



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
<i>Compounds Nouns</i>	General rule If the compound word functions as a noun (noun + noun or gerund + noun), the primary stress falls on the first element and the secondary stress falls on the second element (regardless of the grammatical category of the individual component parts).	Football /'fʊtbɔ:l/ Armchair /'a:mtfɛə(r)/ Mailbox /'meɪlbɔks/ Highway /'haɪwei/ Goldfish /'gɔ:ldfiʃ/ Training shoe /'treɪniŋ ſu:/ Swimming-pool /'swɪmɪŋ pu:l/
	<i>Exceptions</i>	Mankind /mæn'kaɪnd/ Headmaster /'hed'ma:stə(r)/
	Compounds which include past participle + noun are stressed on the second element	Inverted commas /ɪn'vez:tɪd 'kɒməz/ Lost property /lɒst 'prəpəti/
<i>Compound adjectives</i>	General rule Primary stress on the second element, secondary stress on the first element	Blue-eyed /'blu: 'aɪd/ Dark-green /'da:k 'gri:n/ Open-minded /'əʊpən 'maɪndɪd/ Kindhearted /'kaɪnd 'ha:tɪd/ Well-known /'wel 'nəʊn/
	If one of the components in a two-word adjective is a noun , stronger stress may fall on the noun irrespective of whether it is first or second component.	Homesick /'həʊmsɪk/ Handmade /'hænd'meɪd/ Law-abiding /'la: əbaɪdɪŋ/ Low-cost /ləʊv 'kɒst/ Waterproof /'wɔ:təpru:f/ High-class /'hai 'kla:s/ Color-blind /'kʌlə blaɪnd/

	Compound words composed of adjective and ' ed ' at the end receive stress on the second element.	Bad-tempered / bæd 'tempəd/ Well-educated / ,wel 'edʒukeɪtɪd/ Well-dressed / ,wel 'drest/
	Compound words composed of an adjective and a gerund (-ing) at the end receive stress on the second element.	Good-looking / ,gʊd 'lʊkɪŋ/ Easy going / ,i:zi 'gəʊɪŋ/ Global warming / ,gləʊbl 'wə: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 'kla:s/ One-eyed / ,wʌn-'aɪd/ three-cornered / ,θri: 'kɔ:nəd/
Compound adverbs	General rule Compounds functioning as adverbs are usually finally stressed.	North-east / ,nɔ:θ 'i:st/ Downstream / ,daʊn'stri:m/ Above-mentioned / ,ə,bʌv 'menʃnd/
Compound verbs	General rule Primary stress on the second element, secondary stress on the first element	Overboil / ,əʊvə'bɔɪl/ Underestimate / ,ʌndə'restɪmɪt/ Outrun / ,aʊt'rʌn/ Overtake / ,əʊvə'teɪk/
	Compound words which function as verbs and have an adverbial element first take final stress.	Ill-treat / ,ɪl 'tri:t/ Back-pedal / ,bæk 'pedl/ Downgrade / ,daʊn'greɪd/ Upside down / ,ʌpsaɪd 'daʊn/
	Phrasal verbs 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	
a-	Aside /ə'saɪd/, Aback / /	/
ab-	Abnormal /æb'nɔ:məl/, Absolve / /	/
an-	Anachronism /ə'næk'rənɪzəm/, Anomaly / /	/
co-	Cooperative /kəʊ'prətɪv/, Cohabit /kəʊ'hæbit/, coexist /kəʊ'zɪst/, Coordinate / /	/
de-	Demotivate /di:'məʊtɪveɪt/, Decode / /	/
dis-	Dislike /dɪs'lаіk/, Disagree /dɪsə'gri:/, Dispatch /dɪ'spætʃ/, Disable / /	/
im-	Impossible /ɪm'ɒsəbl/, Immortal /ɪ'mɔ:tł/, Imprison /ɪm'prɪzn/, Imbalance / /	/
in-	Intoxicate /ɪn'tɔksɪkeɪt/, Invaluable /ɪn'veljuəbl/, Incorrect / /	/
re-	Resource /rɪ'sɔ:s/, Reorder /rɪ'ɔ:də(r)/, Rearrange / /	/
un-	Uncertain /ʌn'sɜ:tən/, Unfaithful /ʌn'feɪθfl/, Unable / /	/

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** /'impətənt/, **impulse** /'impʌls/, **impudent** / /, **infinite** / /, **insolent** / /.

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
-able/-ible (adj)	Considerable /kən'sɪdəbl/, Unavoidable /ʌnə'veɪdəbl/, Visible / /
-age (adj)	Percentage /pə'sentɪdʒ/, Marriage /'mærɪdʒ/, Passage / /
-ance/-ence (n)	Admittance /əd'mіtns/, Consistence /kən'sіstəns/, Dependence / /
-ant/-ent (n)	Reluctant /rɪ'lʌktənt/, Commandment / /
-dom (n)	Martyrdom /'ma:tədəm/, Wisdom /'wіzdm/, Kingdom / /
-ern (adj)	Western /'westn/, Eastern /'i:stən/, Northern /'no:ðən/, Southern / /

-ed (v)	Adapted /ə'dæptid/, Reasoned /'ri:znd/, Condemned /	
-er / -ar (n)	Interpreter /in'tɔ:pri:tə/, Commander /kə'ma:ndə/, Scholar /	
-ful (adj)	Sorrowful /'sɒrəʊfəl/, Beautiful /'bju:tifl/, Merciful /	/
-hood (n)	Brotherhood /'brʌðəhʊd/, Adulthood /'ædʌlθʊd/, Neighborhood /	
-ing (gerund)	Educating /'edʒu:kɪtɪŋ/, Interesting /'ɪntrestɪŋ/, Consisting /	/
-ism (n)	Alcoholism /'ælkəholɪzm/, Communism /	/
-ish (adj)	Childish /'tʃaɪldɪʃ/, Swedish /	/
-ist (adj)	Journalist /'dʒɜ:nəlist/, Physicist /'fɪzɪsɪst/, Specialist /	/
-less (adj)	Bottomless /'bɒtəmles/, Defenseless /dɪ'fensləs/, Penniless /	/
-like (adj)	Autumn-like /'ɔ:təmlaɪk/, Businesslike /'bɪznɪslaɪk/, Native-like /	/
-ly (adv)	Carelessly /'keələslɪ/, Apparently /ə'pærəntli/, Rapidly /	/
-man (n)	Policeman /pə'li:smən/, Fireman /'faɪəmən/, Businessman /	/
-ment (n)	Development /dɪ'veləpmənt/, Accompaniment /	/
-ness (n)	Tenderness /'tendənəs/, Greatness /'greɪtnəs/, Quietness /	/
-or (n)	Director /dɪ'-, də'rɪktə/, Survivor /sə'vaɪvə/, Instructor /	/
-s (n/v)	Images /'ɪmɪdʒɪz/, Advances /əd've:nsɪz/, Forests /'fɔ:rɪsts/, Damns /	
-ship (n)	Censorship /'sensəʃɪp/, Dictatorship /dɪk'teɪtəʃɪp/, Sponsorship /	
-some (adj)	Adventuresome /əd'ventʃəsəm/, Quarrelsome /'kwɔ:rəlsəm/, Venturesome /	
-ward(s) (adj, adv)	Backward /'bækwəd/, Southwards /'saʊθwədz/, Forward /	/
-wise (adj)	Otherwise /'ʌðəwaɪz/, Cornerwise /'kɔ:nəwaɪz/, Clockwise /	/

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

Practice: Mark the stress in the following complex words:

WORD	TRANSCRIPTION	WORD	TRANSCRIPTION
1. Considerable		14. Frightful	
2. Comfortable		15. Fatherhood	
3. Orphanage		16. Preparing	
4. Assistance		17. Eleventh	
5. Allowance		18. Happily	
6. Defiance		19. Fearlessly	
7. Demonstrated		20. Clarity	
8. Servant		21. Gentleman	
9. Freedom		22. Afterwards	
10. Difference		23. Instructor	
11. Believer		24. Troublesome	
12. Northern		25. Otherwise	
13. Southern		26. Research	

