

Different stress and intonation in negotiating phrases

Shifting stress in negotiating phrases

Try to pronounce each line below in at least two different ways by changing which word is most strongly stressed, and discuss how that changes the meaning and therefore which pattern is most common. For example, "... is a step in the right diREction" is the normal stress with its normal positive meaning but "... is a STEP in the right direction" is another possible but less positive sentence.

Negotiating phrases to pronounce with different stress patterns

1. Can you give me some idea of...?
2. According to our previous discussion,...
3. ... is our top priority.
4. ... is a step in the right direction.
5. Actually, that is basically what we were suggesting.
6. Another possible option is...
7. Are there any alternatives?
8. How can we deal with this situation?
9. However, one condition of that proposal is...
10. I am not very happy with...
11. I am willing to accept that if...
12. I can move somewhat on that.
13. I can't promise anything.
14. I can't see any problem with that.
15. I can't see any way around this.
16. I don't think we would benefit much from that.
17. I don't want to turn this into a confrontation.
18. I had a guarantee from you that...
19. I hope that meets with your approval.
20. I hope you can see our point of view.
21. I may have to back out of this deal unless...
22. I might be willing to concede on that point.
23. I think that will be acceptable.
24. I understood that a discount was available.
25. I think we've found some common ground.
26. I don't think there's anything more to say.
27. I still think there is some hope for...
28. I will confirm that later.

Use the suggestions for different possible meanings on the next page to help you come up with at least two possible versions.

Descriptions of different meaning

The more common stress pattern is the first explanation on each line.

1. Can you give me some idea of...? – Even a little information would be great./ I won't tell anyone else.
2. According to our previous discussion,... – But I'm not sure about this discussion./ But other people might have had different discussions.
3. ... is our top priority. – It's number one./ Probably different from your priority.
4. ... is a step in the right direction. – Not the wrong direction./ Only a step (so much more needed).
5. Actually, that is basically what we were suggesting. – Though not 100%./ So we are surprised that you didn't seem to understand what we said.
6. Another possible option is... – Different from the other options./ But might not be an option.
7. Are there any alternatives? – Because I don't like this idea./ Anything at all?
8. How can we deal with this situation? – Not that situation./ Without needing any help.
9. However, one condition of that proposal is... – So it's not decided yet./ There is more than one.
10. I am not very happy with... – I'm unhappy with it./ But I am fairly happy with it.
11. I am willing to accept that if... – But only if./ But I'm not sure about other people.
12. I can move somewhat on that. – But not too much./ But that doesn't necessarily mean that I want to.
13. I can't promise anything. – But I can semi-promise./ Really no promises at all.
14. I can't see any problem with that. – No problem at all./ But maybe I'm not looking closely enough.
15. I can't see any way around this. – Really no way round it at all./ Even though the other points are agreed.
16. I don't think we would benefit much from that. – Only a little./ Although you might benefit from it.
17. I don't want to turn this into a confrontation. – So let's keep calm./ But I will if I have to.
18. I had a guarantee from you that... – So I expect you to keep to that promise./ Not just from someone else in your company.
19. I hope that meets with your approval. – As you have the power to decide./ Even though you rejected the other proposals.
20. I hope you can see our point of view. – Please try to look at it through different eyes./ Which is different from your point of view.
21. I may have to back out of this deal unless... – Even though I (nearly) agreed./ But I probably won't.
22. I might be willing to concede on that point. – But I'm not sure./ But not the other points.
23. I think that will be acceptable. – So we are getting closer to a deal./ But I'm not sure.
24. I understood that a discount was available. – Was I wrong?/ Not the thing you just said.
25. I think we've found some common ground. – So that's positive./ But not much.
26. I don't think there's anything more to say. – We've completely finished./ But I could be wrong.
27. I still think there is some hope for... – I haven't given up./ But not much hope.
28. I will confirm that later. – Not now./ I promise.

Check with the suggested answers or as a class.

Suggested answers

1. Can you give me SOME idea of...?/ Can you give ME some idea of...? – Even a little information would be great./ I won't tell anyone else.
2. According to our PREvious discussion,.../ According to OUR previous discussion,... – But I'm not sure about this discussion./ But other people might have had different discussions.
3. ... is our TOP priority./ ... is OUR top priority. – It's number one./ Probably different from your priority.
4. ... is a step in the RIGHT direction./ ... is a STEP in the right direction. – Not the wrong direction./ Only a step (so much more needed).
5. Actually, that is BASically what we were suggesting./ Actually, that is basically what WE were suggesting. – Though not 100%./ So we are surprised that you didn't seem to understand what we said.
6. ANOther possible option is.../ Another POSSible option is... – Different from the other options./ But might not be an option.
7. Are there any ALTERNatives?/ Are there ANY alternatives? – Because I don't like this idea./ Anything at all?
8. How can we deal with THIS situation?/ How can WE deal with this situation? – Not that situation./ Without needing any help.
9. However, one conDition of that proposal is.../ However, ONE condition of that proposal is... – So it's not decided yet./ There is more than one.
10. I am NOT very happy with.../ I am not VErY happy with... – I'm unhappy with it./ But I am fairly happy with it.
11. I am willing to accept that IF.../ I am willing to accept that if... – But only if./ But I'm not sure about other people.
12. I can move SOMEwhat on that./ I CAN move somewhat on that. – But not too much./ But that doesn't necessarily mean that I want to.
13. I can't PROMise anything./ I can't promise Anything. – But I can semi-promise./ Really no promises at all.
14. I can't see Any problem with that./ I can't SEE any problem with that. – No problem at all./ But maybe I'm not looking closely enough.
15. I can't see Any way around this./ I can't see any way around THIS. – Really no way round it at all./ Even though the other points are agreed.
16. I don't think we would benefit MUCH from that./ I don't think WE would benefit much from that. – Only a little./ Although you might benefit from it.
17. I don't want to turn this into a confronTation./ I don't WANT to turn this into a confrontation. – So let's keep calm./ But I will if I have to.
18. I had a guaranTEE from you that.../ I had a guarantee from YOU that... – So I expect you to keep to that promise./ Not just from someone else in your company.
19. I hope that meets with YOUR approval./ I hope THAT meets with your approval. – As you have the power to decide./ Even though you rejected the other proposals.
20. I hope you can see our point of VIEW./ I hope you can see OUR point of view. – Please try to look at it through different eyes./ Which is different from your point of view.
21. I may have to back OUT of this deal unless.../ I MAY have to back out of this deal unless... – Even though I (nearly) agreed./ But I probably won't.
22. I MIGHT be willing to concede on that point./ I might be willing to concede on THAT point. – But I'm not sure./ But not the other points.

23. I think that will be aCCEPtable./ I THINK that will be acceptable. – So we are getting closer to a deal./ But I'm not sure.
24. I underSTOOD that a discount was available./ I understood that a DIScount was available. – Was I wrong?/ Not the thing you just said.
25. I think we've found some COMon ground./ I think we've found SOME common ground. – So that's positive./ But not much.
26. I don't think there's Anything more to say./ I don't THINK there's anything more to say. – We've completely finished./ But I could be wrong.
27. I STILL think there is some hope for.../ I still think there is SOME hope for... – I haven't given up./ But not much hope.
28. I will confirm that LAtEr./ I WILL confirm that later. – Not now./ I promise.

Changing intonation in negotiating phrases

Change the meaning of the phrases below by saying each at least two different ways with at least two different meanings. Anything from slightly different to completely different is OK.

Fine

I see

Okay

We could accept that

So, there's nothing we can do

Hmmm, interesting proposal

I suppose so

Look at the descriptions of the different meanings below and try to pronounce the words and expressions each of those ways.

-----cover, fold or cut-----

Descriptions of the meanings with different intonation

Fine – I'm happy./ I'm not happy.

I see – There's nothing I can do about it, but I'm not happy./ I understand your situation.

Okay – I accept that./ I doubt that./ Checking with a question

We could accept that – It's possible./ It's possible but unlikely.

So, there's nothing we can do – We give up./ Checking by turning it into a question.

Hmmm, interesting proposal – Really interesting./ Strange and completely unacceptable (using sarcastic/ ironic intonation).

I suppose so – Accepting./ Reluctant.

Check as a class. Then test each other on the phrases:

- Choose one line, say it in the two ways written above or in the opposite order, and see if your partner can say which way round you pronounced them
- Say one of the lines in one of the ways written above and see if your partner can say which way you were pronouncing it.
- Hum one of the lines with both intonation patterns/ meanings explained above and see if your partner can guess which one you were humming