



Native-like Accent Pronunciation Course

Lesson 11

Part 1: Syllables and Word Stress

Welcome to Lesson 11 ! Today's lesson is an introduction to syllables and word stress. A syllable is a "unit" of sound in a word.

For example, the word **mom** has one syllable. **Mother** has two syllables. And **grandmother** has three syllables. One way to help you define the syllables is to clap or tap once for each syllable: **mom**, **mo - ther**, **grand - mo - ther**.

Remember that the number of syllables is related to the sound of the word, not the spelling. So words with one syllable can be short – like **he**, **sit**, **car**, or **help** – or they can be a little longer in written form, like **friends**, **thought**, **washed**, or **laughed**.

Some English students have difficulty pronouncing words with one and two syllables clearly – they either add an extra syllable to one-syllable words:

ηηηηη. sport → "esport"

Or they drop the second syllable of a two-syllable word:

ιιιιι. I'm having fun → "I'm have fun"

Try this exercise with similar one-syllable and two-syllable words/phrases:

1 syllable	2 syllables
sit	cit - y
rain	rain - ing
rent	rent - ed
store	a store
four	for - ty
blow	be - low



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cleaned	clean it
watch	watch – es

does	does - n't
Miss	Mrs. (“miss – es”)

In words with two or more syllables, one of the syllables is the “**strong**” or “**stressed**” syllable. This is very important, because stressing the wrong syllable can change the sound of the word so much that it’s impossible to understand.

Take the word **computer** as an example – it has three syllables, and the stress is on the second one: com – PU – ter. If we put the stress on the first or third syllable, the word sounds *completely* different:

φφφφφ. COM – pu – ter
 κκκκκ. com – pu – TER

Unfortunately, there is no way to know, from simply looking at the written form of the word, which syllable is stressed – you need to listen to it or look it up in the dictionary.

But there are some general trends, which we’ll be learning in the next few lessons. One of them is that 2-syllable **nouns and adjectives** tend to have the stress on the first syllable, and 2-syllable **verbs** tend to have the stress on the second syllable:

Noun	Adjective	Verb
PAR – ty	FA – mous	for – GET
SA – lad	EAR – ly	pro – VIDE
PER – son	PUB – lic	en – JOY
COUN – try	MA – jor	be – LIEVE
STU – dent	SPE – cial	ex – PECT
SYS – tem	RE – cent	con – TROL
PRO – gram	COM – mon	re – PEAT



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Of course, there are many exceptions to this trend!

In some words, that are used as both nouns and verbs, the word stress changes – when it is used as a noun, you stress the first syllable; when it is used as a verb, you stress the second syllable.

λλλλλ. We want to **increase** sales.

μμμμμ. There was a big **increase** in sales last month.

These words have a change in the stressed syllable when pronounced as nouns or verbs:

record, contrast, desert, export, object, present, protest, rebel

However, there are also words that are both nouns and verbs, in

which the pronunciation doesn't change: answer, picture, visit, promise, reply, and

travel.

Let's practice a few words with three and four syllables. I've divided them into categories based on which syllable is strong:

1 st Syllable Stressed	2 nd Syllable Stressed	3 rd Syllable Stressed
HIS – to – ry	re – MEM – ber	en – gi – NEER
SCI – en – tist	al – READ – y	af – ter – NOON
E – le – phant	po – TA – to	re – com – MEND
BI – cy – cle	con – SIS – tent	ma – ga – ZINE
MI – cro – wave	an – NOUNCE – ment	gua – ran – TEE

Now try these four-syllable words.

1 st Syllable Stressed	2 nd Syllable Stressed	3 rd Syllable Stressed
CA – te – go – ry	cer – TI – fi – cate	de – mon – STRA – tion
MECH – a – ni – sm	ex – PE – ri – ment	math – e – MA – tics
IR – ri – ta – ble	pho – TO – gra – pher	id – i – O – tic
TES – ti – mo – ny	ap – PRE – ci – ate	ad – o – LES – cent



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AN – y – bo – dy	un – THINK – a – ble	con – tro – VER – sial
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Four-syllable English words almost never have the stress on the last syllable. One place where correct stress is important is when pronouncing numbers:

vvvvv. **thirteen** (13)

ooooo. **thirty** (30)

Homework:

11: Part 1: a) Record yourself pronouncing these numbers:

- 14 / 40
- 15 / 50
- 16 / 60
- 17 / 70
- 18 / 80
- 19 / 90

b) Click the following links to practice word stress:

- 1) <https://www.esl-lounge.com/student/pronunciation/pr26-pronunciation-how-many-syllables-2.php>
- 2) <https://www.esl-lounge.com/student/pronunciation/pr49-pronunciation-find-the-first-stressed-syllable.php>



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Lesson 11

Part 2: Word Stress & Prefixes/Suffixes

In today's lesson, you're going to learn how prefixes and suffixes change word stress.

Prefixes and suffixes are sets of letters added to the beginning or ending of a word to change its meaning or form. For example, adding the prefix **un-** to **happy** makes the word **unhappy** (which is equivalent to "not happy" or "sad"). Adding the suffix **-able** to **inflate** makes the word **inflatable** – this is an adjective describing something that can be inflated.

In these two examples, the addition of the prefix and suffix doesn't change the stress of the main word:

πππππ. **HAP** – py
un – **HAP** – py

θθθθθ. in – **FLATE**
in – **FLAT** – a – ble

But some prefixes and suffixes do change the position of the stress – for example, the verb **ED – u – cate** has the stress on the first syllable. But when we say **ed – u – CA – tion**, the stress changes from "ed" to "ca."

Let's begin with the prefixes and suffixes that DON'T change the stress of the main word:

Prefix	Word	Prefix + Word
in- / im-	POSS – i – ble a – BIL – i – ty	im – POSS – i – ble in – a – BIL – i – ty
un-	pro – FESS – ion – al	un – pro – FESS – ion – al



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over-	re - ACT	o - ver - re - ACT
under-	ES - ti - mate	un - der - ES - ti - mate

Suffix	Word	Word + Suffix
-able	MEA - sure	MEA - sur - a - ble
-al	MU - sic	MU - si - cal
-er	pro - DUCE	pro - DU - cer
-ful	POW - er	POW - er - ful
-hood	NEIGH - bor	NEIGH - bor - hood
-ize	CO - lo - ny	CO - lo - nize
-less	CO - lor	CO - lor - less
-ly	RE - cent	RE - cent - ly
-ment	em - PLOY	em - PLOY - ment
-ness	LA - zy	LA - zi - ness
-ship	PART - ner	PART - ner - ship

Okay – that was the easy part. Now let’s study the suffixes that change the word stress. The good thing about these changes is that they are consistent – so when you know how to pronounce one example, you’ll be able to pronounce ANY word with that ending.

-TION, -IAN/-CIAN, and -IC

These three endings change the stress to the syllable immediately before the suffix, as we saw with **educate** and **education**. Practice with these examples:

LO - cate	lo - CA - tion
CI - vi - lize	ci - vi - li - ZA - tion
com - POSE	com - po - SI - tion
ex - HI - bit	ex - hi - BI - tion
e - VOLVE	e - vo - LU - tion
SUB - sti - tute	sub - sti - TU - tion



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CO – me – dy	co – MED – ian
CI – vil	ci – VIL – ian
pe – di – A – trics	pe – di – a – TRI – cian
MU – sic	mu – SI – cian

AR – tist	ar – TIS – tic
e – CON – o – my	e – co – NO – mic
HY – giene	hy – GIEN – ic
PE – ri – od	pe – ri – OD – ic
SYM – bol	sym – BOL – ic

Longer words ending with -y

In these words, the stress always falls two syllables BEFORE the -y.

GEN – er – ous

gen – er – **OS** – it – y

-ity is the most common, but we also have -ify, -ogy, -omy, -aphy, -stry, and more. Practice with these examples:

PUB – lic	pub – LIC – i – ty
NA – tion – al	na – tion – AL – i – ty
re – LI – a – ble	re – li – a – BIL – i – ty
e – LEC – tric	e – lec – TRI – ci – ty
ME – thod	me – thod – O – lo – gy
CHO – re – o – graph	cho – re – O – gra – phy
con – fi – DEN – tial	con – fi – den – ti – AL – i – ty



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This rule of the word stress being two syllables before the -y always applies, even if the word doesn't originate in a shorter word. So, now you know how to pronounce:

ρρρρρ. **MIN** – i – stry
σσσσσ. bi – **O** – gra – phy
τττττ. as – **TRO** – no – my
υυυυυ. a – **NA** – lo – gy
ϖϖϖϖϖ. di – **VER** – si – fy
ωωωωω. vi – **CIN** – i – ty

Suffixes that take the stress: -ee, -eer, -ette, -esque

Finally, we have some suffixes that take the stress on the suffix itself. For example:

ξξξξξ.AM – pu – tate (v.)
ψψψψψ. am - pu – **TEE** (n. – a person who has had an amputation)

There aren't too many words with these endings in English, but it's helpful to practice a few of them to help you remember the rule:

ζζζζζ. re-fer-**EE**
ααααα. nom-in-**EE**
βββββ. train-**EE**
χχχχχ. en-gi-**NEER**
δδδδδ. vo-lun-**TEER**
εεεεε. bache-lor-**ETTE**
φφφφφ. kit-chen-**ETTE**
γγγγγ. gro-**TESQUE**
ηηηηη. pic-tur-**ESQUE**



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*Exceptions: The words **employee** and **refugee** should also have the stress on the last syllable, but nowadays a lot of people say **em**ploy**ee** and **ref**uge**ee**.*

When we put all these rules together, we get some “families” of words with different stresses:

uuuu. **DEM**-o-crat
dem-**O**-cra-cy
dem-o-**CRAT**-ic

φφφφφφ. **PHO**-to-
graph pho-**TO**-
gra-phy pho-to-
GRAPH-ic

κκκκκκκ. **NA**-tion-al
na-tion-**AL**-i-ty
na-tion-al-i-**ZA**-tion

English pronunciation is certainly interesting, isn't it?

Next Lesson, we're going to begin talking about **sentence stress**.

Homework:

11: Part 2- Click the following links to practice word stress:

<https://www.esl-lounge.com/student/pronunciation/pr53-pronunciation-find-the-most-syllables.php>

References:

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- <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pronunciation/english/american>
- <https://www.esl-lounge.com>
- <https://pronuncian.com/>
- <https://www.coursera.org/lecture/tricky-american-english-pronunciation/linking-connected-speech-practice-SmjN4>
- <https://www.clearenglishcorner.com/ownyourenglish>