

Lesson Note – Emphasis

What is Emphasis? Why is it Important?

Emphasis is when certain words in a sentence are naturally stronger than other words. Without emphasis, our speech would sound extremely boring and dull, perhaps even painful to listen to.

Emphasis also communicates meaning. Consider these examples:

1. Why didn't you tell me EARLIER?
2. Why didn't YOU tell me earlier?
3. Why didn't you tell ME earlier?

The first example emphasizes the time, as in "you shouldn't have waited so long to tell me."

The second example emphasizes the messenger, as in "you shouldn't have asked someone to tell me."

The third example emphasizes the receiver, as in "you shouldn't have told that other person."

In summary, emphasis is important for making our voice pleasant to listen to and also for communicating meaning.

How do I do emphasis?

There are three traits to emphasis:

1. Volume
2. Length
3. Pitch

Emphasized words are usually louder, longer, and higher or lower in pitch. They also tend to have a pause before or afterwards. However, you can also emphasize words by making them quieter or faster. The main thing with emphasized words is to make it different from non-emphasized words.

Another important point to note is that non-emphasized words need to be normal volume, faster, and normal pitch.

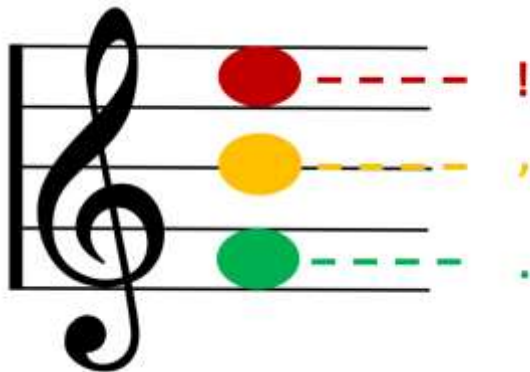
Try practicing these examples aloud right now:

1. Why didn't you tell me EARLIER?
2. Why didn't YOU tell me earlier?
3. Why didn't you tell ME earlier?

If emphasis does not come naturally to you because English is your second language, then you need to spend time observing other people use emphasis and then imitate them. That's what your assignment 1 is all about.

Pitch

Out of the three traits of emphasis, pitch is the most complicated.



! = high pitch.

We use this to show

- Excitement. Example: I **LOVE** it!
- Positive emotions. Example: It's **SO GOOD** to see you!
- Question. Example: Are you **SURE**?

, = rising pitch.

We use this to show that our sentence is not finished yet.

Example: I like to eat **APPLES**, **BANANAS**, and **GRAPES**.

. = low pitch.

We use this to show

- Confidence. Example: He's **REALLY** smart.
- Negative or unhappy emotions: Why is math **SO** hard.
- End of a sentence. Example: I like to eat **APPLES**, **BANANAS**, and **GRAPES**.

There's a lot more nuances to pitch, and it's very hard to explain all the possible reasons for the different pitches. The more you listen to pitch and practice it yourself, the more natural it will become for you.

Practice

Go practice reciting the *I Have A Dream Speech* by Martin Luther King.

Check Your Understanding Questions

1. Why is emphasis in speech important?
2. What are three traits of emphasis?
3. What do the three different pitches mean?