We can do anything practically we choose to with our voice and sound.

But in natural language situations, when we talk like ordinary human beings, no two sounds are produced either equally long or equally loud. There is a difference between one and the other; one is louder than the other. Even if it is a minimal difference, the difference is there because sounds are produced through airwaves which flow in waves, which have crests and troughs.

Therefore, sounds also have, they rise, they fall. No two sounds are equally long or equally loud. This difference in length and amplitude and pitch and one or two other parameters gives each language its unique melody so that you know that this particular guy speaks our language or some other language.

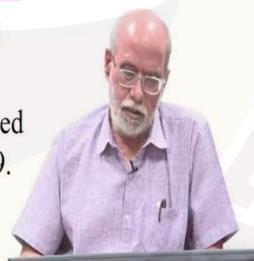
No two syllables are produced equally light. Just as no two sounds are produced equally loud or long, no two syllables are produced equally loud or long. One sound or one syllable is always more prominent than the others. This is true not just of English but of all languages, all-natural languages that they have a melody. And the melody is a product of the difference between the different amplitudes, different lengths, different pitch levels of our speech; speech sounds.

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- In English, difference between prominent syllable and other syllables in a word is much greater than it is in other languages
- Listen to the following sound clip:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/16UFBV\\_MZJNvtDz7fqry30cBR4s\\_MuRwH/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/16UFBV_MZJNvtDz7fqry30cBR4s_MuRwH/view?usp=sharing)

Theresa May, is a British Politician who served as Prime Minister of the UK from 2016 to 2019.



In English, however, the difference between amplitude and length, between loudness and length of two sounds is much greater than it is in many other languages. In English, a short vowel sound is very short, and a long-vowel sound is very long. So long that you think it is almost twice the length of long sounds in many other languages or in many other accents of English itself.

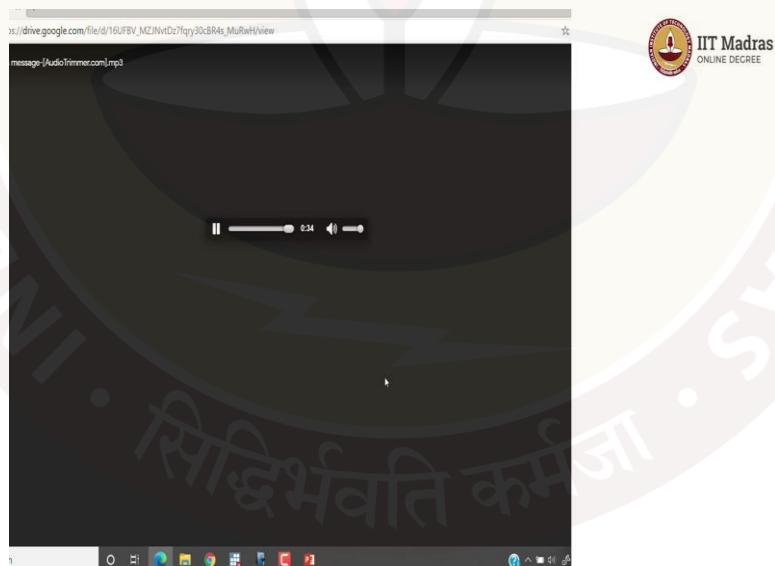
And this difference in length and loudness also reflects in the length and loudness of syllables. A stressed syllable is more prominent, actually much more prominent, much longer, and louder than an unstressed syllable. This is not the case in many other languages. They have a minimal difference between a stressed syllable and other syllables.

Whereas in English, this is not so. In English, the stressed syllable is much louder or longer or has a higher pitch movement than unstressed syllables. So much so, that if you pay some attention, it will not be difficult for you to know which part of a long word is stressed and which other parts are unstressed.

We are going to play to you a short clip of a speech, actually a greeting, a Diwali greeting given by Miss Theresa May, then the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. She was the Prime Minister of the UK between 2016 and 2019. And this recording was made on the eve of Diwali during one of those years when she greeted her fellow citizens on the eve of Diwali.

Listen to this speech, once only for the words and the content, and we will rewind and play again, we will replay. The next time, listen to it for long words and for stress; which part of these words, which part of each word is stressed. It will not be easy if you are not used to doing this exercise, but it will not be difficult either. And we will help you, so do not worry. Just listen, please.

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Theresa May Audio clip: I am delighted to send my very best wishes to everyone celebrating Diwali, a festival which holds such significance for so many people. Indeed, right across the world, lights decorate the streets, flowers adorn homes, treats are served, and presents exchanged, all marking the triumph of light over darkness. But the Festival of Lights is not just relevant for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists; it is relevant to all of us, those of all faiths and none.

Professor: Okay. I am sure you appreciate that a busy politician like Miss May found time to greet her fellow citizens on the eve of a festival, which is not the festival of the majority of people in her country. We must thank her for that.

We are going to rewind and replay. Listen to it, and if you can, please make a note of those parts of different words that you think are stressed. And this will help you if you look at this, look at the script of this speech before you listen.

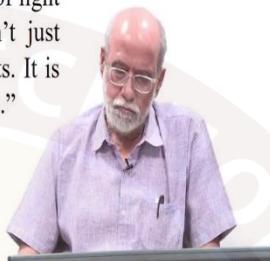


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## TRANSCRIPT



- Former Prime Minister Theresa May's message to mark Diwali. "I am delighted to send my very best wishes to everyone celebrating Diwali, a festival which holds such significance for so many people. Indeed, right across the world, lights decorate the streets, flowers adorn homes, treats are served and presents exchanged – all marking the triumph of light over darkness. But the festival of lights isn't just relevant for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists. It is relevant to all of us, those of all faiths and none."



We will go quiet for a minute. Look at the text so that when we play next, you understand the speech better. Now, come back to listen to it again and ask yourself and make a note of those words which are stressed, and those parts of the words, long words which are stressed. Here we go.

Theresa May Audio clip: I am delighted to send my very best wishes to everyone celebrating Diwali, a festival which holds such significance for so many people. Indeed, right across the world, lights decorate the streets, flowers adorn homes, treats are served, and presents exchanged, all marking the triumph of light over darkness. But the Festival of Lights is not just relevant for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists; it is relevant to all of us, those of all faiths and none.

Remember, we defined a syllable, a syllable is equal to one breath pulse or one spoken vowel, followed or preceded by, or followed and preceded by some other sound, some consonant sounds. So here in this speech, come to the next screen.

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## ACTIVITY



- Can you say which syllables in longer words are stressed in the clip cited in the previous slide.
- Compare with the list here. If you think other syllables have main stress than the ones marked above, then listen to the audio-clip once again.



Can you say which syllable in longer words are stressed in the clip cited in the previous slide? You see, some simple words, short words, monosyllabic words are also stressed, such as best in the best wishes. But there are long words and different parts of each of these words are stressed, which are those long words and which parts are stressed.

Now, if you have made a note, then please compare your list with the list we are going to show you now. If you think you have not marked stress upon those syllables that are stressed here, then please listen to the audio clip once again and mark them correctly. But look at the list, our list first. Go next.

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## ANSWERS



de'lighted	'everyone	'celebrating
Di'wali	'festival	sig'nificance
'many	'people	In'deed
a'cross	'decorate	'flowers
a'dorn	'presents	ex'changed
'marking	'triumph	'over
'darkness	'Hindus	'Buddhists
'relevant		



So you know, Miss May says, delighted, everyone, celebrating, Diwali, festival, significance, many, people, indeed, across, decorate, flowers, adorn, presents, exchanged, marking, triumph, over, darkness, Hindus, Buddhists, relevant.

Now, if you have not marked number one, these words for stress, you have made a mistake, you can listen to it again and identify these words. And then, a certain part of this word, the part following the inverted commas.

You know the single inverted comma, you might find there is a single inverted comma in every word. The syllable or the vowel following this comma is stressed. Keep this list before you and listen to it again we will play the recording and come back to this.

Theresa May Audio clip: I am delighted to send my very best wishes to everyone celebrating Diwali, a festival which holds such significance for so many people. Indeed, right across the world, lights decorate the streets, flowers adorn homes, treats are served, and presents exchanged, all marking the triumph of light over darkness. But the Festival of Lights is not just relevant for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists; it is relevant to all of us, those of all faiths and none.

If you have, if you still have some confusion, if you still find it difficult, it is natural. This is the first time perhaps you have done some exercise of this kind, and it might take you a little while to get used to it. But please believe me, as you listen to a standard of authentic English by Indians, by Europeans, by the British, by Americans, you will get used to them.

Also, in the beginning, look at the text as you listen to the recording so that you get used to, you understand the spoken part of it, you understand which syllable in which word is stressed. Once you do that, you will acquire not only knowledge of how it goes but also the habit of how to speak in Standard English. So it is not difficult at all. All it requires is a little determined practice.

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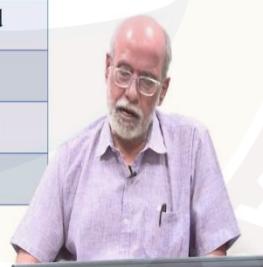
- The most prominent syllable in a word is also generally called stressed syllable.
- Stressed syllable is much louder, or longer or more prominent than others. And this difference is more easily seen in English than in other languages.



## ANSWERS



de'lighted	'everyone	'celebrating
Di'wali	'festival	sig'nificance
'many	'people	In'deed
a'cross	'decorate	'flowers
a'dorn	'presents	ex'changed
'marking	'triumph	'over
'darkness	'Hindus	'Buddhists
'relevant		



The most prominent, what is stressed syllable? The most prominent syllable in a word is also generally called stressed syllable. Come back to the earlier screen. See, for example, in the word delighted, how many syllables does it have? Three. It has three syllables.

They are all stressed, but the most prominent stress is on ligh, L I G H; delighted. So what we call stress is actually another name for the most prominent syllable, which in the rest of the word, you may or may not have difficulty understanding other sounds and other syllables but you rarely have difficulty understanding or listening to the most prominent syllables.

It is either louder than the rest, louder than all else, or it is longer than all else, or the pitch here is higher than the pitch on all else. In some manner in one of these or maybe altogether,

it may be both louder, longer on a higher pitch, it is more prominent. It is there in all languages, even in Hindi, even in Tamil, even in Bangla, Marathi, any language.

No two syllables are spoken at the same level of prominence, but in English, it is much more exaggerated. The stressed syllable is much more prominent than an unstressed syllable. So, for example, we said delighted in English. Had it been Hindi or Tamil, we will say delight; hardly any difference.

But in English, in standard varieties, it is delighted. In non-standard varieties, you might hear everyone, but in standard varieties, it is everyone; it is celebrating; it is Diwali; a festival; it is significance. The ni is heard longer and louder than the other three or four syllables that are there, there is sig, there is fi, there is cance, but you hear knee much more clearly than you hear the other syllables in a word like significance.

That is stress; you have to learn to speak this way, you have to learn to identify, you have to learn to identify stressed syllables in other's speech so that you understand and speak and you are understood. And you understand others without difficulty.

So the most prominent syllable in the word is generally called stressed syllable. In other words, the stressed syllable is much louder or much longer or more prominent because of higher pitch and some other reasons, also psychological perhaps.

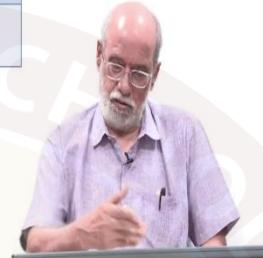
And this difference is more easily seen in English, much more easily seen in English than in other languages. That way, English is unique and a little more difficult than other languages for students of its pronunciation or its accent. Next.

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- In the following words, the second syllable is more prominent than the first:

about	acquit	adopt	afraid
again	allow	beyond	between
beneath	beside	below	before



In the following words, once again, the problem here is, in English, there is another problem. It is not just exaggerated. The other problem is that there is no one rule which would tell you that this syllable in every word is stressed, or that syllable in every word is stressed. There are languages of that kind.

In French, last syllable and every word is stressed. So they have Paris, where is the capital of France? Paris. Where do they live? In Moselle. How do they travel? In a mobile, in a car, they live in a building. Where do they work? In their chambers, in their chamber, in their office. Where do they study? In Bibliotheek, in the library. So theek, Bibliotheek takes stress; so theek.

But there is no rule like that in English, that either all final syllables in the word or all initial syllables in a word are stressed. English has it all over. There are some words where the second syllable is more prominent, second from the beginning.

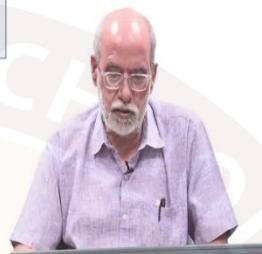
So, for example, in words like about, acquit, adopt, afraid, again, allow, beyond, between, beneath, beside, below, before; the second syllable, in all of these words, has more prominent stress than the stress on the initial syllable. But this is not the case with every word. Look at the next.

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- Similarly the following words have stress on the first syllable

actor	artist	after	barber
certain	basket	doctor	father
garden	hostel	market	



In the following words, the main stress is on the first syllable, on the initial syllable. It is at the beginning of the word equally loud, long. So, for example, you say actor, you do not say act-or; you say, actor. Ac is longer, louder. You say, artists, A R is longer, you do not say artist unless of course, you are a comedian and you do deliberately so. Otherwise, you say artist. You say after; you say barber, certain, basket, doctor, father, garden, hostel, market.

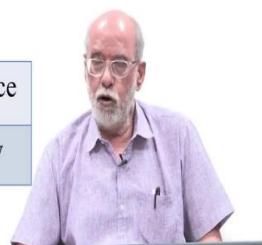
In all of these words, the initial syllable is more prominent than the final. So what is the rule? In some words we see, the final syllable is more prominent. In some other words, we see the initial syllable is more prominent. Let us look at another set of words.

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- On words longer than one syllable, all English dictionaries show syllable with main or prominent stress.
- But different dictionaries do it in different manners. In *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* a stressed syllable is preceded by a single inverted comma. So stress is shown as follows:

'actor	a'bout	'competence
com'ponent	eco'nomic	e'economy



On words longer than one syllable, that is a two-syllable word called bi-syllabic, three-syllable word called tri-syllabic, four-syllable word called (poly) tetra-syllabic; sorry, polysyllabic. In longer words, you may all English dictionaries show the syllable with main or most prominent stress; it is because of this reason.

Because the stress assignment is so uncertain in English words that just as dictionaries show their spelling, their meaning, the grammatical category of words, their usage, they also show how they are pronounced, and they also show in pronunciation, how these words are stressed if they are bi-syllabic or longer words; if they are words with two syllables or more.

But unfortunately for us, all the different dictionaries that there are of English, different companies have produced their own dictionaries of the English language. So there is no uniformity there, there is no one way in which all dictionaries mark stressed syllable.

Some dictionaries, such as the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of English has stress syllable is preceded by a single inverted comma. So stress is shown as follows. Actor the inverted comma is before ac. The stressed syllable ac follows the inverted comma. And about, the stressed syllable is bout. So inverted comma comes within the word after a before bout.

In the next word, competence, the next word competence has three syllables; com pe tence, but it is the initial syllable that is stressed. So the inverted comma, the single inverted commas showing stressed, stress, sorry, is placed before com. The stressed syllable com follows an inverted comma.

But in component, it is po, P O that has main stress. So inverted comma comes in the middle of the word and before P O, po; indicating that it is the second syllable from the left which is stressed. So you have component.

The same case is there in economic; the second syllable is stressed. Same cases they are in economy, the second syllable is stressed. So you will have to see how your dictionary does it. Next.

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- In some other dictionaries, stressed vowel is underlined, such as in the following words:

<u>a</u> ctor	<u>ab</u> out	<u>co</u> mpetence
com <u>po</u> nent	e <u>co</u> nomic	e <u>co</u> nomy



But different dictionaries do it in a different manner. Some dictionaries underline the stressed syllable. So, for example, you have underlined A in actor, underlined O U in about, underlined O in competence, underlined O again in component, underlined O again in economic, and in economy.

Note, in your dictionary, what is given on which page. Similarly, you will have to see how your dictionary works. And one of the things you should see and make a note of is how stress is shown so that in case of doubt, you can go to the word and see how stress is assigned to this word. Go next.

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- In another dictionary, stressed vowel is highlighted, such as shown below.

actor	about	competence
component	e <u>co</u> nomic	e <u>co</u> nomy



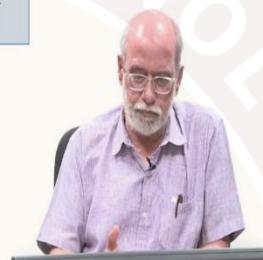
In yet another dictionary, the stressed syllable is highlighted, as you see here in actor, about, etc. Go next.

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- In some still others, a stressed syllable is shown through capitalized letter, such as follows:

ACtor	aBOUt	COMpetence
comPOnent	ecoNOMIC	eCONomy



Somewhere, it is made caps are used to indicate, capital letters are used to indicate a stressed syllable. You should see what your dictionary does; does it show stress through an inverted comma or through highlighting or through underlining or through writing stressed syllable using block capital letters.

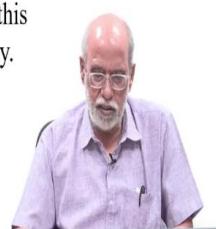
Some manner, each English dictionary indicates stress on long words. Learn to read these notes and whenever in doubt, make use of it. Next.

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## ACTIVITY



- Check how your dictionary shows stress in English words.
- Make a note also of any differences of pronunciation between the way you render this word and the way it is given in the dictionary.



Coming to the end of this unit, I will like you to, I will advise you to check number one, how your dictionary shows stress in English words. Then make a note also of any differences of pronunciation between the way you render those words, the ones I used, the ones I took from Theresa May, and the ones in the lists I gave you.

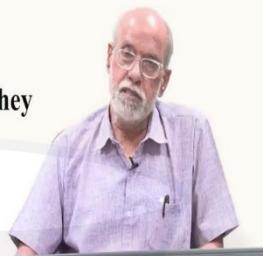
If there is a difference in the way you do them and in the way they are given here, then please re-learn the pronunciation of those words. Next.

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## ACTIVITY



- Look up a dictionary and make a list of frequently used words that are stressed on the first syllable.
- Look up a dictionary and make another list of frequently used words that are stressed on the second syllable.
- Check if you stress these words the way they are listed in dictionary.



Also, look up a dictionary and make a list of frequently used words that are stressed on the first syllable. That will be your one list. And the second list or make another list, a second list where you make a note of those words that are frequently used but stressed on the second syllable.

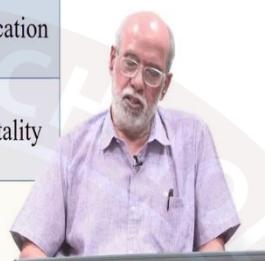
And check if you also stressed these words as indicated in the dictionary. It is quite likely that you do but if you do not, in that case, you should re-learn the pronunciation of those words, do some drill, do some practice, and make it a part of your habit. Whenever you come across component, you pronounce it as component, and whenever you come across competence, you pronounce it as competence.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:15)



- It is so also in longer words. Look at the following words. See if you pronounce them right.

'abdomen	ac'countant	'advocate	af'fectionate
bene'ficial	di'venity	e'liminate	fortifi'cation
'finalize	'government	'governor	hospi'tality



It is so also in longer words. In many long words, you may find them all over. The initial syllable, sometimes in the middle of the word, sometimes toward the end of the word. So, for example, look at abdomen; three syllables, a tri-syllabic word has stress on the initial syllable.

Accountant, a tri-syllabic word again but has stress on the second syllable from the beginning. Advocate, initial syllable; affectionate, second syllable; hospitality, third syllable; fortification, the fourth syllable, for ti fi, first three do not have stress; but governor, initial syllable; eliminate, second syllable.

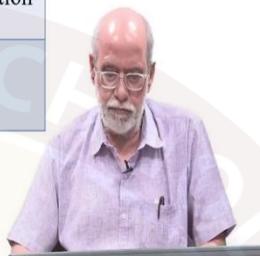
So you have got to learn. Make a list where you have, make a list of frequently-used words, or look up the book we have suggested, A Better Spoken English. There also we have a list of frequently-used but mis-stressed words. So either way, suit yourself, but you have got to.

Without learning appropriate stress on each word, you will have difficulty being understood by listeners and speakers of the Standard English. Next.

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'industry	ju'dicial	la'boratory	ma'chinery
mountai'neer	natio'nality	'orphanage	'president
'questionable	'reasonable	scien'tific	termi'nation
um'brella	'verify	'womanhood	



Same thing here, it is all over. Industry, initial syllable; judicial, second syllable; scientific, third syllable; but reasonable, initial syllable. So it varies. Some words have stress on the final syllable we will see in the next unit. Next.

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- If your pronunciation differs from the indicated pronunciation of these words, then learn to pronounce them right.

- In the words given in the **Activity**:
  - Most words are stressed on the initial syllable
  - Some words are stressed on the second syllable
  - A few words are stressed on the third syllable from the beginning, and
  - Remaining words are stressed on other syllables.



So if your pronunciation, look at these activities and do them. And you will see in the while doing the activity; you will see that most words in English are stressed on the initial syllable in a generally speaking. These are, there are no hard-and-fast rules, but if you take a corpus, if you take some 1,000 words, you are quite likely to come across at least 200 words which will have main stress on the initial syllable.

But some words are also stressed on the second syllable. A few, you will always come across a few, which may be stressed on the third or the fourth syllable. Some words are also stressed on the final syllable.

In the coming units, we will draw your attention to these, but it is a wonderful idea that you should make lists your own, where one list will have words with main stress on the initial syllable, a second list will have words with main stress on the second syllable, the third list like that, you can go on and in no time in under a few weeks, you can re-learn and speak Standard English which can be understood and which you can speak worldwide. Go to the next.

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Thank You



So wish you good luck. If you have any confusion, any difficulty understanding this, these slides, the notes accompanying the slides are going to be with you. Please look at them or please mail us, call us. Thank you. Have a good day.