

Pronunciation: Stress
[For the pronunciation of individual sounds, see
“The Sanskrit Alphabet”]

Stress exists in Sanskrit since the time of Pāṇini. The stress is generally on a **long** penultimate syllable or **heavy** (*guru*) syllable (Kāli'dāsa), on the antepenultimate when followed by a short syllable or if the penultimate syllable is **light** (*laghu*) (Hi'mālaya, Rā'māyaṇa), and the fourth from the end when two short or light syllables follow ('kārayati). Otherwise, all other syllables have equal stress.

Quality of sounds and syllables

The quantity or length of a sound in Sanskrit is reckoned as one of three or four lengths:

a. Any consonant is half that of a short vowel
b. A short (*hrasva-*) vowel is half as long as a long (*dīrgha-*) vowel. There is no distinction between the *guṇa-* and the *vṛddhi* diphthongs. Both are simply long.

c. There is a third vowel quantity (the first two being *hrasva-* and *dīrgha-*), and that is the *pluta* ('protracted'; "swimming"). This is marked by the number 3 after the vowel:

आ३. This quantity is rare even in the Veda.

Guru and Laghu

For metrical purposes, syllables are distinguished as *guru* "heavy" or *laghu* "light"

a. A syllable is **heavy** if its vowel is

1. long
2. diphthong
3. short and followed by more than one consonant (i.e., a conjunct consonant: including an *anusvāra*- and *visarga*-).

b. A **light** syllable includes a short vowel not followed by more than one consonant

The last syllable of a *pāda* (primary division of a verse) is reckoned as either heavy or light.