

Thought Groups

Clear Speech by Judy B. Gilbert/<http://amyesteacher.weebly.com/thought-groups.html>

English speakers use emphasis to help others understand them better. Remember, each word has a stressed syllable and each sentence has **focus and content words**. That means that some words in a sentence are stressed because they are more important than others. One other very important way to be understood better and easily is to use **thought groups**.

A **thought group** is a group of words that belong together. A thought group can be a short sentence or part of a longer sentence. A key to speaking clearly and being understood by native speakers is pausing between groups of words in your sentences. Native English speakers do not speak continuously without taking a breath. They take short, natural pauses between groups of words. This very short pause between groups of words is called "**thought groups**" and these give your listener the opportunity to understand what you have said. In English, it is the speaker's job to be clear. It is NOT the listener's job to work hard to understand the speech. Pausing and while speaking is an important way English speakers can be clear.

NOTE: In written English, punctuation marks such as commas, periods, and question marks show you where a thought group ends and where you should **pause** when reading.

PAIR WORK

A. A change in thought groups can change the meaning

Student A: Say sentence a or b. Then ask the question under the sentence.

Student B: Respond with the appropriate answer on the right.

Example: Student A: "'John,' said the boss, 'is absent.'
"Who was speaking?"
Student B: "The boss."

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| 1. | a. John said, "The boss is absent."
b. "John," said the boss, "is absent."
Question: Who was speaking? | John
The boss |
| 2. | a. Alfred said, "That clerk is lazy."
b. "Alfred," said that clerk, "is lazy."
Question: Who was speaking? | Alfred
That clerk. |
| 3. | a. The teacher said, "That student is lazy."
b. "The teacher," said the student, "is lazy."
Question: Who was speaking? | The teacher
That student |
| 4. | a. Lisa said, "My dog is intelligent."
b. "Lisa," said my dog, "is intelligent."
Question: Who is speaking? | Lisa
My dog |

B. Saying series of items

Practice saying these sentences. Be sure to pause after each comma.

1. The shirt is red, blue, and green.
2. The pants are red, blue, green, and yellow.
3. They saw a Ford, a Toyota, and a Honda.
4. We have a computer, a fax, and a scanner.

5. The zoo has elephants, tigers, bears, and lions.
6. His suitcase contains socks, ties, shirts, and some books.

C. Practice: There is more than one way to make thought groups. Native speakers can (and will) say things differently. Look the following passages and how they are divided, even though the passage is the same. Each student in the pair should read one of the passages below. **Make sure to pause at the commas and periods.**

Student #1: Read this passage

I've decided to set a long-term goal for myself—to put aside enough money to buy a new car. By this time next year, I'll have put away enough cash for a down payment. My short-term goal is to start living within my means. Once I've started sticking to a monthly budget, I think it'll be easy.

Student #2: Read this passage

I've decided to set a long-term goal for myself—to put aside enough money to buy a new car. By this time next year, I'll have put away enough cash for a down payment. My short-term goal is to start living within my means. Once I've started sticking to a monthly budget, I think it'll be easy.

On your own . . .

Read the following passage by yourself. As you read, decide where you think thought groups should be. Mark the pauses with a “/”

My college expenses are going to get me into a lot of debt. I don't expect to have begun making payments by the time I graduate but I do have a plan. After I finish university my short-term goal is to find a job where I can make some good money and begin a payment plan on my loans. Then I figure that by the time I'm thirty I should have paid back everything I owe.

Read the passage above with your pauses included. Listen to your partner read their passage as well. How are they the same and how are they different?