



## Pronunciation

### Stress in American English

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Grammar Points

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## Grammar Points

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### **The Focus of This Lesson Is Stress in American English.**

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In the first two lessons, we talked about vowels and consonants, which are the sounds that make up a word. In this lesson, we will talk about stress.

English is a stress language. This means that every word has at least one syllable that is more audible than the rest of the syllables. When we stress the wrong syllable, the word may be harder to understand. Stress only falls on vowels and not consonants.

#### **For Example:**

1. "star": one-syllable word, one stress
2. "lesson": two-syllable word, one stress
3. "calendar": three-syllable word, one stress

See whether you can hear the stress in the words in the above examples. The sound that we emphasize the most is the stress, and most often it is also the syllable that lasts the longest.

Here's an example of a word that has a functional difference when we change the stress:

#### **For Example:**

1. "an **in**crease": noun
2. "to incre**ase**": verb

And here's an example of how sometimes it's hard to understand different accents (note the spelling

difference as well).

## For Example:

1. "aluminum": American English
2. "aluminium": British English

Some words may have a secondary stress, such as "pronunciation." It may seem as though this word has two stresses, but the "-a" is the main stress, and the "-u" is the secondary stress.

Nouns, verbs, and adjectives are known to be content words in a sentence, which mean that they have meaning on their own. We usually hear the stress in these words, which then sets the rhythm of the sentence.

## For Example:

1. "I saw a **friend** last **weekend**."

In this particular sentence, "saw," "friend," and "last" "weekend" are the content words. Thus, hearing the sentence as a whole, those are the words that have the most audible stress. The other words, "I," "a," and "last," are not as important; therefore, we do not stress them as much when we are speaking. This does not mean that we do not say them, but rather we do not emphasize them as much.

Of course, depending on what you want to convey, the stress of the sentence may change.

## For Example:

1. "I saw a friend **last weekend**."

In this sentence, the speaker is trying to make it clear that it was "last" weekend and not any other weekend. If you want to stress the subject, then you might say the sentence like this.

## For Example:

"**I** saw a friend last weekend."

Stress is an important aspect to know and understand when learning English. It will also set the stage for the next lesson. If your native tongue is not a stress language, then it may be hard to pronounce words as well as hear and understand them at first. However, once you recognize the difference, you will know what to look out for and what to practice.