

If you didn't understand what I was saying here it's because I misplaced the primary stress in almost every word. "The engineer complained to the manager on the conclusions of the company survey."

The primary stress is one of the most important elements when it comes to clear pronunciation. Yet it is one of the things that causes the most headache for non-native speakers when communicating in English, because it is inconsistent and elusive. This is why in this video, I'm going to help you understand everything related to primary stress. Because first, we're going to learn what is primary stress and how to identify the primary stress in new words in English.

Then I'm going to share with you some patterns to help you predict how to use the primary stress in certain words, that will ground you and help you feel more confident when speaking English. Then I'm going to share with you my 3-step system to help you learn and practice the primary stress. And finally, I'm going to quiz you to see how you are doing with your primary stress.

So, what is the primary stress? The primary stress is the one syllable in the word that sticks out the most. It is longer, louder, and higher in pitch. A syllable is the smallest unit of a word that usually has one vowel in it, and one or more consonants. For example, if we take the word 'example', here if we break it down to the smallest units - ig-ZAM-p'l - we hear and feel that we have three syllables - ig-ZAM-p'l. In this example, the middle syllable, the ZAM is the primary stress, because it is longer, louder, and higher in pitch. ig-ZAM-p'l.

Every word must have a primary stress. Technically it's every content word, but right now let's just generalize it and talk about the fact that every word must have a primary stress. So for example, if we take the word 'dog', it has one syllable, and that syllable is the primary stress. But if we take the word 'apple', we here have two syllables. The first one, A, is the primary stress - longer, louder, higher in pitch: A-p'l. And the second syllable is a weak stress.

So, when we talk about the stress system of English, we have the primary stress, we have one and only one. Then the rest of the syllables are either getting the secondary stress, which is a pure vowel - we'll just treat it as the default pronunciation, it's not to stress not to reduce - and then it could also be reduced to a schwa. And that is the weak stress.

Now, if you know me for a little bit, you know that I'm obsessed with the schwa, and I have a lot to say about it. But right now we're not talking about the schwa and we don't have all day. So I'm going to link to all of the necessary content for you to understand the schwa in the description below. Check it out cause it's really interesting.

Now. As we said, you have the primary stress, which is the one syllable that sticks out the most, and then you either have a secondary stress or a weak stress. Like in the example, 'A-p'l' – primary, weak. In the word 'unite' the 'NAIT' is the primary stress. Notice what I'm doing with my voice: u-NAIT, right? And the 'u' is a secondary stress, it is lower and it is shorter. Unite. Unite. Let's stick the word 'condition'. The middle syllable – DI – is the primary stress: k'n-DI-sh'n, k'n-DI-sh'n. The middle syllable is longer, louder, and higher in pitch. k'n-DI-sh'n. Now, how can you identify what syllable use stress when you say a word? Here's the thing. When you break down a word into smaller units, when you reach the primary stress – and primary stress is something that we all use and we all have, you're doing it in your native language as well. And you're doing it in English. You might be doing it slightly differently than how I explained. Maybe you're just saying it a little louder, maybe you're just saying it higher in pitch, but you are doing something to distinguish one syllable from all the other syllables. Almost all languages have words with primary stress.

So, when you break down a word saying it really slowly, you're breaking it down into syllables. And then there will be one syllable that is more dominant. So for example, if you're saying the word 'condition' and you want to identify what part you're stressing, you want to say it slowly. And then there is like this one part that is a little bit more dominant.

Let's say, if I ask you to punch your palm when you say the word, when you say it slowly, you're going to do it on a certain syllable, right? And if we use the word 'condition', where would you do it? So, first of all, let's say it slowly: condition, condition, right. And if you had to punch once when you say the word, would it be on the first syllable – CONdition? Would it be on the second syllable – conDition? Would it be on the last syllable – condiTION, right? What would feel more intuitive and natural, and not out of place?

I'm assuming that most of you said 'conDition' because that is the primary stress, that is where the power of the word is. And this is how you should think about it. So if you want to practice understanding where the primary stress is, you can use the punching method.

Condition, condition, condition.

– Son, what are you doing over there? I'm a little concerned about you.

– Oh, don't worry, mom. I'm just practicing my primary stress.

So make sure you're home alone when practicing the primary stress.

Another way to understand where the primary stress is to call the word out the window: condition, come home! Casual, come home! That part, where you go higher in pitch, is the primary stress. You might want to be home alone when practicing this too.

Okay. So now you know how do I identify the primary stress when you are saying the word,

because it's a huge part of the work that we're doing. But what happens if you are misplacing the primary stress, like I did at the beginning of this video? Here's the thing. When we speak a second language, oftentimes we apply things from our first language on to the second language. We do that with sounds.

So let's say, I can use 'rrr' instead of 'ur', and say 'rrrun' instead of run. I can use international patterns, different international patterns from my native language, it happens intuitively. And I can use different stress patterns. In many languages the stress is easily predicted, meaning, when you have a word, it's either always going to be at the end or always going to be on the one syllable before the end. Or it might change according to the word in the sentence, but it's very, very consistent.

So you might be applying that onto English. And in English, the stress is really inconsistent. Sometimes it's at the beginning, sometimes it's in the middle, sometimes it's at the end, sometimes it can be both – at the beginning or the end, depending on the word. And sometimes the stress is just, you know, going crazy and it's inconsistent altogether. So this is why it's so confusing.

So, what you're likely to do is, you know, cause you want some certainty in life, you might bring the patterns that you know from your native language, but then you might say something like ENgineer instead of engiNEER, or CONtEnt when you want to say conTENT. And that causes lack of clarity.

Now, the reason why it's so confusing is because when people hear a word, the first thing that they detect is the primary stress, because it's so dominant. Even if you don't think that right now, it is. And people search for the meaning or they search in their vocabulary, best based on where the stress is.

So if you're saying something like conTENT, they will look for the word that has the stress on the second syllable. And even though you intended to say CONtEnt, this might create a confusion, and it'll take the person listening a little longer to understand what it is that you're trying to say.

And remember, it is always about getting heard and delivering your message, right? It's not about sounding just more American or British or Australian. Ultimately, you want people to understand you, so you can communicate, so you get what you want, right? And this is why it is so incredibly important. And I'm so passionate about understanding it better and practicing it. Because intelligibility is everything. This is your tool to communicate with confidence. So as you can see, this could be very, very confusing. So don't feel bad, there's nothing wrong with you. It's just because this is how it is when communicating in a second language.

So now, let's move on to the second part where I give you actionable tools to know how to identify the primary stress, or at least to practice it when you don't have something concrete to work with.

So, when it comes to stress patterns, here's something interesting to look at. When you add a suffix to a word – a suffix is that small addition that changes the meaning of the word and the lexical function. So for example you can say 'available', but if you add '-ity' it turns into 'availability', right?

When we add a suffix, in most suffixes it kind of like draws and pulls the stress closer to the suffix, no matter where the stress is at the beginning. So for example, with the word 'available', here the primary stress is on the VAI – a-VAI-la-ble, right? But once I add '-ity', it draws the stress, and the stress moves from a-VAI-la-ble to a-vai-la-BI-li-ty. PO-ssi-ble – po-ssi-BI-li-ty.

So, when you add the suffix '-ity' the stress moves to the one syllable before the suffix. Same thing with '-cal'. gra-MMA-ti-cal. TECH-ni-cal. po-LI-ti-cal. Right? PO-li-tics – po-LI-ti-cal. Now, I have an entire lesson about stress in words with suffixes, so I'm going to link to that in the description below so you can learn more about that.

Now, it happens not in all suffixes, but with some of the most common suffixes in English, which gives you a lot of words to work with and to predict where the primary stress is, so make sure you check it out.

The next pattern that I'm going to share with you is when there is a word with two syllables. If the word with two syllables is a verb, usually the stress is going to be on the second syllable: com-PLETE, a-PPROVE, cre-ATE. If the word is a noun, the stress is likely to be on the first syllable: A-pple, TA-ble, CAP-tion. Right?

Now, here's another example that will help you understand it even better. Sometimes there are words that are exactly the same, and the only thing that changes is the stress. If it's a verb, the stress is going to be on the second syllable: pre-SENT. If it's a noun, the stress is going to be on the first syllable: PRE-sent. Con-VICT – CON-vict. re-CORD – RE-cord. So, understanding suffixes and understanding this pattern of verbs and nouns can help you quite a lot when trying to identify the primary stress.

But what happens if a word does not have that particular suffix that moves the stress closer to it, or it's not a word with two syllables? Then you have to use my 3-step system for identifying, learning, and practicing the primary stress.

So, if you come across a word – let's take the word 'congratulate' – and you're trying to identify the primary stress. First, I want you to guess what the primary stress is, and then

pronounce it and record it. When you record yourself and you listen back to it, you hear things more clearly. Because you're not doing it while all these other things going on in your head. And you're more focused on identifying what it is that you're doing, you know, checking your performance.

So, I recommend recording the word and then trying to identify what was the primary stress that you used. You can also use the 'punching method' or 'calling it out the window', and then you want to mark that primary stress. Then you want to go to the dictionary. My favorite is either a simple Google search - 'how to pronounce...' and then put the word, or 'define...' and then write the word, or go to [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com).

Then you'll see the word written out. On Google it'll be in bold, and on [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com) you're likely to see the apostrophe to the left of the primary stressed syllable. So, when you see that apostrophe above a certain letter, that means that what comes after is the primary stress. So that's how you know where the primary stress is for sure. And you want to compare it with what you detected. If it's okay, good for you, pat yourself on the back, you're doing an amazing job. If it's not, you're still doing an amazing job, but maybe we need to put in a little more work into practicing the word with the right pronunciation.

So, let's say you took the word 'congratulate', and you said that the 'late' is the primary stress, and in the dictionary you saw that it's 'gra'. So, you want to practice it with the right pronunciation. That means saying the word, but exaggerating the syllable that is the primary stress. ConGRAAAAAAtulate. You want to drag it and stretch it forever. ConGRAAAAAAtulate. AAAAAApple. FRUUUUUstrated. CAAAAAsual. Right? And you can use your arm, it really does help.

Or you want to go higher in pitch, but significantly. Apple. conGRAtulate. opporTUnity. SoPHISlicated. Right? So you either go a little longer or a little higher in pitch, or both, but you're practicing the right pronunciation again and again and again, developing new speaking habits and building pronunciation confidence.

This is how you shift from old habits that might not be serving you anymore, because it's not the accurate pronunciation, and step into speaking with new speaking habits using the right primary stress. But you have to do it again and again, and you have to exaggerate it because that's the only way for you to know if you're actually practicing it correctly or not.

Because a lot of times people will practice the right pronunciation, but in fact use the old pronunciation using the wrong primary stress without even noticing, because it is so incredibly elusive. And sometimes we think that we're doing one thing, but our mouth and our brain are taking us to a totally different place.

So you always want to be in control. And what I'm telling you here to do will help you to be in control and really start changing those habits. Okay? And then you want to do it again and again and again, and of course use it in context, in a small phrase, and then a sentence, and then try to use it intentionally when speaking.

Now, here's what you're probably saying to yourself, "Wait, Hadar, there are so many words. Am I supposed to do it with every word that I mess up?" No, because the actual practice, the act of identifying and practicing is what creates awareness. And awareness works in a miraculous way. It doesn't only help you identify what it is that you're working on right now, it gives you a broader sense of how the language works. Because your brain starts becoming more attentive and starts paying more attention to that thing called primary stress. Because up until now, your brain was like, "I don't need this information. I know what to do here." When in fact what you did was applying patterns from your first language.

So now you become more aware. Practicing it makes you be more in control of how you use your sounds and speech and voice. And that alone will help you use the right stress, even in words that you haven't practiced before. So, don't be discouraged if you feel that this is just such a small part of the entire language. Because that is the work that will help you improve and understand and become more aware of the primary stress in English.

Okay. So now that you know what is the primary stress and how do I identify it, and you know a little bit more about how to predict the stress in certain situations. And you also know my 3-step system to help you learn and practice by identifying, searching for the right stress, and practicing it in a certain way.

Now, let's put it into practice. I'm going to say the words you need to identify the primary stress - I also have them written down in the description - and then go to my website, and check if you got it right. Let's begin.

Democracy. Economics. Responsibility. Graduation. Psychology. Vegetables. Employee. Sitcom. Abundance. Profitable. Comprehend. Content. Saturated. Elusive. Sexuality. Residential. Interpersonal. Hidden. Recreate. Natural.

Okay, that's it. First of all, if you like this video, make sure to like and subscribe to my channel. I would really, really appreciate it and would love to have you here with us. And then let me know in the comments, how many words you got right in the quiz. So, share your wins or struggles with us. And if you have any other tips to share with the community on how to practice the primary stress, don't be shy, share them in the comments below.

Thank you so much for watching. And remember, even if you don't get it right, do not worry because mistakes is the only way to learn.

How to Find the Primary Stress in Words (transcript)

Have a beautiful day. And I will see you next week in the next video. Bye.