

**Word stress, vowel clarity and Focus Words**  
**Clear Speech by Judy Gilbert**

**A. English words with more than one syllable have a main stress. Listen and repeat the following words.**

- |                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Asked_____     | 7. Economic_____      |
| 2. Wanted_____    | 8. Photograph_____    |
| 3. Hamburger_____ | 9. Photography_____   |
| 4. Customs_____   | 10. Photographic_____ |
| 5. Customers_____ | 11. Ideal_____        |
| 6. Economy_____   | 12. Idealistic_____   |

Listen one more time. How many syllables does each word have? Which syllable is stressed?

**B. Clear Vowels**

Listen to this word.

 Which "a" has a clear vowel sound? BANANA

Only the stressed "a" is said with a clear sound. A stressed syllable is extra clear and extra long.

**C. Reduced Vowels - Schwa /ə/**

The other two vowels in BANANA are **reduced** to a very short, unclear sound. This is the **schwa** sound.

- There is no letter for this sound, but the dictionary symbol is /ə/
- All of the vowel sounds in English can be reduced to schwa.
- Schwa is the most common sound in English.

**D. The contrast between clear and reduced vowels (Schwa)**

Listen.

 Notice the difference between schwa and the sound of a stressed vowel.

- |                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Travel /trəvəl/ | 6. Kansas /Kənsəs/     |
| 2. pilot /pɪlət/   | 7. Alaska /ələskə/     |
| 3. ticket /tɪkət/  | 8. Nebraska /Nəbrəskə/ |
| 4. pencil /pɛncəl/ | 9. Canada /Cənədə/     |
| 5. advice /ədvice/ | 10. America /əmerəcə/  |

**E. Focus Words—Each English sentence has words with more focus than other words**

Focus = Emphasis

 Basic emphasis pattern:

- Content words are **emphasized**.
- Structure words are **de-emphasized**.

Content words (emphasized)	Basic Emphasis Words			
	nouns	main verbs	adverbs	adjectives
	(cat)	(runs)	(quickly)	(happy)
	<u>question words</u> (who, what, where, when, why, how)			
Structure words (No emphasis)	pronouns	prepositions	articles	"to be" verbs
	(he, she)	(of, to, at)	(a, the)	(is, was)
	<u>conjunctions</u> <u>auxiliary verbs</u> (and, but)          (can, have, do, will)			

When content words are emphasized and structure words are de-emphasized, the contrast helps the listener to hear the important words. Therefore, it helps make your English clearer.