

Word stress

Learners need to be able to say words with the correct stress if they are to be understood. Research suggests that correct stress is often a more important ingredient of intelligibility than the accurate production of sounds. As there are no hard-and-fast rules for stress placement in English vocabulary, stress usually needs to be learned on a word-by-word basis.

Here's a simple technique for raising learners' awareness of the stress of new words.

Awareness raising

- Learners have just been introduced to the meaning of a group of words, for example:

admitted advised announced apologised challenged
complained promised refused thanked threatened

English Unlimited Upper Intermediate, Unit 11

- Draw a table on the board with columns representing the **stress patterns** of the various words and ask learners to copy it.

The words in the box above have the following five stress patterns:

O	Oo	oO	oOo	oOoo

For example, *admitted* has three syllables and is stressed on the middle syllable, so it belongs in the *oOo* group.

- Say the words. The learners' task is to listen and write the words in the correct columns according to the number of syllables they have and where they are stressed. You may need to do one or two examples with your learners to get them started.
- Learners compare their answers in pairs or groups. Offer to read out some or all of the words again.
- Go through the answers as a class and complete the table on the board:

O	Oo	oO	oOo	oOoo
<i>thanked</i>	<i>challenged</i>	<i>advised</i>	<i>admitted</i>	<i>apologised</i>
	<i>promised</i>	<i>announced</i>		
	<i>threatened</i>	<i>complained</i>		
		<i>refused</i>		

- Learners are now ready to practise saying the words. To start with, say the words yourself and have the learners repeat after you. Then you can continue by simply pointing at the words on the board while the learners say them. Keep the focus on correct word stress. If necessary use gestures or clap your hands or tap the board to emphasise the stress pattern.

For more advice on this stage, have a look at the Teaching Tips on **Drilling** and **Disappearing Drills**.

Variations

- For learners who are already familiar with this activity and have had some practice in identifying stress patterns, you can make the activity more challenging by telling learners how many stress patterns there are but not what the patterns are.
- A more challenging alternative is to ask learners to put the words into as many groups as they think they need.
- You can introduce an element of learner training at Stages 4 and 5 by having learners check the stress patterns of the words for themselves in a dictionary. They will probably need some guidance on how to read dictionary entries correctly from you before they start.