



# Intonation in English Pronunciation

# What is intonation?

- ▶ Intonation and stress are closely linked. In fact it's impossible to dissociate them. They go hand in hand.
- ▶ Intonation is about *how* we say things, rather than *what* we say, the way the voice rises and falls when speaking, in other words the music of the language.
- ▶ There are two basic patterns of intonation in English: falling intonation and rising intonation.
- ▶ In the following examples a downward arrow (↘) indicates a fall in intonation and an upward arrow (↗) indicates a rise in intonation.

# Falling Intonation ( ↘ )

Falling intonation is the most common intonation pattern in English. It is commonly found in statements, commands, wh-questions (information questions), confirmatory question tags and exclamations.

# Statements

- ▶ Nice to meet ↘you.
- ▶ I'll be back in a ↘minute.
- ▶ She doesn't live here ↘anymore.
- ▶ Dad wants to change his ↘car.
- ▶ Here is the weather ↘forecast.
- ▶ Cloudy weather is expected at the end of the ↘week.
- ▶ We should work together more ↘often
- ▶ I'm going for a walk in the ↘park.

# Commands



- ▶ Write your name ↘here.
- ▶ Show me what you've ↘written.
- ▶ Leave it on the ↘desk.
- ▶ Take that picture ↘down.
- ▶ Throw that ↘out.
- ▶ Put your books on the ↘table.
- ▶ Take your hands out of your ↘pockets.

# Wh- questions (requesting information.)

(questions beginning with 'who', 'what', 'why', 'where', 'when', 'which', and 'how')

- ▶ What country do you come ↘from?
- ▶ Where do you ↘work?
- ▶ Which of them do you ↘prefer?
- ▶ When does the shop ↘open?
- ▶ How many books have you ↘bought?
- ▶ Which coat is ↘yours?
- ▶ Whose bag is ↘this?

# Questions Tags that are statements requesting confirmation rather than questions.

Not all tag questions are really questions.

Some of them merely ask for confirmation or invite agreement, in which case we use a falling tone at the end. He thinks he's so clever, doesn't ↘he?

- ▶ She's such a nuisance, isn't ↘she?
- ▶ I failed the test because I didn't revise, did ↘I?
- ▶ It doesn't seem to bother him much, does ↘it?

# Exclamations

- ▶ How nice of ↘ you!
- ▶ That's just what I ↘ need!
- ▶ You don't ↘ say!
- ▶ What a beautiful ↘ voice!
- ▶ That's a ↘ surprise!



# Rising Intonation ( ↗ )

Rising intonation invites the speaker to continue talking. It is normally used with yes/no questions, and question tags that are real questions.

# Yes/no Questions

- ▶ Do you like your new ↗ teacher?
- ▶ Have you finished ↗ already?
- ▶ May I borrow your ↗ dictionary?
- ▶ Do you have any ↗ magazines?
- ▶ Do you sell ↗ stamps?

# Questions tags that show uncertainty and require an answer (real questions).

- ▶ We've met already, ↗ haven't we?
- ▶ You like fish, ↗ don't you?
- ▶ You're a new student ↗ aren't you?
- ▶ The view is beautiful, ↗ isn't it?



“ We sometimes use a combination of rising and falling intonation in the same sentence.

”

The combination is called Rise-Fall or Fall-Rise intonation.



# Rise-Fall Intonation

We use rise-fall intonation for choices, lists, unfinished thoughts and conditional sentences.

# Choices

- ▶ Are you having ↗ soup or ↘ salad?
- ▶ Is John leaving on ↗ Thursday or ↘ Friday?
- ▶ Does he speak ↗ German or ↘ French?
- ▶ Is your name ↗ Ava or ↘ Eva?

# Lists (rising, rising, rising, falling)

Intonation falls on the last item to show that the list is finished.

- ▶ We've got ↗ apples, pears, bananas and ↘ oranges
- ▶ The sweater comes in ↗ blue, white pink and ↘ black
- ▶ I like ↗ football, tennis, basketball and ↘ volleyball.
- ▶ I bought ↗ a tee-shirt, a skirt and a ↘ handbag.

# Unfinished thoughts (partial statements)

In the responses to the following questions, the rise-fall intonation indicates reservation. The speaker hesitates to fully express his/her thoughts.

- ▶ Do you like my new handbag? Well the ↗ leather is ↘ nice... ( but I don't like it.)
- ▶ What was the meal like? Hmm, the ↗ fish was ↘ good... (but the rest wasn't great).
- ▶ So you both live in Los Angeles? Well ↗ Alex ↘ does ... (but I don't).



# Conditional sentences

(The tone rises in the first clause and falls gradually in the second clause.)

- ▶ If he ↗ calls, ask him to leave a ↘ message.
- ▶ Unless he ↗ insists, I'm not going to ↘ go.
- ▶ If you have any ↗ problems, just ↘ contact us.

# Fall-Rise Intonation ( ↘ ↗ )

The voice falls and rises *usually within one word*. The main function of fall-rise intonation is to show that the speaker is not certain of the answer they are giving to a question, or is reluctant to reply (as opposed to a falling tone used when there is no hesitation). It is also used in polite requests or suggestions.

# Hesitation/reluctance

## Politeness-Doubt-Uncertainty

- ▶ So you'd be willing to confirm that?  
...Well ... I ↘sup ↗pose so ... (You are not sure what the answer might be.)
- ▶ You didn't see him on Monday? I don't quite ↘re ↗member ...
  - ▶ Perhaps we could ↘vis ↗it the place?
  - ▶ Should we ↘cop ↗y the list?
  - ▶ Do you think it's ↘al ↗lowed?

Thank You!

