

Stress (die Betonung)

Stress (Betonung) is added acoustical energy that a speaker places on a sound in his/her speech. Stress deals with the loudness of an utterance. In a multi-syllabic word in German and English, one of the syllables will be pronounced louder (with more acoustic energy) than the others. Sometimes in a sentence, one of the words will be pronounced louder than the others. Stress is also sometimes called "accent". There are two kinds of stress: syllabic stress and word stress.

Syllabic Stress is the additional acoustic energy that the speaker places on a syllable (or syllables) within a word.

Word Stress is the additional acoustic energy placed on a word (or words) within a sentence.

Examples of syllabic stress:

In the word "hospital" for example, the first syllable is stressed: *hos* pital. In the word "uni ver sity" the third syllable receives the added force. The following words have stress on their first syllable (initial syllabic stress): "laughable, freedom, silver". These next words have stress on the second syllable: "impossible, fantastic, lampoon". The remaining examples have stress on the last syllable (final syllabic stress): "understand, entertain, recommend".

German stress patterns are extremely consistent. The general principle in German is that the stress within a multi syllabic word falls on the initial syllable of the stem of the word. This concept of initial syllabic stress (accent on the first syllable) applies to words that have no prefix. The portion of a word without prefix and without grammatical endings is called the "stem" of the word. The stems of German words are surprisingly short, usually one or two syllables. Only a few words have more than two syllables in their stem. It is the stem, or the first syllable of the stem, that is typically stressed in German.

Prefixes

When a German word contains a prefix, other issues come into play. There are at least three types of prefixes found on German words. These three types of prefixes are based on stress patterns.

Stressed prefixes (betonte Vorsilben) - "auf, an, aus, bei, mit, un, etc." These prefixes are always stressed. These prefixes found on a verbs are also known as separable prefixes. These prefixes are always stressed, even if they are not attached to the verb. Wann fährt der nächste Zug *ab*? Sie schlief sofort *ein*. Die Teilnehmer haben einen Termin *festgesetzt*.

Unstressed prefixes (unbetonte Vorsilben) - "be, ent, zer, etc." These prefixes are never stressed. Words with these prefixes are typically stressed on the initial syllable of the stem. These prefixes on stems of verbs are inseparable. Er *beschreibt* die Lage. Die Touristen *zerstören* die Ruhe. Der Film hat uns gut *gefallen*.

Prefixes with changeable stress (Vorsilben mit wechselhafter Betonung) - "unter, über, um, etc." These prefixes are sometimes stressed and sometimes unstressed, usually depending on their meaning. There are often two counterparts to words formed with these prefixes. The meaning of each counterpart changes with the stress. The stressed prefix usually has a concrete connotation, whereas the unstressed counterpart often carries an abstract meaning.

übersetzen: to translate (from one language to another) / *übersetzen*: to ferry across a river (to set something over)

Sometimes the stress of these syllables will change with the semantic category of word.

umkreisen: to circle, surround (verb) / der *Umkreis*: the region, surrounding area (noun)

Students of German must learn each example individually.

Words of foreign origin (Fremdwörter)

Words that have origins outside of German, often have stress on a syllable other than the initial syllable. Students learning German must memorize which words are considered "fremd" and consequently learn the stress patterns of these words. Sometimes (but not typically) the stress in a Fremdwort falls on the first syllable: Mensa, Auto, Radio, etc. More typically, the stress in a Fremdwort falls on a syllable other than the first: Theater, Fabrik, Professor, Garage, Philosophie, Biologie, etc.