

**Matching exercise**

Learners are given sets of cards with words or phrases and a set of cards with a stress pattern. They must find words which match the pattern.

O o o	sciences	✓	(matches)
	rhythm	×	
	everyone	✓	(matches)
	tomorrow	×	

Or, a model word or phrase can be used instead of a pattern card.

If done in pairs or groups, these activities can stimulate a lot of discussion and experimentation with different versions, and are conducive to greater awareness and familiarity with stress pattern.

**A summary of English word stress rules****Rule 1**

*'Front weight' in nouns and adjectives.* There seems to be a very strong tendency in English for what is called core vocabulary to have stress on the first syllable. This means that many common nouns and adjectives will have stress on the first syllable.

*Examples:*

water	people	brother	table
finger	woman	sister	ugly
father	butter	pretty	apple
mother			

**Rule 2**

*Two- and three-syllable words which have a prefix.* In words with prefixes such as 'be-', 'in-', 'dis-', 'ex-', 'un-', etc., the stress is almost always on the second or third syllable, i.e. prefixes are not stressed in English words. Note that the majority of these words are verbs.

*Examples:*

repeat	begin	because	distrust
increase	exhaust	infer	inspect
conclude	confer	invite	understand

**Rule 3**

*Words with suffixes.* If we examine English words with suffixes, a similar tendency is revealed: suffixes are never stressed.

*Examples:*

-ly	quietly
-al	original
-ive	administrative
-ent/ant	equivalent
-ic	automatic

Another general tendency is for the stressed syllable to be somewhere in the middle of the word, rather than on the first or last syllable in words of four, five, or six syllables.

**Rule 3.1** Certain suffixes determine on which of the other syllables the stress will fall. There are very many suffixes which cause the syllable *before the suffix* to be stressed. These are:

-ive (impressive)	-iate (deviate)
-ient (incipient)	-iary (pecuniary)
-iant (deviant)	-iable (negotiable)
-ial (substantial)	-ish (diminish)
-ion (invention)	-ify (identify)
-ic (geographic)	-ium (premium)
-ian (median)	-ior (superior)
-ious (infectious)	-io (radio)
-ical (economical)	-iar (familiar)
-ity (opportunity)	-ible (impossible)

It doesn't matter if the stress was on a different syllable in the form of the word without the suffix (sometimes called the 'base' word); the stress will move from wherever it was to the syllable before the suffix when any of these suffixes are added.

**Rule 3.2** The suffix '-able' usually does not change the stress pattern of a word to which it is added. So in 'commend' the stress is on the second syllable, in 'commendable' it remains on the second syllable.

*Examples:*

adapt	adaptable
rely	reliable
knowledge	knowledgeable
detest	detestable

*Exceptions:*

demonstrate	demonstrable
admire	admirable
prefer	preferable

**Rule 3.3** The following suffixes cause the stress to be placed on the fourth syllable from the end of the word (this applies, of course, only to words of four or more syllables):

- ary (vocabulary)
- ator (investigator)
- mony (alimony)
- acy (intimacy)
- ory (category)

**Rule 4** *Compound words.* There are also some rules for determining stress in compound words. These are words which are formed by combining two nouns, a noun and an adjective, a verb and a

preposition, etc. It is very common for compound words which are nouns to have stress on the first element. So, the tendency in Rule 1 also applies to compound nouns.

*Examples:*

a teapot	a chairman	a put-on	a crossword
a windscreen	a postman	a pushover	a hotdog
a newspaper	a walkout	a grandfather	a blackbird

#### Rule 4.1

Some compound words are formed from an adjective plus a noun. When the same two words are used separately in a sentence, each word will have equal or independent stress. For example, compare:

What a beautiful blackbird!  
Look at that big black bird!

#### Rule 5

There is a set of *words which can be used as either a verb or a noun* in English (there are a few cases of noun or adjective):

increase	export	impòrt	content
overflow	insult	decrease	

In all these words, the noun has the stress on the first syllable, and the verb has the stress on the last syllable. This seems to fit with Rules 1 and 2: the nouns will have front weighting and the verbs, with a prefix as the first syllable, will have stress on the second syllable.

## 4.2

### Using stress in sentences

In Chapter 3 we looked at some ways of introducing learners to the way a speaker gives the listener information about the relative importance of different parts of a message. Here we will look at ways of exploring the use of stress in sentences to convey specific meanings.

#### 4.2.1

Asserting,  
denying,  
correcting

Conversations are full of negotiation. Speakers often want to assert a fact or opinion quite strongly, deny what another speaker has said and offer a correction, or ask about alternatives and options in order to come to an agreement about what to do. English has various means of carrying out these functions, including special constructions and vocabulary such as 'it's me who has to tell him' (the cleft formation) or 'on the contrary'. However, English speakers very often resort to stress to achieve their ends. For example, if a speaker has just made a statement with which you disagree, then you can assert the opposite by repeating their words almost exactly, but changing the verb from positive to negative or vice versa, and moving the main sentence stress:

People are funny.  
People aren't funny. They're strange.

Learners of English need to be aware of this use of stress in order to follow discussions, arguments, and exchanges of opinions. The ability to use stress in this way is also a useful speaking skill. Below are two

