

# Getting the right stress in English words

## Introduction

If an English word has more than one syllable, then one of the syllables is usually spoken with more force, or strength, than the others. For example the stressed syllable may be made a little longer than the others. The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables of a word is called its 'stress pattern'. This stress pattern is important for the recognition of a word. Here is how the *Macmillan Essential Dictionary* gives this information:

**computer** /kəm'pjʊ:tə/ noun [C] ★★★ an electronic machine that has programs on it

The phonetic letters tell you the sounds, and the mark ' ˈ ' tells you that the syllable after it is stressed. So you say the word *computer* with extra force on the second syllable.

What you need to know is:

- How many syllables there are in the word
- Which one of the syllables is stressed

These activities will help you practice this.

### ► Activity 1

Tick the correct box according to the number of syllables each word has.

	2	3	4
<b>a</b> computer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>b</b> ceremony	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>c</b> careful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>d</b> character	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>e</b> content (noun)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>f</b> collection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>g</b> certificate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>h</b> currency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>i</b> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>j</b> command	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>k</b> confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>l</b> contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	2	3	4
<b>m</b> career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>n</b> content (adjective)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### ► Activity 2

Now put the words from activity 1 in the correct group according to their stress patterns. Use the dictionary to help.

Ooo	oOo	oO	Oo	Oooo	oOoo
	<i>computer</i>				

### ► Activity 3

Read this short extract. Underline the words with more than one syllable.

James Bond is sent to Jamaica to investigate the sudden disappearance of the island's Governor and his assistant. When he arrives, 007 begins to suspect that the Governor's absence is in some way linked to Dr No, the reclusive owner of a remote island which lies between Cuba and Jamaica. There have been several strange deaths on this island, which the local people blame on a mysterious and terrifying 'dragon'. Bond decides to pay a secret visit to the island. But he is not the only person to land there.

(This short extract has been taken from *Dr No*, written by Ian Fleming and retold by F H Cornish. Published by Macmillan Education, 2005.)

### ► Activity 4

Now decide whether the primary stress in the words you have underlined is on the first, second or third syllable.

Stress on 1st syllable: \_\_\_\_\_

Stress on 2nd syllable: Jamaica

Stress on 3rd syllable: \_\_\_\_\_