



# Native-like Accent Pronunciation Course

## Lesson 12

### Part 1: Sentence Stress – Introduction

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During this course, we've been practicing a lot of individual words – and now we're going to focus on making your English phrases and sentences sound more natural. When we say a sentence, we don't say all the words exactly the same. Listen to these two examples: which one sounds more natural?

λλλλλλ.      Nice to meet you.

μμμμμμ.      **Nice** to **meet** you.

You can hear that the words “nice” and “meet” are stronger; we put more emphasis on them.

Just as individual English words have stressed syllables, English sentences also have “strong” and “weak” words. The pattern in this sentence is strong-weak-strong-weak (**QoQo**)

Here's an example of a sentence that has the opposite structure: weak-strong-weak-strong:

**oQoQ**      The **bank** was **closed**.

We put the emphasis on “bank” and “closed.”

There are many other rhythms in English, for example:

oo**Qo**      Can you **help** me?

**QooQ**      **Where** does she **live**?

oo**QoQ**      Would you **like** a **drink**?

Practice these sentences to help you get the hang of different patterns of strong and weak words and syllables in a sentence:



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IOHN LIKES BEER.

John went back to London.

John and his girlfriend were arguing.

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Bill plays golf.

Bill was writing letters.

Bill has been mad at his co-worker.

Notice that the “weak” words and syllables are pronounced *softer and faster*, and there are some “reductions”. We don’t say “**Bill has been mad.**” We say, “**BILL** ezbin **MAD** atis **CO**-worker.”

How can you know which words in a sentence are “strong” and should be emphasized? Here are some tips:

**“Strong” words carry the content of the sentence:**

Main verbs	think, play, give
Nouns	music, bike, Diana
Adjectives	green, modern, beautiful
Adverbs	quickly, always
Negative auxiliary verbs	don’t, aren’t, can’t, haven’t

**“Weak” words provide the structure/links in the sentence:**

Pronouns	he, we, you, they
Prepositions	at, from, on, in
Articles	a, an, the



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<b>Conjunctions</b>	and, but, yet, because
<b>Positive Auxiliary verbs</b>	do, are, can, have

The fact that positive auxiliary verbs are weak and negative auxiliary verbs are strong can help you hear the difference in similar sentences, by the difference in the rhythm. For example:

**QoQ**      **JEN can SWIM.**

**QQQ**      **JEN CAN'T SWIM.**

**ooQo**      Do you **LIKE** it?

**QoQo**      **DON'T** you **LIKE** it?

Try to repeat these practice sentences at normal speed – imitating the rhythm of strong and weak words and syllables. One thing you'll notice is that the “weak words” are often pronounced very quickly, and they tend to “run together” – this is what often gives the impression of native English speakers speaking fast.

I'm **STUD**ying **ENG**lish so that I can **TRA**vel to Au**STRA**Lia next De**CEM**ber.

*Notice that the words “so that I can” – all of which are weak words – are pronounced as if they were one word: “sothetiken”*

**PAUL** and **KAT**ie **CRASHED** their **CAR** while they were **DRI**ving to the **PART**y.

We should have **BROUGHT** a **CAM**era – we could have **TAK**en some **PIC**tures of the **SHO**W.

*Notice that “should have” and “could have” sound like “shoulda” and “coulda”*

I **THINK** he **FELL** a**SLEEP** while **WATCH**ing a **MOV**ie.

How about **WAIT**ing for a few **DAYS** to **SEE** what will **HAP**pen?



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*The words “what will” sound like “whatll”*

It was some of the **BEST ICE** cream I’ve **TASTed** in my en**TIRE LIFE**.

Have you ever **THOUGHT** about **GETting** a **MASt**er’s de**GREE?**

**HARry** can **COOK** pretty **WELL**, but he has **NO CLUE** how to **BAKE** a **CAKE**.

*The words “but he has” run together so that they sound like one word:  
“butteeas”*

If you **DON’T KNOW** what you’re **TALKing** about, then you **SHOULDN’t SAY**  
**ANything** at **ALL**.

*Again, compare the different rhythms when we have a “strong” negative  
auxiliary verb and a “weak” positive auxiliary verb:*

ooQQo      You should **SAY SOMETHing.**

oQoQQoo      You **SHOULD**n’t **SAY ANything.**



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### Part 2 : Special Sentence Stress

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In part 1, you learned about strong and weak words in the rhythm of a sentence. But sometimes we give **extra** emphasis to specific words, to call attention to a detail, depending on the situation.

Consider these examples, where the same sentence is spoken with different stress, depending on the situation:

Did John give Mary the book?

No, **I** gave Mary the book.

Did you lend Mary the book?

No, I **gave** Mary the book.

Did you give **Jane** the book?

No, I gave **Mary** the book.

Did you give Mary the magazine?

No, I gave Mary the **book**.

You can see that each example emphasizes the most important word for that situation. When the question asks about who received the book, the emphasis in the answer is on the person who received the book (Mary). When the question asks about the action (lend vs. give), the response also emphasizes the action (**gave** the book).

Now test your ability to identify which word is most important and should receive the emphasis. We're going to work with the sentence "We had dinner at Mary's house yesterday."

You'll see this sentence as the answer to four different questions and you need to say it with the stress on the correct word.



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Did you have dinner at Mary's house last week?

We had dinner at Mary's house yesterday.

I heard you had lunch at Mary's house yesterday.

We had dinner at Mary's house yesterday.

So you were over at Mary's apartment the other day?

We had dinner at Mary's house yesterday.

Didn't you eat at Martha's house yesterday?

We had dinner at Mary's house yesterday.

Special emphasis is often used in three situations:

## α. Corrections

"We have five new employees."

"Actually, there are **seven** new employees."

"So you speak German?"

"Well, I'm **learning** German."

## You can also use it to correct yourself:

"The company is located in the southeast of France – oh, sorry – the south**west** of France."

## β. Disagreements

"I told you, we **don't** have enough money to buy this."

"Yes, we **do!**"

"*That's a stupid idea.*"

"No, it's **not!**"

## χ. Adding new details / information

"I heard you're a teacher?"

"Yes – a **history** teacher."

Let's do an exercise where you practice saying the same sentence two different ways, depending on the stress needed:



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Is the event this October?

No, it'll be **next** October.

Is the event next November?

No, it'll be next **October**.

He bought a new car.

Actually, he bought a **used** car.

He bought a used motorcycle.

Actually, he bought a used **car**.

Does the class start on Thursday night?

It starts on **Tuesday** night.

Does the class start on Tuesday morning?

It starts on Tuesday **night**.

Michelangelo was a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Italian painter – excuse me – a **16<sup>th</sup>-century** Italian painter.

Michelangelo was a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish painter – excuse me – a 16<sup>th</sup>-century **Italian** painter.

Special emphasis can also be used to add **implied** meaning to a sentence – something we don't say directly, but that the other person can understand "between the lines" or indirectly.

Here's a sentence that has 7 different implications, depending on how you say it and where you put the stress:

**I** never said she stole my money.

(implies that I never said it, but someone else did)

I **never** said she stole my money.

(emphasizes that this event – my saying she stole my money – never happened, not even once)



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I never **said** she stole my money.

(implies that I never said it out loud, but perhaps I thought, implied, or behaved as if this was true)

I never said **she** stole my money.

(implies that I am not accusing her specifically, but that someone else DID steal my money)

I never said she **stole** my money.

(implies that I never accused her of stealing, but perhaps I said that she did something else with my money)

I never said she stole **my** money.

(implies that she stole someone else's money, but not mine)

I never said she stole my **money**.

(implies that she stole something else from me, but it wasn't money)

## **Homework:**

**12: Parts 1 & 2 Click the following link to practice sentence stress:**

<https://www.englishclub.com/pronunciation/sentence-stress-quiz.php>



### **References:**

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