

# Falling, Rising, and Non-Final Intonation Patterns

Rising and falling intonation patterns are an important part of American English. These intonation patterns do for your speech what punctuation does for your writing. They indicate pauses, stops, and questions and also communicate emotions. Varied intonation tells your listener whether you are finished talking or not, if you are asking a question, and whether you are excited, angry, surprised or confused. Not using these rising and falling patterns can confuse the listener and can also leave your speech sounding monotone. Another common misuse of these patterns is the current trend toward “upspeak,” which is ending each sentence with a rising intonation. This makes the speaker sound insecure and makes their statements sound like questions. Following the guidelines below for using rising, falling, and non-final intonation will make your speech clearer and more engaging for your listener.

## Falling Intonation

This is when your pitch lowers at the end of a phrase or sentence. We use falling intonation at the end of a statement or with a question that uses who, what, when, where, why, or how.

### Statements

1. I went to the store.
2. She has a new car.
3. I have to work late tonight.
4. My computer is broken.
5. He is coming home.

### Questions

1. Who was that?
2. What is his name?
3. When will we leave?
4. Where are you going?
5. Why did you leave?
6. How did he fall?

## Rising Intonation

This is when your pitch goes up. It is used when asking a yes/no question.

### Statements

1. Is his name John?
2. Are you leaving?
3. Are we going to the movies?
4. Is it true?
5. Can you believe it?

### Rising vs. Falling

Let's contrast the rising and falling intonation between Wh- questions and yes/no questions.

<i>Yes/No</i>	<i>Wh- Question</i>
1. Is his name John?	What is his name?
2. Does he have a car?	Which car is his?
3. Are you going to the store?	Where are you going?
4. Did you finish the report?	When will you finish the report?
5. Is that your boss?	Who is that?
6. Are you feeling okay?	How are you feeling?
7. Did you take my pen?	Why did you take my pen?

### Non-Final Intonation

Non-final intonation is a pattern within a sentence that includes rising intonation followed by falling intonation in the same sentence. We use non-final intonation for unfinished thoughts, introductory words and phrases, with a series of words, and when expressing choices.

### Unfinished Thoughts

When you raise your pitch at the end of a phrase, it indicates that your thoughts are not complete, even if you stop talking. For example:

1. If I had a million dollars...
  2. When I grow up...
  3. If she would just listen to me...
- Finished thought      Unfinished, then completed*
1. I have a million dollars.                      If I had a million dollars, I would take a nice vacation.
  2. I am an adult.                      When I am an adult, I will live in my own apartment.



### *Examples*

1. Please go to the store and get milk, eggs, and bread.
2. That sweater comes in black, gray, white, and red.
3. He can play football, soccer, baseball, and tennis.
4. You need to read the book, go to class, study hard, and do well on the test.
5. I went to work, sat in a meeting, wrote a proposal, talked to the customer, and then came home.

### **Expressing Choices**

Non-final intonation can also be used when offering two or more choices in a question.

### *Examples*

1. Do you want the blue one or the red one?
2. Is he coming tonight or tomorrow?
3. Will you be bringing salad, bread, or dessert?
4. Do you live in New York or New Jersey?
5. Is the delivery date in August or September?