

Sentence stress for correction

Introduction

In this activity, students explore the impact of shifting sentence stress and how it can impact on and change the meaning of a sentence.



They explore a collection of sentences and practice moving the stressed words and syllables. They finish by playing a game in pairs to identify how the stress has moved.

This activity draws on ideas presented by Clark von Heller in his presentation ‘Composing music to enhance pronunciation.’

Webinar time reference: 20:50 – 20:22

Level: B1+ Secondary

Time: 40 – 60 minutes

Aim: To make students aware how moving stress within a sentence can be used for correcting a misunderstanding.

Preparation:

- Make copies of the shifting stress sentences
- Practice saying the sentences with stress on different words.

Procedure

- Tell the students that in English sentences, some words are more loudly stressed than others.
- Give them the example, “I’m going to the beach at the weekend.”
- Ask the students to try to say the sentence with you and emphasise the stressed words.

- Tell the students that sometimes words are given extra stress in a sentence to change the meaning of the sentence. Tell them this is often done to correct misunderstandings.
- Read through the different stress variations of the first sentence, “I asked you to buy me a bunch of red roses.”
- Ask the students if they can hear the difference.
- Now ask them to listen and think about how the meaning changes.
- Say each of the versions of the sentence, then ask students to discuss how the meaning changes.
- Get some feedback and clarify their answers.
- Next, give the students the other sentences and ask them to practice saying them with the stress on different words.
- Get the students to work together in pairs and practice saying the sentences with the stress on different words. Their partner should tell them how it changes the meaning.
- Give out the answer sheet with all the variations of the sentences.
- Say some yourself and get students to tell you the meaning. Note: You could also play this as a group game, with students taking it in turns to say sentences and then others guessing the meaning.

Materials:

Moving sentence stress

1. I asked you to buy me a bunch of red roses.
2. I wanted to buy her a new dress.
3. I don't think we should fire him.
4. I didn't cheat in the exam today.
5. We should think about selling the house.
6. I can see the beach from the balcony.

Answers

I asked you to buy me a bunch of red roses.

I asked, not someone else.

I **asked** you to buy me a bunch of red roses.

I asked you, but you didn't do it.

I asked **you** to buy me a bunch of red roses.

I asked you, not someone else.

I asked you to **buy** me a bunch of red roses.

I asked you buy them, not steal them.

I asked you to buy **me** a bunch of red roses.

I asked you to buy them for me, not for someone else.

I asked you to buy me a **bunch** of red roses.

I asked for a bunch, not just one.

I asked you to buy me a bunch of **red** roses.

I asked for red roses, not a different colour.

I asked you to buy me a bunch of red **roses**.

I asked for roses, not a different kind of flower.

I **wanted** to buy her a new dress.

I wanted to. I didn't want someone else to.

I wanted to **buy** her a new dress.

I wanted to, but I didn't buy one.

I wanted to buy **her** a new dress.

The dress was for her, not for someone else.

I wanted to buy her a **new** dress.
I wanted a new one, not an old or second hand one.

I wanted to buy her a new **dress**.
A dress, not some other piece of clothing.

I don't think we should fire him.
Someone else thinks we should fire him.

I **don't** think we should fire him.
Correcting misunderstanding.

I don't **think** we should fire him.
I'm sure we should fire him.

I don't think **we** should fire him.
I think you should fire him.

I don't think we **should** fire him.
I think we must fire him.

I don't think we should **fire** him.
I think we should do something different (promote him,
send him on a course etc)

I don't think we should fire **him**.
I think we should fire someone else.

We should think about selling the house.
We should discuss it together.

We **should** think about selling the house.
Correcting a misunderstanding and emphasising
the importance of the action.

We should **think** about selling the house.
We should think about it, not do it.

We should think about **selling** the house.
We should think about selling, not renting.

We should think about selling the **house**.
The house, not the car or some other property.

I can see the beach from the balcony.
I can, but someone else may not be able to.

I **can** see the beach from the balcony.
Correcting and emphasising.

I can **see** the beach from the balcony.
Not smell or hear.

I can see the **beach** from the balcony.
Not some other thing.

I can see the beach from the **balcony**.
Not from the door or window.

Additional resources

English sentence stress

- In this article, Lynn Gallacher offers a range of techniques for making students more aware of sentence stress. The article also includes some example recordings.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/english-sentence-stress>

Teaching the schwa

- In this article, Catherine Morley looks at the role of the schwa in English pronunciation and how it works with other syllables to create the rhythm of English.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/teaching-schwa>

Rhythm

- Rhythm is both a feature of and product of the phonological structure of English. In this article, Steve Darn looks at what creates the characteristic rhythm of English.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/rhythm>

Pronunciation whispers

- Del Spafford explains how to use this creative technique to develop students' pronunciation.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/pronunciation-whispers-0>