

Pronunciation - Practicing Stress and Intonation

I am often surprised at how focusing on the "stress - timed" quality of English helps students improve their pronunciation skills. Students often focus on pronouncing each word correctly and therefore tend to pronounce in an unnatural manner. By focusing on the stress - timed factor in English - the fact that only principle words such as proper nouns, principle verbs, adjectives and adverbs receive the "stress" - students soon begin sounding much more "authentic" as the cadence of the language begins to ring true. The following lesson focuses on raising awareness of this issue and includes practice exercises.

Aim: Improving pronunciation by focusing on the stress - time nature of spoken English

Activity: Awareness raising followed by practical application exercises

Level: Pre - intermediate to upper intermediate depending on student needs and awareness

Outline:

- Begin awareness raising activities by reading an example sentence aloud to the students (for example: The boys didn't have time to finish their homework before the lesson began). Read the sentence the first time pronouncing each word carefully. Read the sentence a second time in natural speech.
- Ask students which reading seemed more natural and why it seemed more natural.
- Using the ideas students come up with, explain the idea of English being a "stress - timed" language. If the students speak a syllabic language (such as Italian or Spanish), point out the difference between their own native language and English (theirs being syllabic, English stress - timed). Just this awareness raising can make a dramatic difference in such students abilities.
- Talk about the differences between stressed words and non-stressed words (i.e. principle verbs are stressed, auxiliary verbs are not).
- Write the following two sentences on the board:
 - *The beautiful Mountain appeared transfixed in the distance.*
 - *He can come on Sundays as long as he doesn't have to do any homework in the evening.*
- Underline the stressed words in both sentences. Ask students to try reading aloud. Point out how each sentence seems to be approximately the same length in "stress - time".
- Ask students to look through the example sentences and underline the words that should be stressed in the worksheet.
- Circulate about the room asking students to read the sentences aloud once they have decided which words should receive stresses.
- Review activity as a class - ask students to first read any given sentence with each word pronounced followed by the "stress - timed" version. Expect a surprise at the quick improvement students make in pronunciation (I am every time I do this exercise)!!

Pronunciation Help - Sentence Stress

Take a look at the following list of stressed and non-stressed word types.

Basically, stress words are considered **CONTENT WORDS** such as

- Nouns e.g. kitchen, Peter
- (most) principle verbs e.g. visit, construct
- Adjectives e.g. beautiful, interesting
- Adverbs e.g. often, carefully

Non-stressed words are considered **FUNCTION WORDS** such as

- Determiners e.g. the, a, some, a few
- Auxiliary verbs e.g. don't, am, can, were
- Prepositions e.g. before, next to, opposite
- Conjunctions e.g. but, while, as
- Pronouns e.g. they, she, us

Mark the stressed words in the following sentences. After you have found the stressed words, practice reading the sentences aloud.

- John is coming over tonight. We are going to work on our homework together.
- Ecstasy is an extremely dangerous drug.
- We should have visited some more castles while we were traveling through the back roads of France.
- Jack bought a new car last Friday.
- They are looking forward to your visiting them next January.
- Exciting discoveries lie in Tom's future.
- Would you like to come over and play a game of chess?
- They have been having to work hard these last few months on their challenging experiment.
- Shakespeare wrote passionate, moving poetry.
- As you might have expected, he has just thought of a new approach to the problem.

[Worksheet Printing Page](#)

Back to [lessons resource page](#)

Related Articles

- [Lesson Pronunciation Practice Stress and Intonation - Focus on Pronunciatio...](#)
- [Lesson Pronunciation Practice Stress and Intonation - Focus on Pronunciatio...](#)
- [Lesson Pronunciation Practice Stress and Intonation - Focus on Pronunciatio...](#)
- [Intonation and Stress- English as 2nd Language](#)
- [Intonation and Stress - Word Stress and Intonation](#)