

## Two-syllable words

Here the *choice* is still simple: either the first or the second syllable will be stressed – not both. We will look first at verbs. The basic rule is that if the second syllable of the verb contains a long vowel or diphthong, or if it ends with more than one consonant, that second syllable is stressed. Thus:

‘apply’ ə'plai      ‘attract’ ə'trækt  
‘arrive’ ə'raɪv      ‘assist’ ə'sɪst

If the final syllable contains a short vowel and one (or no) final consonant, the first syllable is stressed. Thus:

‘enter’ 'entə      ‘open’ 'əʊpən  
‘envy’ 'envi      ‘equal’ 'i:kwəl

A final syllable is also unstressed if it contains əʊ (e.g. ‘follow’ 'fɒləʊ, ‘borrow’ 'bɒrəʊ). Most two-syllable verbs that seem to be exceptions to the above might be interpreted as being morphologically complex (e.g. ‘permit’ pə'mɪt = ‘per’ + ‘mit’), or we could simply list all such verbs as exceptions.

Two-syllable simple adjectives are stressed according to the same rule, giving:

‘lovely’ 'lʌvli      ‘divine’ dɪ'vaɪn  
‘even’ 'i:vŋ      ‘correct’ kə'rekt  
‘hollow’ 'hɒləʊ      ‘alive’ ə'laɪv

As with most stress rules, there are exceptions, for example ‘honest’ 'ɒnɪst, ‘perfect’ 'pɜ:fɪkt or 'pɜ:fekt, both of which end with two consonants but are stressed on the first syllable.

Nouns require a different rule: if the second syllable contains a short vowel the stress will usually come on the first syllable. Otherwise it will be on the second syllable.

‘money’ 'mʌni      ‘estate’ ɪ'steɪt  
‘product’ 'prɒdʌkt      ‘balloon’ bə'lu:n  
‘larynx’ 'læərɪŋks      ‘design’ dɪ'zaɪn

Other two-syllable words such as adverbs and prepositions seem to behave like verbs and adjectives.

### Three-syllable words

Here we find a more complicated picture. In verbs, if the last syllable contains a short vowel and ends with not more than one consonant, that syllable will be unstressed, and stress will be placed on the preceding (penultimate) syllable. Thus:

'encounter' ɪŋ'kaʊntə      'determine' dɪ'tɜ:mɪn

If the final syllable contains a long vowel or diphthong, or ends with more than one consonant, that final syllable will be stressed. Thus:

'entertain' entə'teɪn      'resurrect' rezə'rekt

Nouns require a different rule. Here, if the final syllable contains a short vowel or əʊ, it is unstressed; if the syllable preceding this final syllable contains a long vowel or diphthong, or if it ends with more than one consonant, that middle syllable will be stressed. Thus:

'mimosa' mɪ'məʊzə      'disaster' dɪ'zɑ:stə  
'potato' pə'tetəʊ      'synopsis' sɪ'nɒpsɪs

If the final syllable contains a short vowel and the middle syllable contains a short vowel and ends with not more than one consonant, both final and middle syllables are unstressed and the first syllable is stressed:

'quantity' 'kwɒntɪti      'emperor' 'empɪrə  
'cinema' 'sɪnəmə      'custody' 'kʌstədi

Most of the above rules show stress tending to go on syllables containing a long vowel or diphthong and/or ending with more than one consonant. However, three-syllable simple nouns are different. If the final syllable is of this type, the stress will usually be placed on the *first* syllable. The last syllable is usually quite prominent so that in some cases it could be said to have secondary stress.

'intellect' 'ɪntələkt      'marigold' 'mæŋgəʊld  
'alkali' 'ælkəlaɪ      'stalactite' 'stæləktɪt  
(or 'ælk|aɪ)

Adjectives seem to need the same rule, to produce stress patterns such as:

'opportune' 'ɒpətju:n      'insolent' 'ɪnsələnt  
'derelict' 'derələkt      'anthropoid' 'ænθərəpɔɪd

The above rules do not, of course, cover all English words. They apply only to major categories of lexical words (nouns, verbs and adjectives in this chapter), not to function words such as articles and prepositions.