

speaking though not of English speech as a whole — we speak without rhythm when we are nervous or hesitant. Certainty is a useful approach to adopt when presenting and demonstrating stress patterns to ESOL students.

To help students gain control over this important feature of English pronunciation we can introduce a number of UNDERSTANDING SENTENCE STRESS features.

Helping students understand sentence stress

First, we can tell our students which words are generally stressed and which are usually unstressed and therefore weak. First of all, and as a general rule of thumb, words of more than one syllable are always stressed. Next, words of one syllable are generally not stressed if they are purely grammatical words like pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and articles. Other words which are stressed, for example include full verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs. This factual information can be visually presented to the students, again using home-made wall posters — see figure 6 below by way of example. Use plenty of differentiating colours in such posters.

Sentence words that are usually <i>stressed</i> .	Sentence words that are normally <i>unstressed</i> .
Full verbs: <i>eat, love, take, fill, taste, etc.</i> Nouns: <i>chair, book, dog, pen, paper, box, etc.</i> Adjectives: <i>good, bad, red, cold, hot, tired, etc.</i> Adverbs: <i>well, just, quite, not, soon, always, etc.</i>	Prepositions: <i>for, to, at, on, from, by, off, into, etc.</i> Articles: <i>the, a, an.</i> Pronouns: <i>I, me, you, he, she, it, him, her, etc.</i> Conjunctions: <i>and, but, while, unless, because, etc.</i>
REMEMBER! <ol style="list-style-type: none"> It's the words which are stressed, which give us the picture or provide most of the information. This vowel sound /ə/ only occurs in unstressed syllables, NEVER in stressed ones. 	

Figure 6.

Recycling exercises

As with the sounds of English and word stress, any piece of text used during the lesson can be recycled. Ask the students to work in pairs or small groups to underline or box the words they think would be stressed if the text was spoken. A few minutes regularly spent on exercises such as this can help heighten students' awareness of stress patterning. As a second stage you can show the students how to mark stress (ˈ) but ensure they know that the stress mark always precedes the stressed syllable and must always be drawn vertically. It should never lean to the left or right lest it be confused with a tone mark.

Choral rhythm drills

Simple verses such as the two below are particularly well-suited to class chorus work which can provide an easy introduction to the more individual work demanded by other types of stress patterns.

'Jack 'Sprat could 'eat no 'fat,	There 'was a young 'lady of 'Riger,
His 'wife could 'eat no 'lean,	Who 'went for a 'ride on a 'tiger.
And 'so be'tween them 'both, you 'see,	They re'turned from the 'ride,
They 'licked the 'dishes 'clean.	With the 'lady in'side,
'Jack ate 'all the 'lean,	And a 'smile on the 'face of the 'tiger,
His 'wife ate 'all the 'fat,	
The 'bone they 'picked it 'clean,	
Then 'gave it to the 'cat.	

Later, a range of sentences, all of which can be said with the same rhythm pattern, can be introduced chorally and visually. It can be helpful to get the students to clap on the stress (beat) in order that they may easily perceive the individual stress patterns. The main purpose behind such exercises as those suggested here is simply one of stress timing awareness. As a second stage, using any lesson text, have the students mark the stress then read it aloud to practise stress prominence.