

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)
	question words (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)
	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.