

Intonation in English:

Intonation is the rise and fall of the voice when speaking. It helps convey meaning, attitude, emotion, and sentence type. English uses several common intonation patterns.

1. Rising Intonation (↗)

The pitch goes up at the end of the sentence.

Used for:

Yes/No questions

Are you coming? ↗

Question tags when unsure

You're tired, aren't you? ↗

Showing surprise or disbelief

You did what? ↗

2. Falling Intonation (↘)

The pitch goes down at the end.

Used for:

Statements

I live in London. ↘

Wh- questions

Where are you going? ↘

Commands

Sit down, please. ↘

Question tags when speaker expects agreement

It's cold today, isn't it? ↘

3. Fall–Rise Intonation (↘↗)

The pitch falls then rises.

Used for:

Uncertainty or hesitation

I suppose so... ↘↗

Polite corrections

Well, I would go... ↘↗

Implying more information

I like it... (but there's something I'm not saying) ↘↗

4. Rise–Fall Intonation (↗↘)

The pitch rises then falls.

Used for:

Strong feelings: enthusiasm, surprise, sarcasm, excitement

Really! ↗↘

Emphatic statements

That was amazing! ↗↘

5. Intonation and Meaning

Intonation can completely change meaning:

You're going. ↘ = statement

You're going? ↗ = question

You're going...? ↘↗ = uncertainty or doubt

6. Intonation in Lists

In a list, items rise until the last one falls:

We bought apples ↗, bananas ↗, and oranges ↘.

★ Summary

Stress is the emphasis placed on a syllable.

It affects meaning, word class, and pronunciation.

Many English words change meaning depending on where the stress falls, especially noun/verb pairs.

The difference between “a dessert” and “a desert” is mainly in stress and vowel quality, even though they look very similar in spelling.

1. a dessert 🍰 (sweet food)

IPA: /ə dɪ'zɜ:t/ (BrE) | /ə dɪ'zɜ:t/ (AmE)

Stress: on the second syllable

Pronunciation: di-ZERT

Meaning: sweet food eaten at the end of a meal

Example:

> We had cake for a dessert.

2. a desert 🏜️ (dry land)

IPA: /ə 'dez.ət/ (BrE) | /ə 'dez.ət/ (AmE)

Stress: on the first syllable

Pronunciation: DEZ-ert

Meaning: a dry, sandy area with little rain

Example:

> The Sahara is a desert.

🔑 Key differences at a glance

Word	Stress	Strong syllable	Meaning
dessert		second syllable	-zert sweet food
desert	first syllable	dez-	dry land

💡 Memory tip

Dessert has two “s” letters → you want seconds of sweets 😊

Desert has one “s” → dry and empty.

The verb “to desert” means (leave/abandon).