

Stress - English Oral Skills Notes

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[Introduction](#)

- Not all syllables in a word are given equal emphasis. By the same token, not all words in a sentence are said with equal length.
- The relative emphasis that may be given to certain syllables in a word, or certain words in a sentence is what we refer to as **stress**.
- You say a syllable or a word is stressed when it is said louder or longer than the rest.
- Stress is studied in two levels:
 - a. Word level; and
 - b. Sentence level.

[Stress at the Word Level](#)

- A part of a certain word when said louder or longer than it is stressed.

[Rules of Word Stress](#)

1. For two-syllable nouns and adjectives, stress the first, for example
Cloudy carton table
2. For verbs with two syllables and prepositions, emphasize the second syllable, for example Trans/**fer**—two syllables
3. Words with three syllables.
 - a. Those ending in - er, -ly, emphasis put on the first syllable, for example,
 - b. Stress the first, for those ending in consonants and in - y, for example,
 - c. Stress the last syllable if the word ends in - ee, -ese, -eer, -ique, -ette, for example,
 - d. Look at the ones with the suffixes below, where stress is placed on the second,
 - -ary: library
 - -cial: judicial, commercial
 - -cian: musician, clinician
 - -tal : capital, recital

— Stress is important in studying the heteronyms. A pair, or group of words is referred to as heteronym when those words are spelled the same way but have different pronunciation and meaning. We have two main categories of heteronyms:

- a. Noun- verb pairs; and
- b. Verb -and-adjective pairs.

— We stress the first syllable if noun and the second if verb.

Examples of noun-and-verb pairs are included in the table below:

Noun	Verb	Noun	Verb
Abuse		Graduate	
Record		Cement	
Convert		Wind	

Abuse		Sin	
Contest		Produce	
Duplicate		Excuse	
Polish		Insult	
Rebel		Permit	

— In sentences;

- a. Many factories **produce** the **produce** we import.
- b. Allan became a **convert** after deciding to **convert** to christianity.

Sentence Stress

- Sentence stress is accent on certain words within a sentence.
- Most sentences have two basic word types:
 - a. **Content words** which are the key words carrying the sense or meaning- message.
 - b. **Structure words** which just make the sentence grammatically correct. They give the sentence its structure.

Look at the sentence below:

Buy milk feeling tired.

— Though the sentence is incomplete, you will probably understand the message in it. The four words are the content words. Verbs, nouns, adjectives, are content words.

— You can add words to the sentence to have something like:

Will you buy me milk since I am feeling tired?

— The words: will, you, me, since, I, are just meant to make the sentence correct grammatically.

— They can also be stressed to bring the intended meaning.

Now let's study the sentence below:

Joan doesn't think Akinyi stole my green skirt.

— Each word in the sentence can be stressed to bring the meaning as illustrated in the table.

Sentence	Meaning
Joan doesn't think Akinyi stole my green skirt.	She doesn't think that, but someone else does.
Joan doesn't think Akinyi stole my green skirt.	It is not true that Joan thinks that.
Joan doesn't think Akinyi stole my green skirt.	Joan doesn't think that, she knows that.
Joan doesn't think Akinyi stole my green skirt.	Not Akinyi, but someone else. Probably Njuguna or Adhiambo.
Joan doesn't think Akinyi stole my green skirt.	Joan thinks Akinyi did something to the green skirt, may be washed it.
Joan doesn't think Akinyi stole my green skirt.	Joan thinks Akinyi stole someone else's green skirt, but not mine.
Joan doesn't think Akinyi stole my green skirt.	She thinks Akinyi stole my red skirt which is also missing.
Joan doesn't think Akinyi stole my green skirt .	Joan thinks Akinyi stole my green shirt. She mispronounced the word.

Exercise 1