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English Institute

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Washington English Center: Teaching Pronunciation

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Agenda

- Pedagogical Priorities
- Overview of Pronunciation
- Exercises for Teaching
- Questions & Answers
- Final Comments

Before you start teaching pronunciation, you have to rid yourself of common myths.

Myth: An accent is something that can be “removed” from someone’s speech pattern, e.g. “to lose an accent.”

Better: If students think of the target speech pattern as “an accent that they are putting on,” then they are more likely to accept the odd feelings they will experience when using it.

Beware of assuming that students can repeat what they hear.

Myth: “Ear training” is an effective accent-reduction technique. Most people can imitate the sounds you model for them.

Fact: The ability to imitate accents is rare. Most people cannot hear sounds that do not belong to the repertoire of their native language. A much more systematic approach is needed.

What is taught in pronunciation training is often not what the students most need.

Myth: Accents consist primarily of systematic patterns of pronunciation errors. As such, pronunciation training is best done by teaching students the sounds of English.

Fact: Intonation and rhythm together with muscularity and resonance carry much more of the essence of a language than individual sounds.

What is taught in pronunciation training is often not what the students most need.

Myth: If intonation is an important factor, students can make progress only by learning and using every subtle pitch-change pattern used by native speakers.

Fact: Pitch-change and rhythm characteristics contribute enormously to the authentic native impression of many languages and dialects.

Everyone has an accent.

Actors “put on” accents to play different characters.

Presenting oneself to the world does not feel the same as it did when using the first language or its patterns of rhythm and intonation.

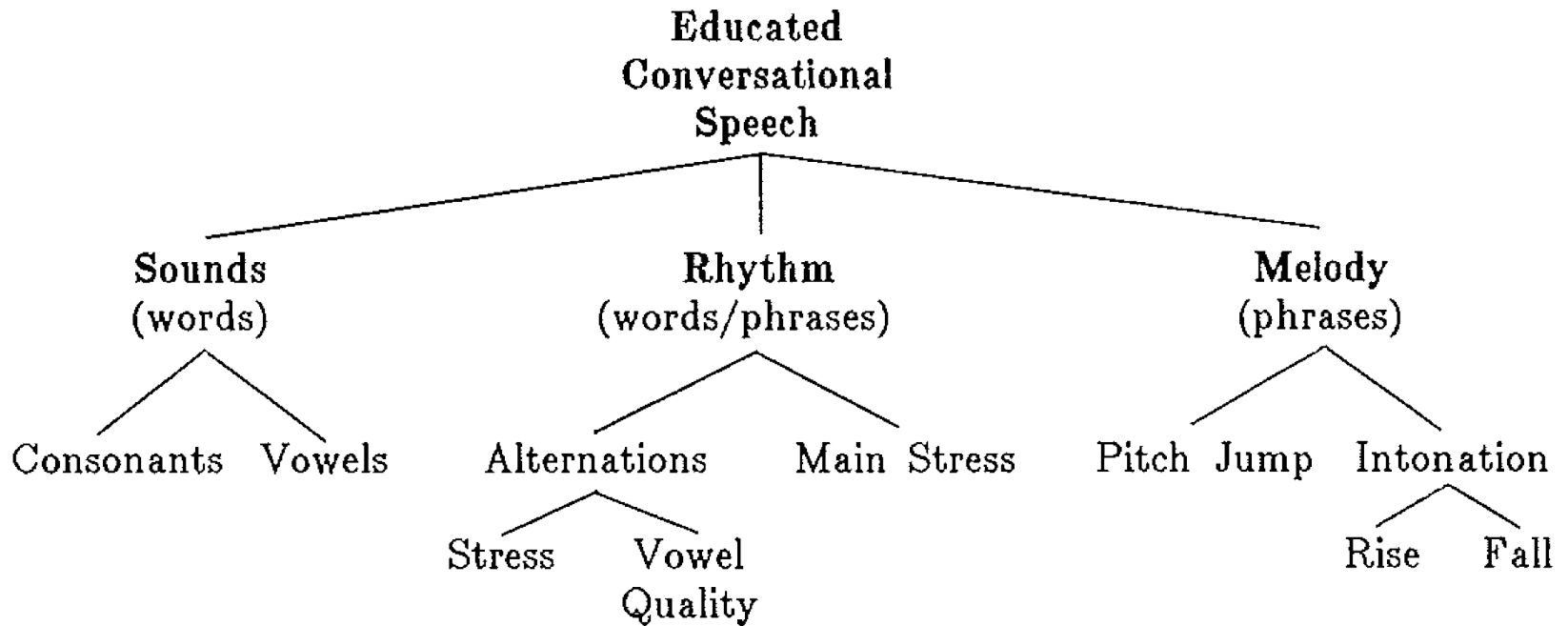


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Elements of English Speech

An overview of the places of
articulation and mouth movements
required in English

Educated English speech consists of three main components.



By sounds is meant the consonants and vowels
that make up the words.

c c c c c c c

| | | | | | |

c o n g r a t u l a t i o n s

| | | | |

v v v v v

Rhythm refers to the alternation of stress and vowel quality, and the placement of major stress.

c ö n g r à t ŭ l á t i ö n s

v		v	v	v	v
r		f	r	f	r

•

Rhythm is also characteristic of phrases.

. ○ . . ○ . . ●

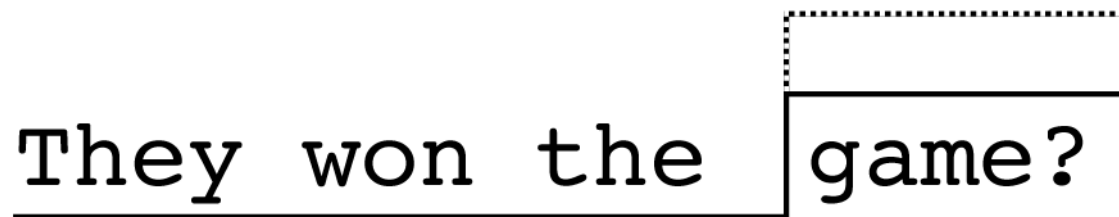
You seem to be amazed at our team.

. ○ . . ○ . . ●

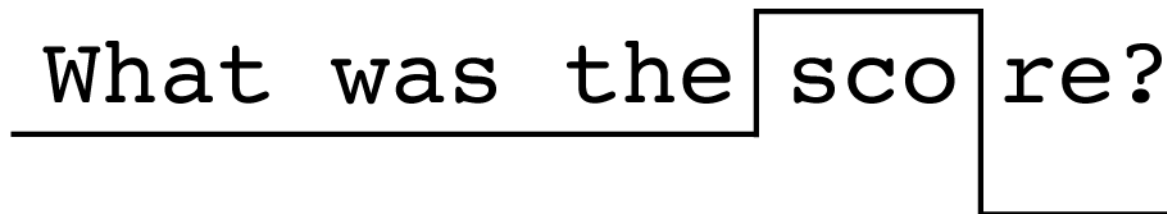
It's hard to believe we could win.

Melody, the third component, consists of a pitch jump on the word with focal stress, then the movement of pitch after the jump.

They won the game?



What was the score?





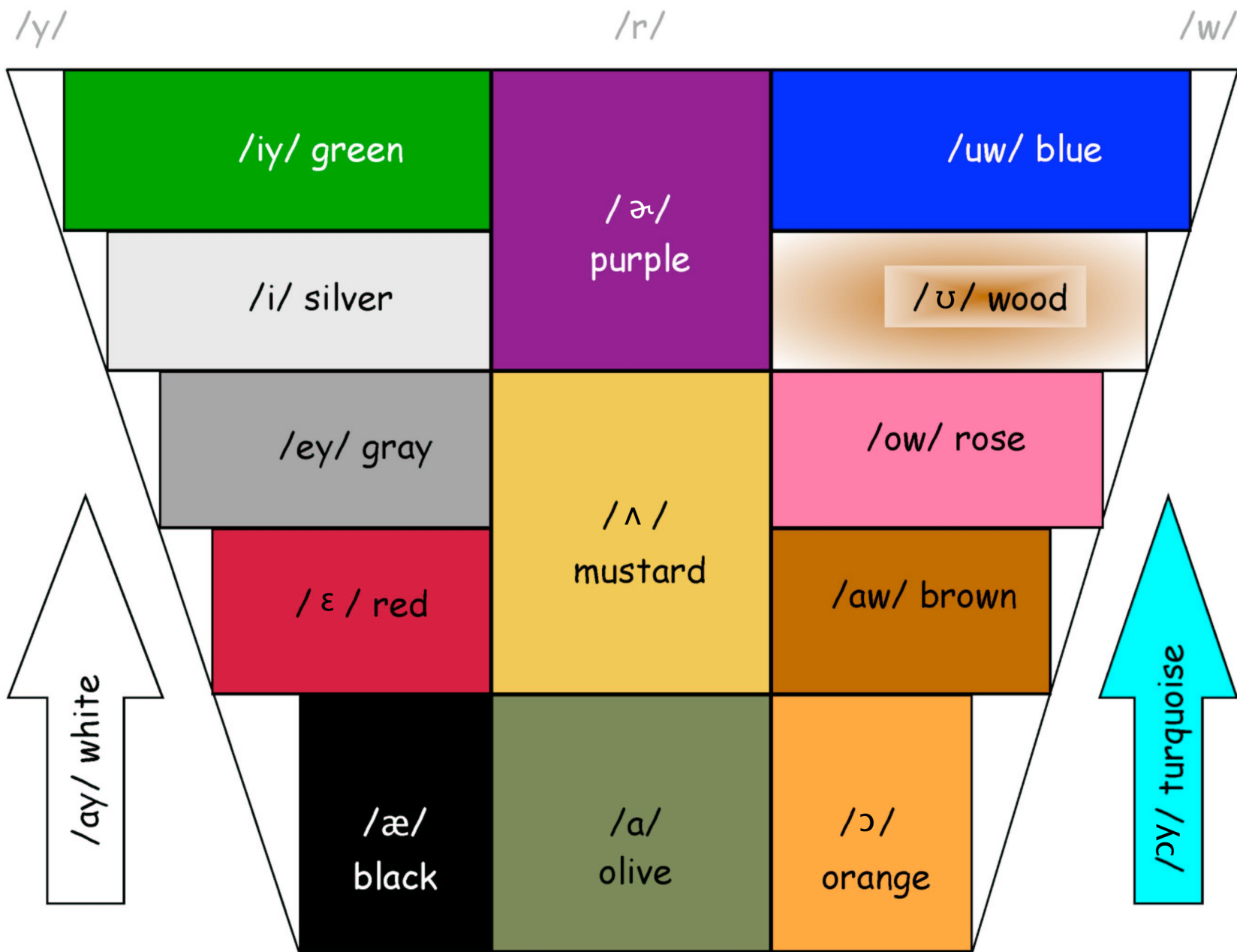
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The Sounds of English

An overview of the places of
articulation and mouth movements
required in English

Where in the mouth the sound is produced

How Made	Voicing	Bilabial	Labiodental	Interdental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	Voiceless	/p/			/t/		/k/	/ʔ/
	Voiced	/b/			/d/		/g/	
Fricative	Voiceless		/f/	/θ/	/s/	/ʃ/		/h/
	Voiced		/v/	/ð/	/z/	/ʒ/		
Affricate	Voiceless					/tʃ/		
	Voiced					/dʒ/		
Nasal	Voiced	/m/			/n/		/ŋ/	
Lateral Liquid	Voiced				/l/			
Approximant Liquid	Voiced				/r/			
Glide	Voiced	/w/				/y/		





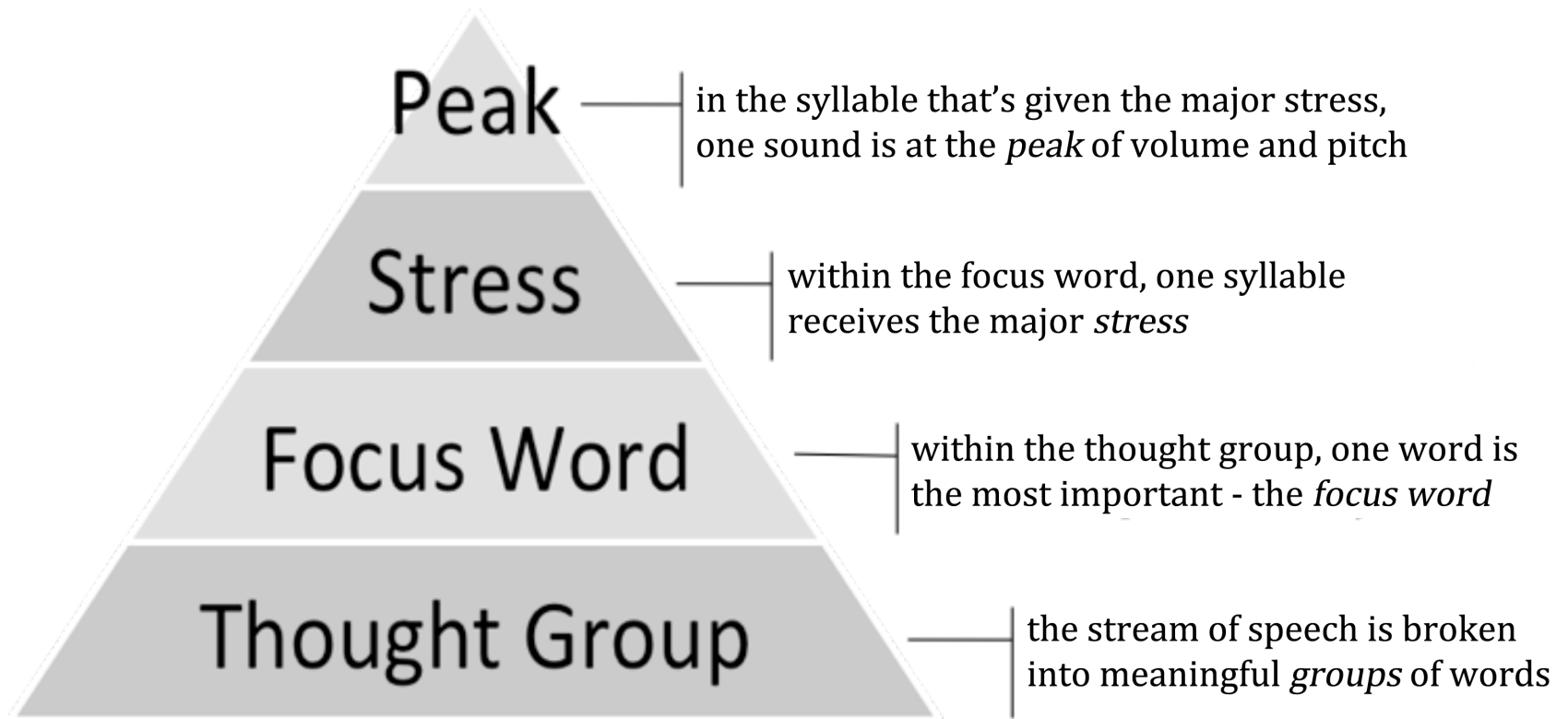
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Phrase Rhythm and Melody

The special rhythm and melody of
English



Speakers help listeners follow their message by breaking utterances into thought groups.



Thought groups consist of meaningful grammatical units.

Example: The first colloquium|will be next Friday.

NOT: The|first colloquium will be next|Friday.

Listeners depend heavily on phrase rhythm to make sense out of your message.



"Alfred," said the boss, "is stupid."



Alfred said, "The boss is stupid."

Signals of Thought Group (Intonation Unit) Boundaries		
Criteria	Sentence A (3 intonation units)	Sentence B (2 intonation units)
Number of pitch contours	3: Alfred / said the boss / is stupid	2: Alfred said / the boss is stupid
Number of lengthened syllables	3: AL-fred, BOSS, STU-pid	2: AL-fred, STU-pid
Number of pauses	3: after Alfred, boss, stupid	2: after said, stupid
Frequency of pitch reset	2 resets at: said, is	1 pitch reset at: the boss

The more thought groups you use, the more emphatic your message sounds.

A pause has some power to draw your attention to what the speaker is trying to say.

A pause has some power | to draw your attention | to what the speaker is trying to say.

Each thought group usually contains one focus word that receives primary stress.

● ●

A pause has some power | to draw your attention | to

●

what the speaker is trying to say.

Within a thought group, phrase rhythm prevails.

. o . . ● . o . ● .

A pause has some power | to draw your attention | to

. . o . o . ●

what the speaker is trying to say.

Each thought group has its own pattern of melody and intonation.

. o . . ● . o . ● .
A pause has some power | to draw your attention | to
. . o . o . ●
what the speaker is trying to say.

Within a thought group, words are linked smoothly.

VOWEL TO VOWEL, *y*, *w*

Now I can do it.
-w- -w-

We always fly at night.
-y- -y-

Say yes, so we can go.
-y- -w-

VOWEL TO CONSONANT

Come any time you like.

Draw me a picture.

He recently flew to France.

CONSONANT TO VOWEL

I'd like a Pepsi.

She's only four.

We'll arrive in time.

CONSONANT TO SAME CONSONANT

It's a full length dress.

We got to meet Tom.

I wish she'd never read it.

STOP TO DIFFERENT STOP

Cab drivers like tips.

We should give it back.

Pete did a good job.

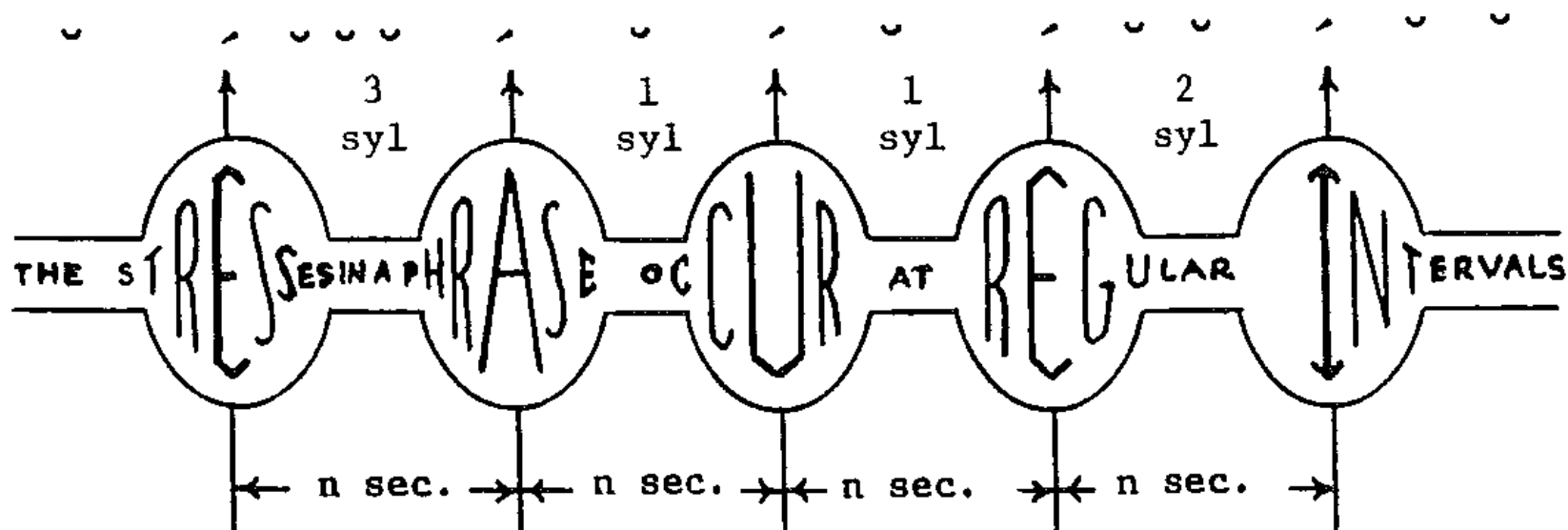
CONSONANT TO SIMILAR CONSONANT

Come back in December.

I'll drink some strong coffee.

Can you wash dishes?

The stresses in a phrase occur at regular intervals.





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Focal Stress in Discourse

Using focal stress for further
information signaling

Neutral focal stress occurs on the last stressed syllable in a thought group.

○ ●
Randy's going. ↘

○ ○ ●
Randy's going to work. ↘

○ ○ ○ ●
Randy's going to work nights. ↘

Neutral focal stress applies equally to
statements and questions.

○ ●
I think it's interesting. ↘

○ ○ ●
I think it's an interesting idea. ↘

○ ●
Do you think it's interesting? ↗

○ ○ ●
Do you think it's an interesting idea? ↗

Focal stress normally falls on content words.

Content Words

nouns

verbs

adjectives

adverbs

Sometimes Carry Content

Demonstratives (this, that)

Interrogatives (who, what)

Function Words

articles

prepositions

personal pronouns

possessive adjectives

relative pronouns

conjunctions

auxiliary verbs

More specifically, focal stress signals new information.

○ ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

We use a pH meter | to measure the acidity or alkalinity

● ○ ○ ●

of compounds. | If the value is lower than seven, |

● ○ ● ○

then it's an acid. | If the value is larger than seven, |

● ○ ● ○

then it's a base. | If the value is exactly seven, | we

○ ● ○ ● ●

call this a neutral compound. | For example, | water is a

○ ○

neutral compound.

New information can be in one word or a string of words, but focal stress will typically fall on only one word.

○

○

●

If the value is lower than seven,

Old information has already been mentioned or
is already known in the speaking situation.

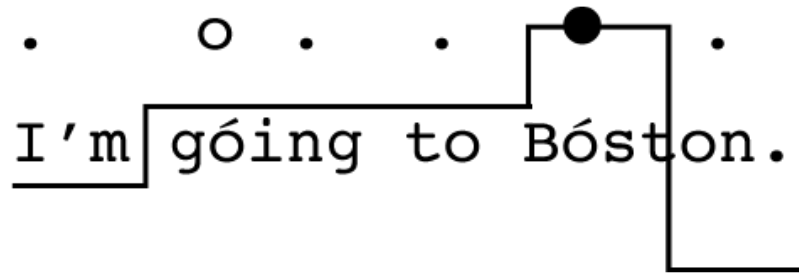
○ ● ○

If the value is larger than seven,

○ ● ○

If the value is exactly seven,

Focal stress and phrase melody work together.



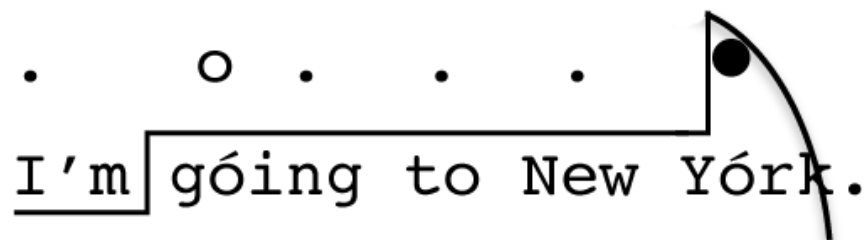
I'm leaving tomorrow.

Please open the window.

When are you going?

Who will you be visiting?

When the last stressed syllable in a phrase is the last syllable in a word, intonation glides down.



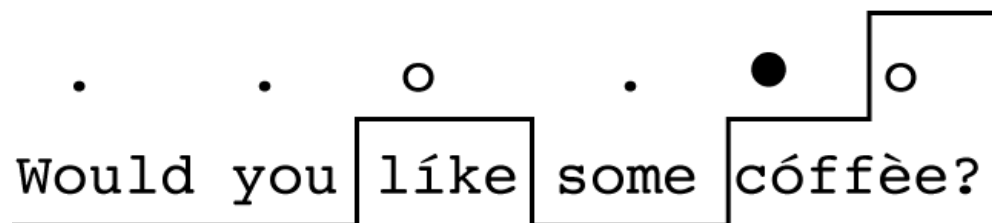
I'm léaving sóon.

Pléase clóse the dóor.

Whén can you gó?

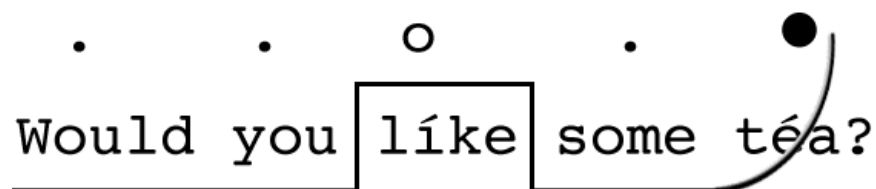
Hów long will you be awáy?

The step-or-glide principle applies also to rising intonation.



Would you like some coffee?

The diagram illustrates the pitch contour for the sentence "Would you like some coffee?". The words are written in a monospaced font. Above each word is a pitch marker: a dot for "Would", a dot for "you", an open circle for "like", a dot for "some", a solid black circle for "c", and an open circle for "ó". A horizontal line connects the dots under "Would" and "you". A vertical line connects the dot under "you" to the open circle under "like". Another vertical line connects the dot under "some" to the solid black circle under "c". A final vertical line connects the solid black circle under "c" to the open circle under "ó". A horizontal line extends from the open circle under "ó" to the right, indicating a rising intonation pattern.



Would you like some tea?

The diagram illustrates the pitch contour for the sentence "Would you like some tea?". The words are written in a monospaced font. Above each word is a pitch marker: a dot for "Would", a dot for "you", an open circle for "like", a dot for "some", and a solid black circle for "té". A horizontal line connects the dots under "Would" and "you". A vertical line connects the dot under "you" to the open circle under "like". Another vertical line connects the dot under "some" to the solid black circle under "té". A curved line starts from the solid black circle under "té" and curves upwards and to the right, indicating a rising intonation pattern.

English speakers use a wide range of pitch changes within the natural register of their voice.

Level 4	Extra High	surprise, anger, disbelief, strong emphasis	used to express strong emotions and emphasis
Level 3	High	stressed syllables, yes/no questions	Most of the time English speech flows between Levels 2 and 3.
Level 2	Middle-Low	unstressed and reduced syllables	
Level 1	Extra Low	glides at the ends of phrases, sentences and wh-questions	most thoughts end with falling pitch in level 1

Statements, requests, commands and
wh-questions use a 2-3-1 range.

It's raining.

Let's go.

What time is it?

Yes-No questions use a 2-3 range.

Did she 'answer?

She's not 'here?

Contrasts and Comparisons use a 3-2-4-1 or
4-2-3-1 range.

Hís Árabíc is bétter than mine.

Shé sounds líke her móther.

Lists and series use repeated 2-3 moves,
terminated by a 2-3-1 conclusion.

We réad pláys, / nóvels, / and póetry.

Cóme at eléven, / twélve, / or two.

Alternative choice questions use 2-3 / 2-4-1 or
2-4 / 2-3-1 moves.

Will you spéak first, / or last?

Will you téll them, / or sáy nothing?

Double yes-no questions use 2-3 / 2-3 moves.

Do they séll chícken, / or túrkey?

Do you ádvocate the óverthrow of the Ú.S. Góvernment by fórcé or by víolence?

Tag questions use question intonation to signal a real question, statement intonation to signal expected agreement.

His name isn't Jones, / is it?

It's a nice day, / isn't it.