

# PG-5: EF-C

## PRACTICE VARYING THE STRESS IN PHRASES AND SENTENCES

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Oral English differs from many other spoken languages in that syllables in a word, phrase, or sentence vary considerably in stress (or accent). As a matter of fact, English sentence rarely contain more than two or three syllables which are emphasized. That statement should be tempered for many Southern speakers who often (as a part of their dialect) stress more syllables per sentence than do speakers from other dialect regions of the United States. The stressed syllables help to "headline" the meaning of a sentence. To illustrate how this works, let's take a simple sentence and vary the "headline" syllables. Notice how the meaning of the sentence changes:

"Do you think it's going to **rain**?" (the question is "rain")

"Do **you** think it's going to **rain**?" (the question is "Do you?")

"Do you **think** it's going to rain?" (the question is "think")

"Do you think it's **going** to rain?" (how soon?)

"**Do** you think it's going to **rain**?" (your opinion isn't clear)

Unfortunately, all those possible shades of meaning in the same spoken sentence will be lost if we cue and say each syllable with equal stress. It is only fair to say that it might be difficult -- if not impossible -- to show all of the variations of syllabic stress in speech with cues alone. We can, however, show many "weak-form" words of English with Cued Speech because these non-stressed words are often said with different vowel sounds. English vowel sounds tend to become neutral when they are said with minimal stress in a phrase or sentence. Let's go back to our "rain" sentence to demonstrate how this works. We shall also need to use the Phonemic Spelling system to overcome the ambiguities of regular English Spelling.

If you gave equal stress to all syllables in the "rain" sentence, you would probably cue-and-say:

"Due [1-c] yue [8-c] xhingk [7-t,8-s,2-s] its [5-t,5-s,3-s] gohing [7-s/f,5-t,8-s] tue [5-c] rayn [3-c,5-t,4-s]."

Does anyone talk that way in normal conversation? Very rarely! We are more apt to say something like "D'ya think its gonna rain?" In informal conversation /due/ becomes /du/[1-s/d], yue becomes /yu/[8-s/d], /gohing tue/ becomes /gunu/ [7-s/d,4-s/d]. Depending upon intended meaning the syllable stress would vary.

The point being made is that when a spoken syllable is weak, the vowel in that syllable usually becomes either /u/ [side/down], /i/ [throat], or /oo/ [throat]. This is a phonologic rule you can count on. Some selected common examples will demonstrate how the rule works:

Printed	Stressed Oral	Unstressed Oral
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=====	=====	=====
a	/e-i/[5-c,5-t]	/u/ [-s/d]
an	/an/[5-t,4-s]	/un/ [-s/d,4-s]
the	/thee/[2-m]	/thu/[2-s/d] or /thi/[2-t]
to	/tue/[5-c]	/tu/[5-s/d/ or /too/[5-t]
and	/and/[5-t,4-s,1-s]	/un/[5-s/d,4-s/ or /und/
but	/buht/[4-s/d,5-s]	/but/[4-s/d,5-s]
or	/awr/ or /ohr/	/ur/ or in some dialects /u/
for	/fawr/ or /fohr/	/fur/ or /fu/
nor	/nawr/	/nur/ or /nu/
by	/bah-i/ or /bah/	/bu/
you	/yue/	/yu/ or /yoo/
as	/az/	/uz/
your	/yawr/ or /yohur/	/yur/ or /yoor/ or /yu/
be	/bee/	/bi/
I	/ah-i/[5-s,5-t]	/u/[5-s/d] or /ah/[5-s/f]
we are	/wee ahr/	/wir/ or /wu/

The above list is by no means exhaustive. Often in spoken words such as "David" and "minute" the unstressed second syllable is so weak that it is difficult to hear whether one says /dayvid/ or /dayvud/, whether it is /minit/ or /minut/. In such cases cue the vowel which happens to be in the most convenient position - throat or side/down.

In these practice phrases and sentences cue-and-say all syllables which are not italicised with the vowels /u/, /oo/, /i/, or /ur/:

"Take a chance."

"Tea for two."

"One of a kind."

"Not so bad."

"Jack and Dawn."

"Suits your fancy."

"Today is my birthday."

"Two on a match."

"What is your name?"

"Before you go."

"All by myself."

"Water under the bridge."

"Think of a number from one to ten."

"It's all in the way you say it."

"I can think of a number of things you could do."

"I'd like to be the first to know."

You may have decided when you said the above phrases or sentences that you stress more (or different) syllables in your personal conversational speech than were indicated. That's fine! Cue as you speak. But cueing and saying unstressed syllables and weak-form words as you actually speak them will in the long run do much to help you to achieve genuine fluency in your Cued Speech.

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