Rules for Sentence Stress in English

The basic rules of sentence stress are:

1 - Content Words are stressed

2 - Structure Words are unstressed

3 - The time between stressed words is always the same
1) Content words - stressed

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2) Structure words - unstressed

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* Mark the stressed words in the following sentences.

- Johan is coming over tonight. We are going to work on our homework together.

- Ecstasy is an extremely dangerous drug.

- We should have visited some more castles while we were traveling through the back roads of France.

- They are looking forward to your visiting them next January.

- Would you like to come over and play a game of chess?

- They have been having to work hard these last few months on their challenging experiment.

- Shakespeare wrote passionate, moving poetry.
When you are speaking English the words you stress can change the underlying meaning of a sentence. Let's take a look at the following sentence:

I don't think he should get the job.

This simple sentence can have many levels of meaning based on the word you stress.

Consider the meaning of the following sentences with the stressed word in bold. Read each sentence aloud and give a strong stress to the word in bold:
I don't think he should get the job.

**Meaning:** Somebody else thinks he should get the job.

I don't think he should get the job.

**Meaning:** It's not true that I think he should get the job.

I don't think he should get that job.

**Meaning:** Somebody else should get that job.

I don't think he should get that job.

**Meaning:** In my opinion it's wrong that he's going to get that job.

I don't think he should get that job.

**Meaning:** He should get another job.

I don't think he should get that job.

**Meaning:** Maybe he should get something else instead.
I said she might consider a new haircut.

- Not just a haircut.
- It's a possibility.
- It was my idea.
- Not something else.
- Don't you understand me?
- Not another person.
- She should think about it. It's a good idea.