

Stress Patterns for Set Phrases and Descriptive Phrases

What's the difference? In American English, when a noun follows an adjective, typically the noun gets the stress, as in "soft **chair**."

However, if the two words form a compound word or a set phrase, the stress goes on the *first* word. A set phrase is two or more words that are commonly used together to mean something different than the individual words.

Examples

Adjective plus noun descriptive phrase:

White board

He nailed a white board onto the side of the house.

Soft ball

The baby played with a soft ball.

Compound word or set phrase:

Whiteboard

The teacher wrote the assignments on the whiteboard.

Softball

Our team won the softball game last night.

Exercises

Here are some other examples of phrases that can be used both ways. See if you can figure out where the emphasis goes in the following sentences.

Green house

1. We live in a beautiful green house.
2. She grew lovely flowers in her greenhouse.

Green back

1. If you have a lot of greenbacks, you are wealthy.
2. The parrot has a brightly colored green back.

Yellow Jacket

1. Be careful not to get stung by a yellow jacket.
2. Wear your yellow jacket to dinner tonight.

Blue book

1. She left the blue book on the counter.
2. What is the bluebook value of your car?

Blue bell

1. What lovely bluebells you have growing in your garden!
2. Ring the blue bell first, and then the red one.

Orange juice

1. Drinking orange juice is good for a cold.
2. Do you want orange juice or purple juice?

Pink eye

1. My white rabbit has a pink eye.
2. The baby got pink eye and was very unhappy.

Red bud

1. In Tennessee, blooming redbuds are a sign of spring.
2. The rose bush has red buds all over it.

White House

1. The president lives in the White House.
2. Meet me at the big tree in front of the old, white house.

Red coat

1. In the Revolutionary War, the British were known as the Redcoats.
2. Her red coat was getting too small for her.

Briefcase

1. He bought a new leather briefcase for his job.
2. The lawyer finished the brief case in one day.

Sometime

1. He had not visited his mother in some time.
2. Sometime, I'd like to go to Paris.

Sidekick

1. The soccer player gave the ball a side kick into the goal.
2. Batman depends on his sidekick, Robin.

Pink slip

1. John didn't tell his wife he had gotten a pink slip at work today.
2. Her pink slip was showing under her dress.

Blue collar

1. The coffee left a stain on his blue collar.
2. Most factory employees are known as blue collar workers.

Wild life

1. National parks are full of beautiful wildlife.
2. In his early years, he lived a wild life of drinking and partying.

Goldfish

1. The goldfish swam happily in the pond.
2. Her aquarium was full of blue and gold fish.

Dark room

1. The young girl was afraid to enter the dark room.
2. The photographer built a darkroom onto his house.

Panhandle

1. The upper part of Florida is known as the Panhandle.
2. Don't burn yourself on the hot pan handle.

Plainclothes

1. She felt foolish in her plain clothes at the fancy party.
2. The plainclothes policeman blended into the crowd.

Rough house

1. The boys love to roughhouse with their dad.
2. That's a rough house that will need a lot of work.

Top coat

1. He put a glossy topcoat on the table he was painting.
2. My coat is the top coat on the pile.