



STUDY NOTES

EPISODE 12: INTONATION

INTONATION

Intonation is a feature of **pronunciation**, one of the criteria by which your Speaking is assessed. Other features which define this criterion include the following.

Pronunciation Features	
Rhythm	Number and length of stressed syllables
Stress	Syllable and sentence stress
Intonation	Rising and falling tones of your voice
Sounds	Pronunciation of sounds

IELTS Tip

Be aware of and listen out for English stress and rhythm patterns. Practise these patterns by imitating the speech of native speakers.

In the IELTS interview remember to speak with a clear and strong voice. Use a rising tone when asking for clarification and a falling tone when making a statement.

Speaking English naturally and fluently means speaking with English stress and rhythm patterns. It is sentence stress that actually gives the English language its rhythm. Try saying this sentence aloud.

I really admire my university professor.

How many stresses are there in the sentence?

	1	2	3	4
I	'really ad	'mire my uni	'versity pro	'fessor

There are four strong stresses or beats.

Now, tap out the beats with your hands. The beat occurs on the strong stresses or syllables.

a	1 and a	2 and then a	3 and then a	4
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The stressed syllables occur at regular intervals while the unstressed ones in between are said more quickly to keep the rhythm pattern of English.

Rhythm and sentence stress

English is a stress-timed language. This means that the timing between stressed syllables in a spoken sentence comes at regular intervals regardless of the number of syllables that may occur between the stressed ones. There may be one, two or three syllables between the stressed ones as in the example above.

Stressed syllables occur on certain words within a spoken sentence. There are two types of word in sentences:

- content or information words
- function or grammar words



Content words are the important words in the sentence. They carry the meaning or sense and are stressed.

Function words are the smaller words and give the sentence its structure and make it grammatically correct.

The following table shows the types and examples of content and function words.

Content words – stressed	
main verbs	admire, teach, know, write, think, dream, learn, talk, describe, ask
nouns	professor, rhythm, knowledge, information, success, experience
adjectives	nice, good, talented, smaller, excited, famous, confident, popular
adverbs	really, quickly, surprisingly, creatively, environmentally-friendly
negatives	aren't, can't, don't, no, not, none
demonstratives	this, that, these, those
wh-question words	who, what, when, which, why

Function words – unstressed	
pronouns	I, you, he, she, his, her, it, we, our, they, their
prepositions	at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to, with
articles	a, an, the
conjunctions	and, but, or, for, because, as, while, although, so, yet
auxiliary verbs	be, do, have
modal auxiliary verbs	will, can, may, might, could, would, should, must

Rhythm patterns of a sentence are created using stressed and unstressed syllables. The stressed syllables carry the strong beat. They are pronounced longer and somewhat louder. Unstressed syllables are weak and pronounced using a short vowel /ɪ/ or schwa /ə/.

Here are some examples of rhythm patterns. A phonetic transcription is given of the unstressed syllables and/or words.

1. He's a tall man with dark hair.

	beat 1	beat 2	beat 3	beat 4
He's a /hɪzə/	'tall	'man with /wɪθ/	'dark	'hair.

2. You promised to help me with my pronunciation.

	beat 1	beat 2	beat 3
You /ju:/	'promised to /mɪstə/	'help me with my pronunci /mɪ wɪθ maɪ prənʌnsi/	'ation.



3. The city is full of great restaurants and pubs.

	beat 1	beat 2	beat 3	beat 4	beat 5
The /ðə/	'city is /tjɪz/	'full of /əv/	'great	'restaurants and /trɒntsən/	'pubs.

4. My goal in life is to run my own business in five years' time.

	beat 1	beat 2	beat 3	beat 4	beat 5	beat 6	beat 7
My /ma/	'goal in /ɪn/	'life is to /ɪz tə/	'run my own /maɪjə/	'business in /nəsɪn	'five	'years'	'time.

5. She's the funniest person I've ever met.

	beat 1	beat 2	beat 3	beat 4
She's the /ʃɪzðə/	'funniest /nɪjəst/	'person I've /sən əv/	'ever	'met.

Communicating different meaning

It is important to know that placing a stronger emphasis on a word in an utterance can also affect its meaning. In the single utterance below a different word is stressed changing the meaning in each.

Stressed word	Meaning
I'd like you to talk to her older sister.	The emphasis is on you , meaning that the person is referring to you specifically, and not someone else.
I'd like you to talk to her older sister.	The emphasis is on talk , meaning that the person doesn't want you to write, email or take any other action.
I'd like you to talk to her older sister.	The emphasis is on older , meaning that it's not the younger or the oldest sister, but the older one that the person wants you to talk to.
I'd like you to talk to her older sister .	The emphasis is on the sister , meaning that it's the sister in particular that the person wants you to talk to and not her brother.

Practising using rhythm and the stress patterns of English will help to improve not only your speaking but listening skills as well. Because English is a stressed-timed language not every word will be heard loudly and clearly. Being aware of this can help overcome some difficulties when listening. Be careful also that particular meaning may be conveyed when more emphasis is placed on a word.