

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**.

Content words (emphasized)	Basic Emphasis Words			
	nouns (cat)	main verbs (runs)	adverbs (quickly)	adjectives (happy)
	question words (who, what, where, when, why, how)			
Structure words (No emphasis)	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
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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.