

## Sentence Stress & Thought Grouping

### Resource 1: Analysis – listening for stress



**Task 1:** Listen to a police detective asking a witness, Alice, about a bank robber. Underline (the stressed syllable of) each stressed word.

**Detective:** Excuse me, ma'am, do you recognize any of the men in this photograph?

**Alice:** Yes, that one. That's him! That's the man who robbed the bank!

**Detective:** The man with the black pants?

**Alice:** Yes. But he had a mustache.

**Detective:** A mustache? This man? Last Saturday?

**Alice:** Yes. And he was wearing a jacket.

**Detective:** A black jacket?

**Alice:** No, a plaid jacket. Red plaid.

**Detective:** Can you tell me exactly what happened?

**Alice:** Well, I was working at the bank on Saturday afternoon. Suddenly, this man ran past me, grabbed a handful of cash, and stuffed it in a bag.

**Detective:** What kind of bag?

**Alice:** A plastic bag.

**Detective:** And what happened after that?

**Alice:** He ran back out again. It all happened so fast.

**Detective:** And you're absolutely sure the man in this photograph is the same man?

**Alice:** Yes. Absolutely. That's him.

**Detective:** Thank you for your help.

**Alice:** I hope you catch him!



**Task 2.1:** Now listen again. Over-lace each word in the dialogue that receives primary stress / that is a focus word with a big dot. These words are said more slowly (lengthened vowels), are a bit louder and use more pitch.

**Task 2.2:** Do you notice cases in which the same word received primary stress in one utterance, but not in another? Why could that be?

## Resource 2: Controlled practice



**Task 1:** Listen to this conversation.

A: That's the person who took my **bag**!

B: Did he have a hat?

A: Yes. A **black** hat.

**Task 2:** Practice the conversation with a partner. Replace the underlined words with the items in the pictures. Watch for correct vowel quality and unreleased word-final stops in addition to new information stress.



## Resource 3: Guided practice

**Task:** Go together in pairs and make a few conversations as in the pattern below. I.e., person A makes a statement, person B asks a question repeating the focus word of that statement, while person A answers still using one of the old focus words.

Make sure you use length, pitch and loudness properly to (de)emphasize old and new information.

### Example 1

A: I was wearing a **jacket**.

B: A **black** jacket?

A: No, a **plaid** jacket. **Red** plaid.

### Example 2

A: When were you last **shopping**?

B: I went **shopping** on **Friday**.

A: Oh, I see. How was the **weather** that **Friday**?

#### Resource 4: Controlled practice of thought grouping

*Task:* Go together in pairs. One of you says sentence a) or b) and asks the question underneath the two sentences. The other one responds with the appropriate answer on the right.

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1. a. John said, "The boss is absent."<br>b. "John," said the boss, "is absent."<br><b>Question:</b> Who was speaking?                   | John.<br>The boss.            |
| 2. a. Alfred said, "That clerk is incompetent!"<br>b. "Alfred," said that clerk, "is incompetent!"<br><b>Question:</b> Who was speaking? | Alfred.<br>That clerk.        |
| 3. a. The teacher said, "That student is lazy."<br>b. "The teacher," said that student, "is lazy."<br><b>Question:</b> Who was speaking? | The teacher.<br>That student. |
| 4. a. Lisa said, "My dog is intelligent."<br>b. "Lisa," said my dog, "is intelligent."<br><b>Question:</b> Who is speaking?              | Lisa.<br>My dog.              |

#### Resource 5: Listening for prominent words



*Task 1:* Listen to the song "Little Talks" and note down the prominent words of each sentence/line.

#### *Little Talks (Of Monsters and Men)*



*Task 2:* Listen to Brad Chase from the TV show "Boston Legal". Brad is a super-fast speaker. First listen and write down all the prominent words you can actually make out.

Now look at the transcription. Mark thought groups with slashes in order to make his speech appear normally paced and easy to follow.

Excuse me. Sorry to interrupt. Brad Chase. Look I've been asked to stay, which I'm considering but I'm concerned that you and I have gotten off on the wrong foot I like to be straight up with people if there's an issue or conflict let's address it head-on if you don't mind.

*Note:* There are slow and fast speakers. Consider the following:

When he sees how sweet and lovely and PRETTY she is / he'll thank his lucky stars he was asked to DiNner.  
vs.  
When he sees how LOVEly / and SWEET / and PRETTY she is / he'll thank his lucky STARS / he was asked to DINner.

## Resource 6: Putting it together – listing with focus word and thought grouping



**Task 1:** Listen to the following dialogue and make a slash (/) at the end of each thought group. Then underline the focus word in each thought group.



### Difficult Children

**Mother:** We want a turkey and cheese sandwich, / and two tuna sandwiches.  
**Server:** On white, whole wheat, or rye?  
**Mother:** The turkey and cheese on rye and the other two on whole wheat.  
**First child:** No! No! I want white bread!  
**Mother:** Whole wheat's good for you.  
**Second child:** I want peanut butter and jelly not tuna!  
**Mother:** OK. One turkey and cheese on rye, one tuna on white and one peanut butter and jelly.  
**Server:** What would you like to drink?  
**Mother:** One iced tea and two glasses of milk.  
**First child:** No milk! Lemonade!  
**Mother:** Three sandwiches, one iced tea and two glasses of water.

**Task 2:** Practice the dialogue with a partner. Use pauses and pitch to make the thought groups clear.

## Resource 7: Communicative practice

**Task:** Report on some events in your life that require you to list a number of individual aspects. Ask each other questions and develop the conversation naturally. Make sure you use proper thought grouping, sentence stress and pitch on individual items. Here are some topic suggestions:

- Vacation
- City tours
- Going someplace with the kids
- Going someplace with your partner
- Some (unusual) work / college day
- A festival
- ....

