

## Thought Groups, Prominence & Intonation

### I. Thought groups / Intonation units

- are longer in rapid speech but shorter in deliberate speech
- are grammatically & semantically coherent
- are often set off by pauses
- have one word more prominent than the rest
- have its own intonation pattern

e.g. *In today's lesson, / we will look at thought groups / and have some practice / in marking them in sentences / and using them in speech.*

### II. Which word is the most prominent in a thought group?

1. New or important information, usually the last content word, in a neutral phrase

*What are you doing?*

*Please record it for me.*

*There's too much traffic.*

*He doesn't understand her.*



## 2. Emphatic stress on a particular element

*MATTHEW'S hair is blue.*

*Matthew's HAIR is blue.*

*Matthew's hair IS blue.*

*Matthew's hair is BLUE.*

## 3. Contrastive stress on two parallel elements

*Is the exam on Monday or Wednesday?*

- Circle the words that receive the most stress.

A: *What did you think of the movie?*

B: *It was really good. What did you think?*

A: *I'll get it.*

A: *Thank you.*

B: *No, I'll get it.*

B: *Thank you.*

A: *How was the movie?*

B: *It was too long.*

A: *Was it a long drive?*

B: *Yeah, it was too long.*

## III. Intonation

4 extra high

3 high

na

2 mid *This is a*  
*lesson on into*  
1 low  
*tion.*

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- Common intonation patterns

1. *What time is it?*

2. *Are you ready?*

3. *I'd like a cheeseburger, small fries, and a large coke.*

4. *Would you like coffee or tea?* (closed-choice)

5. *Would you like coffee or tea?* (open-choice)

6. *It's a beautiful day, isn't it?* (eliciting agreement)

7. *He's not leaving yet, is he?* (signaling uncertainty)

- Intonation can change the meaning of an utterance.

*I've just read a book.*

*What?*

*What?*

*What?*

- Who's stupid?

*Susan said / the boss is stupid.*

*Susan / said the boss / is stupid.*

- How many items were sold?

*He sold his house boat and trailer.*

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