

Sentence Stress in English

1. Definition of Sentence Stress

Sentence stress refers to the emphasis placed on certain words within a sentence to convey meaning, focus, and emotion. In English, **content words** (nouns, main verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) are typically stressed, while **function words** (prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, articles, and conjunctions) are usually unstressed.

For example:

- *She **bought** a **new car** yesterday.*
(The main information is conveyed through the stressed words: *bought* and *new car*.)

Sentence stress plays a crucial role in **sentence rhythm, clarity, and meaning interpretation** in spoken English.

2. Types of Sentence Stress

There are different ways in which stress is used in sentences:

A. Normal Stress (Neutral Stress Pattern)

In neutral speech, sentence stress falls on the **content words** that carry the key information.

- *I saw a **beautiful house** in the **city**.*
- *They **finished** the **project** on **time**.*

B. Contrastive Stress

Stress can be used to emphasize a specific word to contrast it with another or correct a misunderstanding.

- *I wanted a **red** dress, not a **blue** one!*
- *She **called** him, not **texted** him.*

C. Emphatic Stress

This type of stress is used to express strong emotions such as surprise, disbelief, or importance.

- *I **really** love this movie!*
- *You **must** be joking!*

D. New Information Stress

When introducing new information in a conversation, we stress the new or important word.

- *What did you do yesterday?*
 - *I went to the **market**.* (The new information is "market.")
- *Who broke the window?*
 - *John broke the **window**.* (The focus is on "window.")

3. Sentence Stress and Intonation

Stress and intonation often work together to convey different meanings:

- **Rising intonation** (often in yes/no questions)
 - *Are you going to the **party**?*
- **Falling intonation** (often in statements and WH-questions)
 - *She **bought** a new car.*
 - *Where is the **library**?*

5. Exercises

A. Identify the stressed words

Read the following sentences and underline the words that should be stressed:

1. She went to the supermarket to buy some vegetables.
2. I didn't say he stole the money.
3. We are traveling to London next week.
4. *I didn't say he stole the money.* (Someone else said it.)
5. *I didn't say he stole the money.* (Maybe someone else stole it.)
6. *I didn't say he stole the money.* (Maybe he stole something else.)

C. Emphatic Stress Practice

Read the following sentences with strong emphasis on the highlighted words:

1. *I **really** don't like that movie!*
2. *You **must** be kidding!*
3. *I **love** chocolate!*