

Building Speaking Skills

Speaking

Thought groups.

When speaking, it is important to consider thought groups. Thought groups are groups of words that together make up an idea. At the end of a thought group there is often a pause and a drop in pitch. It is important not to pause in the middle of a thought group because it makes your speech more difficult to understand.

There is no rule for where thought groups begin and end, but punctuation is often a clue. Listen to the speech sample below and notice where the thought groups are. They are marked with [//]

SANDRA	And that's their excrement //yeah. //It tends to build up into smears //because they nest together// in clumps//. But if you know, if you look for those little black dots that um //sort of don't brush away,// you can wash them away -// then you know you've probably got bed bugs. //They're very fast moving away from light. //They like to hide in the dark. //So you know, you need to look //in dark places. //Flashlight helps.	1:33
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Now listen to another section of the transcript and mark where you think you hear thought groups. NOTE: Because there aren't clear rules and speakers differ from each other, answers may vary somewhat. See the appendix for suggestions.

SANDRA	They go inside...well they're looking for dark hiding places. Um, to actually multiply to the point where you have a major infestation, i think it's a minimum of about three months. So you take one home, it lays a few eggs. You know a well-fed bed bug in an ideal environment will lay two to three eggs a day. But the females stop laying eggs if they don't feed every ten days. So you know, if there's someplace where it's not easy to get a meal, then they stop laying eggs. They prefer to feed in the early hours of the morning. So they are, you know, less likely to multiply in office buildings where there's no-one to eat at three o'clock in the morning. So you know, they'll come out, look for a meal and, you know, dehydrate.	3:12
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Pronunciation Practice:

Next time you are listening to people speak, try to listen for groups. You can also record yourself speaking and check to see if you are pausing in good places.