

PRACTISING EMPHASIS

Let's start by looking at what emphasis actually means. The dictionary defines emphasis as 'a special stress laid upon or attached to a word or words when speaking to indicate particular importance'.

I don't want to 'over-emphasise' the point here, so I'll simply say that for the purposes of this exercise; we'll be looking at the most direct (and basic) form of emphasis: stressing an individual word or phrase in a sentence by using your voice.

Consider the following sentence (for this exercise to really work, say it out loud).

'I know how to do it.'

Now let's play with the emphasis - try putting the emphasis on the first word.

1. 'I know how to do it.'

Pay close attention to the feel of the sentence and the meaning behind the communication.

Now let's try putting the emphasis on the second word.

2. 'I **KNOW** how to do it.'

Now try putting the emphasis on each word in turn and listen to how the meaning and implications in the same sentence can completely change depending on which word is emphasized and what emotion is put behind it.

3. 'I know **HOW** to do it.'

4. 'I know how **TO** do it.'

5. 'I know how to **DO** it.'

6. 'I know how to do **IT**.'

Finally, repeat the sentence as you did at the start of the exercise. Notice how much the meaning of the sentence changes for you when you place emphasis on the different words?

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Here's another example sentence, that could be interpreted any number of ways, depending on what word you choose to place the emphasis:

Have another go:

1) **WHAT** do you mean by that?

1b) How might this sentence be interpreted?

2) What **DO** you mean by that?

2b) How might this sentence be interpreted?

3) What do **YOU** mean by that?

3b) How might this sentence be interpreted?

4) What do you **MEAN** by that?

4b) How might this sentence be interpreted?

5) What do you mean **BY** that?

5b) How might this sentence be interpreted?

6) What do you mean by **THAT**?

6b) How might this sentence be interpreted?

It's an interesting exercise to discover how other people might be interpreting us, isn't it!