

1-Page Summary *for*

The stress and intonation patterns of English are important for:

1. making sure your message is clear and your intention understood.
2. adequately conveying your emotional connection to what it is you're saying.

You stress the important words in a message. For example:  
Who are the **best architects** in **Rome**?

Intonation illustrates the flow and connection of thought groups and is a reflection of the syntax of a language. English uses staircase intonation with a general downward inflection for statements. For example:

The project will be completed by June.

The project will be completed by June.

It's important to use a downward inflection with statements because:

- 1.) It signifies the completion of your thought and is a cue that the other person may take their turn, and
- 2.) It provides a “definitive” sound to your statement (not equivocal).

If your speech lacks variation in intonation, you can end up sounding bored or boring to your listeners. It's also harder to pay attention to monotone speakers **and** to remember what they've said!

A dynamic voice that shows variation is more interesting and compelling.

If English is not your first language, spend time mastering the basic rules for stress and intonation.

Whether you are a non-native OR a native speaker, there are ways that you can learn how to become a more dynamic speaker:

Drama, role play, singing, improv, and even reading children's books aloud can all be used as approaches for increasing expressiveness.

## Ways To Become A More Dynamic Speaker

### Stress and Intonation The Music of Language

for non-native **and** native speakers of English

Here, I offer a bit of help for both non-native and native speakers of English who are striving to become more fluent and/or more dynamic speakers. I'll break down what stress and intonation are, and how to use them most effectively in your speech so that you are 1.) understood, 2.) listened to, and 3.) a compelling speaker.

The musical components of one's native language, the intonation patterns, become ingrained, so learning the patterns of a second language can be just as challenging, or more so, than mastering the different speech sounds of a second language.

English is a stress-based language, meaning that the key words of a message stick out. Think of using a search engine:

“Who are the **best architects** in **Rome**?”

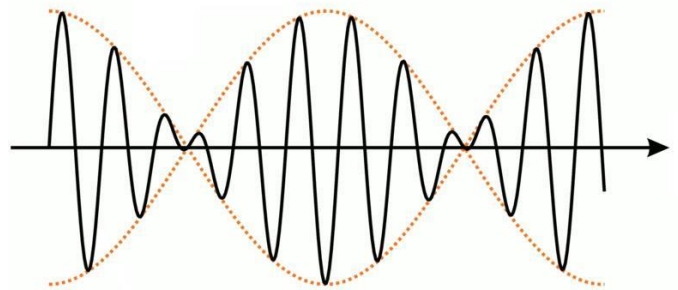


The words that stick out, or are stressed, are **best, architects** and **Rome**.

The function words are reduced; they're not given as much weight.

So, What is **stress**? Stress is what makes a syllable stand out. It may involve:

1. lengthening the sound: AArchitects
2. raising the pitch (of the syllable): AR  
chi  
tects
3. raising the volume: **AR**chitects



## What is intonation?

Intonation illustrates the flow and connection of thought groups. It is also a reflection of a language's syntax. Stress is embedded in intonation.

Subject+Verb+Object or more information... The basic structure of an English sentence

The **dog/** is **playing/** in the **yard.**

There are 3 thought groups here. That's how we deliver messages—in thought groups. That's how we process messages, as well.

You notice what sticks out there: **dog, play, yard**. The function words and grammatical parts fall to the background—the, is, ing, in, the.

Another point regarding intonation:

For statements spoken in English, there is a general downward inflection. Look at the sentence:

The project will be completed by June.

The project will be completed by June.

June is the lowest note, and embedded within the sentence are stressed and unstressed syllables. In other words, there are ups and downs embedded within a downward inflection.

In English, We may start a sentence slightly higher and end slightly lower than many languages do—we may use a wider pitch range, and this is an important part of the American English music.

If you start your sentence at mid-range, you don't really have any place to go with your voice, and your utterance can end up sounding flat.

Example: The project will be completed by June.

Also, that lower sound at the end of a sentence signifies the completion of a thought. In conversation, that is the cue that the other person may take their turn.

\*It also instills a “definitive” sound to your utterance. Important for native and non-native speakers.

I’m sure you’ve heard of up-speak—pitching the ends of sentences upward so all of your statements sound like questions?

“I’d like to start the meeting now?” vs. “I’d like to start the meeting now.”

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And, there are plenty of native English speakers who don’t use a wide enough range of variation in their speech, thus creating a monotone or flat effect. This can make them sound bored or **boring**.



If you think you sound monotone, practice starting sentences on a slightly higher note than your habit may dictate.

“I’d like to start the meeting now.”

*Variations* in the stream of sound not only reinforce meaning and increase intelligibility; they also communicate shades of meaning and innuendo. In

addition, **they reflect your personality and the extent of your emotional involvement; your connection to what it is you're saying.**

\*It's actually harder for people to pay attention to flatly affected voices\*. And you definitely won't be as likely to be drawn in to what a flat-sounding voice is telling you.

It just underscores the fact that developing your voice (and **vocal presence**), which includes addressing intonation patterns, has the potential to transform you from a lackluster speaker into a dynamic one.

Over time, that could mean the difference between getting hired for a position... or being passed over for a promotion because the role involves a higher level of communication with other people or is more of a leadership-type position.

Here are some examples of how stress and intonation can change the meaning or intention of a line:

Syllable stress changes the meaning/function of the word.

If you perfect your accent, it will be perfect.

I will present the present.

The meaning/intention of the sentence is dependent upon which word is stressed.

I didn't say she stole the diamonds.

—A different word stressed changes the meaning of the sentence.

In most languages, to some degree, you'll have to change the words, the order of the words, or the word endings to alter the meanings. It's an example of the important role stress plays in English expression. Non-natives—if you don't have the extensive vocabulary you desire quite yet, take advantage of the powerful tools of expression through stress and intonation.

Depending on your tone and how you present these sentences, they can take on different meanings and shades of innuendo.

I told you she would be late.

What are you going to do?

Timing, subtle pausing, and phrasing can lead to misinterpretation.

The waiter always serves our food and drinks in the dining room.

The blind man picked up his hammer and saw.

Your tone and emotional connection  
to your message can determine your listeners' response.

The results from the third quarter were outstanding.

\*Remember, a voice sends a message just as much as the words. So feel your words; connect to them. Sing your words!

You can always develop and improve your communication skills. It is a lifelong endeavor; we are all works in progress—always learning, changing, and growing. That's the joy!

### **More Tips For Becoming a More Dynamic Speaker**

If English is not your first language: Learn and know the basic stress and intonation patterns of English. Practice them consistently. If English is your first language, play with intonation, as well as different forms of expression.

Take chances in your communication with others. Nudge yourself to try out new intonation patterns, voices, ways of feeling in your speech.

Record yourself reading aloud and then having a conversation. Pay attention to the way you speak with certain people in one context vs. a very different situation.

Observe the different qualities of rate, volume, and pitch variation you hear in each context. You might find that you allow yourself more freedom in one context than the other, and that they bring out different qualities in your voice. What do you like? What do you want to change? Do certain factors negatively impact your speech and delivery, or erode your confidence so that you sound less “like yourself,” or your best self, anyway?

### **Opening up to creativity**

Drama, dancing, singing, and IMPROV are great activities as part of a total approach to increased expressiveness. These all involve physicality, and speech and voice are *physical* activities.



Read **children's stories** to really feel expressiveness. Preferably to children! You can hear (and record) the greater vocal variety in order to increase awareness of the melodic line.



Try playing different **characters** in play readings. See how your voice changes, depending on the role. Observe what your voice is capable of and the different ways it can sound! Notice pitch, rate, and volume variations. Pay attention to the characteristics you like, and try to replicate them in your own speech.

You can try and find a dynamic character or actor who you feel matches the way you would like to sound, and then try mimicking him. Then, read some professional material or pretend to have a conversation with a colleague, channeling the voice characteristics you were made aware of while being that character.

You can always pull back, depending on the context.

**Singing** reinforces tonal support and continuity of voice, and involves changes in pitch, volume, and rate. Sing. And then speak, as if you are still singing. If you

think of speaking as just a less exaggerated form of singing, you will have a better speaking voice!

Sing for the sake of singing. It opens up different sounds that are within you.



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That's a little bit about intonation and stress. Let me know what **YOU** want to learn more about, work on, or discuss. I will either address it in a blog, Zoom session, video, or with **you** directly.

All the best!

And...

Good luck in your professional endeavors, reaching your personal goals, and just enjoying every single day you have the opportunity to communicate with others, being your best self!

And as always, don't be a stranger!

Judy :)

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