

**Sentence Focus
Activity**

Connected Speech Templates

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Talk a Lot

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(Note: see also the Connected Sentence Cards on p.3.1, and Focus on Connected Speech starting on p.11.1.)

Connected Speech Templates enable you to teach students:

- a) how to identify and use the stressed vowel sounds in a sentence
- b) how to speak with connections between the words in a sentence

The Connected Speech Templates consist of ten separate stages. Depending on where your students are at with understanding connected speech, you could do some or all of the stages with them, over the course of several lessons, or all in one lesson; or they could complete the templates at home. In the Talk a Lot lesson materials there is one complete example template for one starting sentence from each unit. When students are familiar with the concepts used in the templates, they could begin applying them to other sentence block sentences, or to other sentences that they either find or write themselves, using the template on p.4.6.

Whilst working on this activity, students should speak the words and phrases – as well as the whole sentences – out loud with their partners. Although this work is partly theoretical, students must spend time practising what they are learning by speaking out loud, in order to improve their spoken English.

1. See that the content words have already been separated from the function words

Words in a sentence are either content words or function words. Content words are “dictionary words” that have a meaning on their own outside of the sentence, whilst function words are there to make the grammar work and provide the weak stresses.

2. Identify how many syllables there are in each content word

This should be straightforward to do. If students are unsure, they could use a good dictionary which shows the words broken up into syllables.

3. Do any of the content words have suffixes? Are there any compound nouns?

In stage 4, students will have to find the stressed syllable on each content word. This preceding activity can give clues as to which syllables are stressed. Suffixes are almost never stressed, e.g. shopp -ing, doct -or, etc (word stress is underlined). So, if there is a two-syllable word with a suffix, like “teach -er”, you can be almost 100% sure that the word stress is on the first syllable. (For more on suffixes, see p.15.1.) Compound nouns are nouns with more than one syllable that consist of: a) different nouns together, e.g. “football” = “foot” + “ball”; b) an adjective with a noun, e.g. “whiteboard” = “white” + “board”, or c) a noun with a verb, e.g. “shoplifting” = “shop” + “lifting”. Compound nouns almost always have the strong stress on the first syllable. (For more on compound nouns, see p.16.1.)

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4. Mark the stressed syllable on each content word

“How do I know which syllable in a word is stressed?”

Each content word has one strong stress, which is always on a vowel sound. There is usually one vowel sound in every syllable. Content words with only one syllable carry the stress on the whole word. The majority of words in a sentence or text will fall into one of three groups:

- i) one-syllable words – the stress falls on this syllable
- ii) words with suffixes – for two syllable words the stress falls on the first syllable; for longer words, we know that the suffix is almost always unstressed
- iii) compound nouns – the stress almost always falls on the first syllable

This gives us lots of help in finding the stressed syllables in a sentence. See p.13.1 for a more detailed guide to identifying word stress.

More tips:

- a) Look in your dictionary for the phonetic spelling of the word and you will see the strong stress mark like this /' / before the stressed syllable. If your dictionary doesn't have each word spelled in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), try to get one that does.
- b) When you learn new words, don't just learn the spelling, but also learn which syllable has the strong stress and how the word sounds. If you don't already know the phonetic alphabet, start learning it today, using the materials in this handbook (see p.18.1). It should be an essential part of learning spoken English, rather than an optional extra.

5. Identify the vowel sound of each stressed syllable

Students should use the phonetic alphabet chart on p.18.6 to help them with this stage. When they have done this they will have the “sound spine” of the whole sentence. These vowel sounds are the most important sounds in the sentence. If students can get these vowel sounds right, with the right rhythm, they will have an excellent chance of being understood, even if they mispronounce a few consonant sounds, or miss out some function words. Let's illustrate this with an example. Take the following dialogue (stressed syllables are underlined):

Mel: What are you doing at the weekend?

Jim: I'm helping a friend move house.

On the printed page it's easy to understand, but let's imagine that the conversation was taking place during breakfast and that Jim answered with a mouthful of toast (stressed syllables are underlined):

Jim: A melpina fre moo vow. /ə'mew.pɪn ə'fre? 'mu: 'vau/ (IPA – stressed vowel sounds are bold)

There are some consonant sounds missing, in particular the beginnings of words (“helping” and “house”) and the ends of words (e.g. “friend” and “house”), all examples of elision. There

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is a /w/ sound instead of the /l/ in helping, an example of assimilation. There is a glottal stop /ʔ/ to replace the “nd” of “friend”. Words have been linked together (“I’m helping”, “helping a”, and “move house”). It’s not a good example of Standard Pronunciation, but is it enough to communicate? I think yes. Try saying it yourself as if you have a mouthful of toast. (Or even make some toast and then try it for real!) If students can make the correct vowel sounds on the correct stressed syllables in the sentence – and can use the context for guidance about meaning, in this case, the question “What are you doing at the weekend?” – it should be possible for them to be understood. It’s one of the reasons why people in the UK with wildly different accents are able to understand each other. There may be some dropped or muffled consonant sounds, **but as long as the right vowel sounds are on the right stressed syllables it’s OK**. We can further underline the great importance of vowel sounds when we compare them with consonant sounds. Let’s use the same sentence as our example, but invert the roles, with all the consonant sounds correct, and even the stressed syllables correct, but the wrong vowel sounds:

Mel: What are you doing at the weekend?

Jim: I’m hallping a frond mive horse. /aɪm 'hɔ:l.pɪŋ ə 'frɒnd 'maɪv 'hɔ:s/

(stressed syllables are underlined)

(IPA – stressed vowel sounds are bold)

You’re what? You’re *hallping* a *frond*? What? Without the correct vowel sounds communication is severely damaged. So, for good communication, say the correct vowel sound on each correct stressed syllable.

6. Identify weak forms among the function words

Now let’s turn our attention to the function words. Are there any weak forms among them? See p.17.1 for more information and a useful list of weak forms in English. Here is a summary of word types that have weak forms:

Word Type: Examples:

conjunctions: *and, but, than, that*

prepositions: *at, to, for, of, from*

verb “be”: *are, am, is*

auxiliary verbs: *has, have, can, do, were, would*

pronouns: *he, you, his, her, him, them, your*

articles: *the, an, a*

Because function words are not stressed, we can use their weak forms, e.g. /fə/ instead of /fɔ:/, with the aim of reducing the words that fall between the content words. We can’t omit these words altogether – that would make our sentences grammatically incorrect – but we can reduce them, squash them, and make them shorter, thus further emphasising the content words, and, in particular, the stressed vowel sound in each content word. You might want to look at function words as being the enemy of rapid speech. All too often students of English

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give words like “and”, “to”, “from”, and “can” a full sound and full stress, which messes up the sentence stress and rhythm of the sentence, by making it much harder to hear the correct stressed vowel sounds on the content words. Truly, these pesky function words – **to, of, for, a**, etc. – try to get above their station far too often and must be SQUASHED!

So, coming back to the connected speech templates... students should look at each function word and decide whether or not it has a weak form that can be used in the sentence. If it does, students should write “**W**” over the greyed out “W” on the template.

7. What kind of sounds connect the words in the sentence?

Next, we come to look at the sounds that connect the words together. For this stage students will need to know about vowel sounds and consonant sounds. See p.18.6 for a list of all the sounds in the English language – both vowel and consonant. The connecting sound between two words will be one of these kinds:

- a) consonant sound to consonant sound (cc)
- b) consonant sound to vowel sound (cv)
- c) vowel sound to consonant sound (vc)
- d) vowel sound to vowel sound (vv)

Try saying the words out loud and listen for the sound at the end of the first word and the sound at the beginning of the second word. Let’s take the words “fifty five” for example. The sound at the end of the first word (“fifty”) is a vowel sound: /i/, and the sound at the beginning of the second word (“five”) is a consonant sound: /f/, so students would write “vc” in the box between these two words to denote “vowel sound to consonant sound”. Students should look for the connecting sounds between the words and write one of the four labels (above) in each box.

8. Identify techniques of connected speech for each transition between two words

If we know what kind of sounds connect two words, we can have a go at saying which technique of connected speech will be used. See p.11.3 for more on the techniques of connected speech. In general, we can say that:

- a) if the transition sounds are consonant to consonant (cc), the techniques of connected speech are likely to be assimilation (A), elision (E), or glottal stops (G). This is because the English tongue can’t cope with two consonant sounds rubbing together, so we either get rid of, or change the sound of, one of them.
- b) if the transition sounds are consonant to vowel (cv) or vowel to consonant (vc), the techniques of connected speech are likely to be linking (L), or R-linking (R). This is because the English tongue is able to easily produce a smooth transition between consonant and vowel sounds, and vice versa.
- c) if the transition sounds are vowel to vowel (vv), the technique of connected speech is likely to be intrusion (I). This is because the English tongue can’t cope with two vowels flowing together, so we have to produce a consonant sound – /j/, /w/, or

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/r/ – to make the two sounds run together. The aim of connected speech is effective communication through words that flow together fluently, with a minimum of jarring sounds.

9. Identify the missing or new sounds between two words

If students find any examples of assimilation, elision, or intrusion – i.e. a sound has changed (A), is missing (E), or has been added (I) – they should write down the missing or changed sound(s). This helps to draw their attention to these particular techniques of connected speech.

10. Write examples using the IPA to show transitions between words

Students should have been saying the sentence out loud, as well as the sound transitions between the words, throughout the whole of this activity. Finally, they should try to write a few examples of some of these sound transitions using the IPA. They could use the example(s) on the answer page for guidance, then use the IPA to write their own examples. Higher level students could write the whole sentence using the IPA, and annotate instances of connected speech techniques.

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Topic: _____

Starting Sentence: _____

5 vowel sound:

4 stressed syllable:

1 content word:

2 no. of syllables:

1 function word:

7 connecting sounds:

6 weak forms: w w w w w w w

8 features of C.S.:

9 missing/new sound:

10 example(s) with IPA: _____

3 suffixes: _____

3 compound nouns: _____

7 connecting sounds: 8 features of connected speech:

| | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|
| cc | consonant sound to consonant sound |
| cv | consonant sound to vowel sound |
| vc | vowel sound to consonant sound |
| vv | vowel sound to vowel sound |

| GLACIER: | | Contraction | a word is shortened |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Glottal stops | an empty space without sound /ʔ/ | Intrusion | a new sound appears – /j/, /w/, or /r/ |
| Linking | syllables connect together | Elision | a sound disappears |
| Assimilation | a sound changes | R-linking | syllables connect with /r/ sound |