

Focus Words  
*Clear Speech* by Judy Gilbert

Just as English words have syllables that are stressed, English sentences have words that are stressed. These words are called **Focus Words**.

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

**Rule 1 Emphasis**

Basic emphasis pattern

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

<b>Basic Emphasis Words</b>				
<b>Content words</b> ( <b>emphasized</b> )	nouns (cat)	main verbs (runs)	adverbs (quickly)	adjectives (happy)
question words (who, what, where, when, why, how)				
<b>Structure words</b> ( <b>No emphasis</b> )	pronouns (he, she)	prepositions (of, to, at)	articles (a, the)	“to be” verbs (is, was)
conjunctions (and, but) auxiliary verbs (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 and your meaning more easily understood.

**Rule 2 Focus**

“Focus” means to see clearly. The **focus word** in a sentence has the most emphasis so that the listener can hear it clearly.

Practice the following. If you reduce the schwa vowels and stress the important words, the rhythm will be exact.

I knew a man from Arkansas  
Who ate a rock that broke his jaw.  
What do you think?  
He said, with a wink.  
Perhaps it's wrong to eat them raw.

**Clear Speech**  
**Focus words: More practice**  
(By Judy B. Gilbert)

**Rule 3 Disagreement**

When there is a disagreement or a correction, the word that corrects the information from the previous statement is the new focus word.

**Pair Practice: disagreement**

Practice these dialogs with your partner. Take turns saying the first remark. Emphasize the underlined word.

1. X: Yinchuan is in Gansu.  
Y: That's not right. It's in Ningxia.
2. X: I buy books at the library.  
Y: No, you buy books at the bookstore.
3. X: I buy books at the library.  
Y: No, you borrow books at the library.
4. X: A ship is smaller than a boat.  
Y: I don't think so. A ship is bigger than a boat.
5. X: You got home late!  
Y: Not very late.
6. X: You're always losing things.  
Y: Not always.
7. X: Florence is the capital of Italy.  
Y: No, Rome is the capital.
8. X: "Actual" means "in the present time."  
Y: No, "actual" means "real."

### Pair Practice: dialog

Stress the focus words and practice the following dialog.

#### Two Students Argue

A: I bought some books at the library.

B: They don't sell books at the library. They lend books there. They sell books at the bookstore. Didn't you know that?

A: On Tuesdays they sell surplus books at the library.

B: Surplus?

A: Extra ones that they don't need.

B: I didn't know that.

A: There's a lot you don't know.