

# Before she left school// she started her own business

## Dividing prepared speech into units (1)

In most contexts, when we speak we are making up what we say as we go along. However, many people at times need to plan and prepare speech more formally, and read this aloud from a written text or develop it from notes. For example, students and academics may have to give presentations or lectures in class or at a conference; business people may have to give reports at meetings; teachers or broadcasters may need to read text aloud to their pupils or their audience. In Units 54 to 60, we will look at some of the features of pronunciation that tend to be found in the *prepared speech* produced in situations like these.

A

D44

In prepared speech, we tend to put speech unit boundaries, often marked with a pause, at clause boundaries (see also Unit 32) although they can go elsewhere, too. In this example, from a presentation, speech units are marked with //. The ones at clause boundaries are marked with //:

We have a great opportunity// at the moment// to encourage awareness of science// among the public.// A recent opinion poll// which was conducted earlier this year// revealed that// 80% of the population// is interested in science.// In addition//, it shows// a growing trust in scientists// who make an important contribution// to society.// However//, the poll also showed// that few people// felt they know enough// about science.// To develop understanding of science// we need more public debate// and we should be making science// more interesting// in school.



When written text is read aloud, speech unit boundaries are often placed at punctuation marks (commas, full stops, etc.). However, speech unit boundaries may also be put in other places.

B

D45

In particular, we tend to put speech unit boundaries –

- between two clauses linked by *and* or *but*:  
We have cut costs substantially// and will continue to invest.  
This is only one view// but it's supported by recent research.
- before and after an adverbial clause (i.e. a clause that gives more information about how, where, when, why, etc.):  
Before she left school// she started her own business.  
We'll be meeting at eight// to get to the airport by ten.
- after a clause which is the subject of a sentence (see also Unit 42):  
What they will do next// is unclear.  
How the process works// will be explained in the next lecture.
- before and after a non-defining relative clause (i.e. a clause that gives more information about a noun or noun phrase before it):  
The head of the police force// who is to retire next year// has criticised the new law.  
I would like to thank the conference organisers// who have worked very hard.

But notice that *defining* relative clauses are less likely to be separated from the noun they refer to by a speech unit boundary:

The number of people who are emigrating// is increasing steadily.  
rather than: The number of people// who are emigrating// is increasing steadily.  
We objected// to the recommendation that was put forward.  
rather than: We objected// to the recommendation// that was put forward.



**Note:** There may not be a speech unit boundary between clauses which are short:  
We'll leave when we can. (rather than: We'll leave// when we can.)

## Exercises

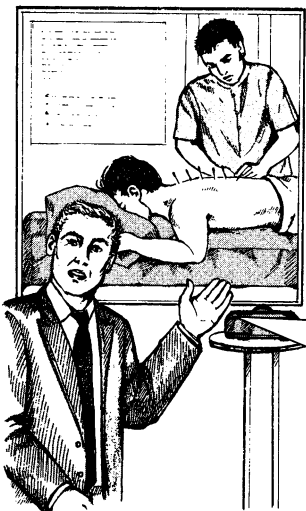
- 54.1 In each sentence, two possible speech unit boundaries are marked with //. Underline the one that is more likely.

EXAMPLE The only college // that teaches medical statistics // is to close next year.

- 1 The ship was launched // in September 1942 // and destroyed a month later.
- 2 Property prices will increase // as long as interest rates // remain low.
- 3 The bird is often heard // but seldom // seen in the wild.
- 4 They took what they could carry // and left the rest // of their belongings behind.
- 5 Why students drop out // of university // is a complex issue.
- 6 Thieves made off // with the painting // despite security guards in the building.
- 7 Most people also speak French // which is taught // from the age of six.
- 8 Who gave the order // to shoot // is to be investigated further.
- 9 Women // who are pregnant // should avoid alcohol.
- 10 He claimed // he was innocent // but the jury disagreed.

D46 Now listen and check your answers, and then say the sentences aloud.

- 54.2 Prepare to read aloud this extract from a talk about complementary therapy. Think about where you will put speech unit boundaries and mark these with //. Use the information in A and B to help you. Read the extract aloud and, if possible, record and listen to yourself.



Complementary therapy, // which focuses on the whole person, // is becoming more widely used. It considers a patient's physical symptoms and also takes lifestyle into account.

Most practitioners believe that the body seeks a state of balance. What complementary therapy does is help people achieve this balance. Treatment not only relieves the disease but also promotes general wellbeing.

How complementary therapy works is still not entirely clear. Recent research has compared it with traditional medicine. In one study conducted in Canada a group of patients who had severe back pain were treated either with complementary or traditional treatments. Patients who had complementary treatments showed faster rates of improvement.

D47 Now listen to the extract as it is said on the recording.

**Follow up:** Record a short section (about 30 seconds) of a radio news broadcast in English. (See Unit 4 for possible online sources.) Listen as many times as you need to and write out what is said. Try to mark the speech units with //. Which of these are at clause boundaries?