



## Stress in Compound & Complex Words

### Stress in compound words

Compound words are formed by two separate words. The meaning of a compound word usually differs from the original meaning of each word.

For example: Paper /'peɪpə/, Boy /bɔɪ/ → Paperboy /'peɪpə bɔɪ/

### Types of compound words:

- 1) **Open compounds:** compound words written as two separate words. For example: credit card; high school; light bulb; post office.
- 2) **Closed compounds (solid compounds/ established compounds):** compound words written as one word. For example: airplane, highland, lighthouse, railroad.
- 3) **Hyphenated compounds:** Compound words written with a hyphen. For example: bad-tempered; good-looking; high-minded; light-hearted.

Most compound words have two stresses: a primary stress, and a secondary stress. Depending on how compound words function in the sentence (Nouns, Adjective, Adverbs, or Verbs), the following stress patterns are found:

Grammatical function	Stress placement rules	Examples
<b>Compounds Nouns</b>	<b>General rule</b> If the compound word functions as a noun (noun + noun or gerund + noun), <b>the primary stress falls on the first element and the secondary stress falls on the second element</b> (regardless of the grammatical category of the individual component parts).	Football /'fʊtbɔ:l/ Armchair /'ɑ:mʃeə(r)/ Mailbox /'meɪlbɒks/ Highway /'haɪweɪ/ Goldfish /'gəʊldfɪʃ/ Training shoe / 'treɪnɪŋ ʃuː/ Swimming-pool /'swɪmɪŋ pu:l/
	<i>Exceptions</i>	Mankind /mæn'kaɪnd/ Headmaster /,hed'mɑːstə(r)/
	Compounds which include <b>past participle + noun</b> are stressed on the second element	Inverted commas /ɪn,vɜːtɪd 'kɒməz/ Lost property /,lɒst 'prɒpəti/
<b>Compound adjectives</b>	<b>General rule</b> Primary stress on the second element, secondary stress on the first element	Blue-eyed /,bluː 'aɪd/ Dark-green / ,dɑːk 'ɡriːn/ Open-minded /,əʊpən 'maɪndɪd/ Kindhearted /,kaɪnd 'hɑːtɪd/ Well-known /,wel 'nəʊn/
	If one of the components in a two-word adjective is a <b>noun</b> , stronger stress may fall on the noun irrespective of whether it is first or second component.	Homesick /'həʊmsɪk/ Handmade / ,hænd'meɪd/ Law-abiding /'lɔː əbaɪdɪŋ/ Low-cost /,ləʊ 'kɒst/ Waterproof /'wɔːtəpruːf/ High-class /,haɪ 'klɑːs/ Color-blind /'kʌlə blaɪnd/

	Compound words composed of <b>adjective</b> and ' <b>ed</b> ' at the end receive stress on the second element.	Bad-tempered / ,bæd 'tempəd/ Well-educated / ,wel 'edʒuketɪd/ Well-dressed / ,wel 'drest/
	Compound words composed of an <b>adjective</b> and a <b>gerund</b> (-ing) at the end receive stress on the second element.	Good-looking / ,gʊd 'lʊkɪŋ/ Easy going / ,i:zi 'gəʊɪŋ/ Global warming / ,glɒbl 'wɔ:mɪŋ/ Central heating / ,sentrəl 'hi:tɪŋ/
	Compound adjectives in which the first element is a number receive stress on the second element	Second class / ,sekənd 'klɑ:s/ One-eyed / ,wʌn-'aɪd/ three-cornered / ,θri: 'kɔ:nəd/
<b>Compound adverbs</b>	<b>General rule</b> Compounds functioning as <b>adverbs</b> are usually finally stressed.	North-east / ,nɔ:θ 'i:st/ Downstream / ,daʊn'stri:m/ Above-mentioned / ə ,bʌv 'menʃnd/
<b>Compound verbs</b>	<b>General rule</b> Primary stress on the second element, secondary stress on the first element	Overboil / ,əʊvə'bɔɪl/ Underestimate / ,ʌndə'restɪmət/ Outrun / aʊt'rʌn/ Overtake / ,əʊvə'teɪk/
	Compound words which function as <b>verbs</b> and have an <b>adverbial element</b> first take final stress.	Ill-treat / ,ɪl 'tri:t/ Back-pedal / ,bæk 'pedl/ Downgrade / ,daʊn'greɪd/ Upside down / ,ʌpsaɪd 'daʊn/
	<b>Phrasal verbs</b> are stressed on the second element.	Let down / ,let 'daʊn/ Takeover / ,teɪk 'əʊvə/ Turn off / ,tɜ:n 'ɒf/

## PRACTICE

Transcribe the following compound words phonemically and identify the primary stress placement (').

Words	Transcription & stress	Words	Transcription & stress
1. Upstairs (adverb)		11. Part-time (adj)	
2. Two-edged (adj)		12. Wristwatch (noun)	
3. Uphill (adverb)		13. Dress up (P.V)	
4. Half-hearted (adj)		14. Overrun (verb)	
5. Two-handed (adj)		15. Dropout (noun)	
6. Hereby (adverb)		16. Barefooted (adj)	
7. High school (noun)		17. Two-faced (adj)	
8. Under-represented (adj)		18. Outside (adverb)	
9. Long-sighted (adj)		19. Backache (noun)	
10. Three-dimensional (adj)		20. Copyright (noun)	

## Stress Placement in Complex words

In this section, we shall examine the stress placement in complex words, which comprises of a prefix + stem + one or more suffixes.

### I. Stress on prefixes

In the words containing prefixes such as: (**a-**, **ab-**, **an-**, **co-**, **de-**, **dis-**, **im-**, **in-**, **re-**, **un-**), the primary stress mostly does not fall on the prefix but **on one of the stem syllables**.

Prefixes	Examples
<b>a-</b>	Aside /ə'saɪd/, Aback /ə'bæk/
<b>ab-</b>	Abnormal /æb'nɔ:məl/, Absolve /əb'sɒlv/
<b>an-</b>	Anachronism /ə'næk'rənɪzəm/, Anomaly /ə'nɒməli/
<b>co-</b>	Cooperative /kəʊ'prətɪv/, Cohabit /kəʊ'hæbɪt/, coexist /ˌkəʊɪg'zɪst/, Coordinate /ˌkɔ:ɪneɪt/
<b>de-</b>	Demotivate /ˌdi:'məʊtɪveɪt/, Decode /di:'kəʊd/
<b>dis-</b>	Dislike /dɪs'laɪk/, Disagree /ˌdɪsə'ɡri:/, Dispatch /dɪ'spætʃ/, Disable /dɪ'seɪbəl/
<b>im-</b>	Impossible /ɪm'pɒsəbl/, Immortal /ɪ'mɔ:tl/, Imprison /ɪm'prɪzn/, Imbalance /ɪm'bæləns/
<b>in-</b>	Intoxicate /ɪn'tɒksɪkeɪt/, Invaluable /ɪn'væljuəbəl/, Incorrect /ɪn'kɒrɪkt/
<b>re-</b>	Resource /rɪ'sɔ:s/, Reorder /ˌri:'ɔ:də(r)/, Rearrange /rɪ'reɪndʒ/
<b>un-</b>	Uncertain /ʌn'sɜ:tən/, Unfaithful /ʌn'feɪθfl/, Unable /ʌn'eɪbəl/

There are many exceptions in English because of the vastness of the language. Thus, stress placement in complex words is not always predictable; however, the rules do work mostly. **E.g.**

**Impotent** /'ɪmpətənt/, **impulse** /'ɪmpʌls/, **impudent** /ɪm'pʊdənt/, **infinite** /ɪn'fɪnɪt/  
/, insolent /ɪn'sɒlənt/.

### II. Stress on suffixes

Unlike prefixes, it is possible for a suffix to change the original pronunciation –stress placement- of the word stem when they are affixed. This depends on whether the suffix is stress-neutral, stress-attracting or pre-stressed (stress shifting).

#### 2.1. Stress-neutral suffixes

Stress-neutral (stress-fixing) suffixes don't change the pronunciation of the word stem and do not influence stress placement: (-able, -age, -ance, -ence, -ant, -dom, -ed, -er, -ern, -ful, -hood, -ing, -ish (adj), -ism, -ist, **less**, **-like**, **-ly**, **-man**, **-ment**, **-ness**, **-or**, **-s**, **-ship**, **-some**, **-wards**, **-wise**).

STRESS-FIXING SUFFIX	EXAMPLES
<b>-able/ -ible (adj)</b>	Considerable /kən'sɪdrəbəl/, Unavoidable /ʌnə'vɔɪdəbəl/, Visible /vɪzə'bəl/
<b>-age (adj)</b>	Percentage /pə'sentɪdʒ/, Marriage /'mærɪdʒ/, Passage /pə'sɪdʒ/
<b>-ance/ -ence (n)</b>	Admittance /əd'mɪtns/, Consistence /kən'sɪstəns/, Dependence /dɪ'pendəns/
<b>-ant/ -ent (n)</b>	Reluctant /rɪ'lʌktənt/, Commandment /kə'mændmənt/
<b>-dom (n)</b>	Martyrdom /'mɑ:tədəm/, Wisdom /'wɪzdəm/, Kingdom /'kɪŋdəm/
<b>-ern (adj)</b>	Western /'westn/, Eastern /'i:stən/, Northern /'nɔ:ðən/, Southern /'sʌðən/

<b>-ed (v)</b>	Adapted /ə'dæptɪd/, Reasoned /'ri:znd/, Condemned /
<b>-er / -ar (n)</b>	Interpreter /ɪn'tɜ:pɪtə/, Commander /kə'mɑ:ndə/, Scholar /
<b>-ful (adj)</b>	Sorrowful /'sɒrəʊfʊl/, Beautiful /'bjʊ:tɪfl/, Merciful / /
<b>-hood (n)</b>	Brotherhood/'brʌðəhʊd/, Adulthood/'ædʌlθʊd/, Neighborhood /
<b>-ing (gerund)</b>	Educating /'edʒukeɪtɪŋ/, Interesting/'ɪntrestɪŋ/, Consisting / /
<b>-ism (n)</b>	Alcoholism /'ælkəhɒlɪzəm/, Communism / /
<b>-ish (adj)</b>	Childish /'tʃaɪldɪʃ/, Swedish / /
<b>-ist (adj)</b>	Journalist /'dʒɜ:nəlist/, Physicist /'fɪzɪsɪst/, Specialist / /
<b>-less (adj)</b>	Bottomless /'bɒtəmləs/, Defenseless /dɪ'fensləs/, Penniless / /
<b>-like (adj)</b>	Autumn-like/'ɔ:təmlaɪk/, Businesslike/'bɪznɪslaɪk/, Native-like/ /
<b>-ly (adv)</b>	Carelessly /'keələsli/, Apparently /ə'pærəntli/, Rapidly / /
<b>-man (n)</b>	Policeman /pə'li:smən/, Fireman /'faɪəmə'n/, Businessman / /
<b>-ment (n)</b>	Development /dɪ'veləpmənt/, Accompaniment / /
<b>-ness (n)</b>	Tenderness /'tendənəs/, Greatness /'greɪtnəs/, Quietness / /
<b>-or (n)</b>	Director /dɪ'rektə /, Survivor / sə'vaɪvə/, Instructor / /
<b>-s (n/v)</b>	Images/'ɪmɪdʒɪz/, Advances/əd'vɑ:nsɪz/, Forests/'fɒrɪsts/, Damns /
<b>-ship (n)</b>	Censorship/'sensəʃɪp/, Dictatorship/dɪk'tetəʃɪp/, Sponsorship /
<b>-some (adj)</b>	Adventuresome /əd'ventʃəsəm/, Quarrelsome /'kwɔ:rlsəm/, Venturesome /
<b>-ward(s) (adj, adv)</b>	Backward /'bækwəd/, Southwards /'saʊθwədz/, Forward / /
<b>-wise (adj)</b>	Otherwise /'ʌðəwaɪz/, Cornerwise /'kɔ:nəwaɪz/, Clockwise / /

**Exceptions:** admirable /'ædmərəbl/, advertisement /əd'vɜ:tɪsmənt/, Catholicism /kə'θɒləsɪzəm/, conference /'kɒnfərəns/, difference /'dɪfrəns/, excellent /'eksələnt/, ignorant /'ɪgnərənt/, reference / /, preferable / /, resident / /.

**Practice:** Mark the stress in the following complex words:

WORD	TRANSCRIPTION	WORD	TRANSCRIPTION
1. Consider <u>able</u>		14. Fright <u>ful</u>	
2. Comfort <u>able</u>		15. Father <u>hood</u>	
3. Orphan <u>age</u>		16. Prepar <u>ing</u>	
4. Assist <u>ance</u>		17. Eleventh	
5. Allow <u>ance</u>		18. Happ <u>ily</u>	
6. Defi <u>ance</u>		19. Fearless <u>ly</u>	
7. Demonstrat <u>ed</u>		20. Clari <u>ty</u>	
8. Serv <u>ant</u>		21. Gentle <u>man</u>	
9. Free <u>dom</u>		22. After <u>wards</u>	
10. Differ <u>ence</u>		23. Instru <u>ctor</u>	
11. Belie <u>ver</u>		24. Troubl <u>esome</u>	
12. North <u>ern</u>		25. Other <u>wise</u>	
13. South <u>ern</u>		26. Resear <u>ch</u>	

