

# SYLLABICATION



## Guidelines:

- \* **A syllable is a unit of pronunciation.** Each syllable contains only one vowel sound. Finding the vowels in a word is an important starting point for breaking it apart by syllables. However, each syllable may have more than one vowel letter. For example, the word *boat* contains one vowel sound, therefore one syllable. However, the vowel sound is represented by the vowel digraph *oa*.
- \* **Whether a group of letters forms a syllable depends on the letters that surround it** (Adams, 1990). For example, the letters *par* form a syllable in the word *partial* but not in the word *parade*.
- \* **One syllable in a multisyllabic word receives more emphasis or stress.** The vowel sound in this syllable is heard most clearly. Stress is indicated in dictionary pronunciation keys by accent marks. In addition to one primary accent, some words have one or more secondary accents. Vowels in unstressed syllables become schwas (/ə/). Generally, in words with prefixes and suffixes, the prefix or suffix forms a separate syllable and the accent falls on the root or base word. In compound words, the accent generally falls on or within the first word. The accent in most two-syllable words falls on the first syllable.
- \* **To decode multisyllabic words, children must be able to divide words into recognizable chunks.** Some readers develop a sense of syllabication breaks independently through their exposures to print, while others have great difficulty and need instruction (Just and Carpenter 1987). For some children, their phonics skills break down when confronted by multisyllabic words because they cannot readily identify syllable boundaries (Eldredge, 1995).
- \* **Children need training in dividing words according to syllables.** They must (1) first understand how to figure out the vowel sound in one-syllable words. (Teach them common one-syllable spelling patterns such as CVC and CVCe), and (2) understand that a syllable has only one vowel sound, but that vowel sound may be spelled using more than one vowel.
- \* **Children can use syllabication strategies to approximate a word's pronunciation.** This approximation is generally close enough for the reader to recognize the word if it is in the reader's speaking or listening vocabularies. This is another reason why developing children's speaking and listening vocabularies and combining the development of background knowledge with vocabulary instruction are so critical.
- \* **Some words can be divided in more than one way.** For example: *treat-y, trea-ty, tr-ea-ty*. However, the fewer the chunks, the easier it is to decode the word.
- \* **Traditional syllabication strategies can be ineffective.** For example, clapping syllables doesn't work because the child has to already know the word in order to clap the syllables (Johnson and Bauman, 1984). Likewise, memorizing countless syllabication rules has little effect



on a child's ability to decode multisyllabic words. (Note: *syllabication* and *syllabification* are synonymous terms.)

- \* **Few syllabication generalizations are very useful to children, but some are worth pointing out.** These include the following (Chall and Popp, 1996). State them in simple, clear terms; focus on their application, not their recitation.
  - ◆ If the word is a compound word, divide it between the two smaller words. If either or both of the smaller words have more than one syllable, follow the syllabication generalizations below.
  - ◆ Inflectional endings such as *ing*, *er*, *est*, and *ed* often form separate syllables. The remaining portion of the word is the root or base word. Looking for these and other meaning units in words is known as morphemic analysis. A morpheme is a meaning unit. There are free morpheme–whole words that can stand alone and cannot be divided into other meaning units (i.e., base words). And there are bound morphemes–word parts that cannot stand alone and must be combined with a free morpheme (i.e., suffixes and prefixes). Bound morphemes alter the meaning of the free morphemes to which they are attached (EXAMPLE: un + happy = unhappy).
  - ◆ When two or more consonant appear in the middle of a word, divide the word between them (CVC●CVC) (EXAMPLE: basket). Then try the short sound for the vowel in the first syllable. This generalization does not apply if the two consonants form a digraph such as *ch*, *tch*, *ph*, *sh*, to *th*. These digraphs cannot be separated across syllable boundaries.
  - ◆ When only one consonant appears between two vowels, divide the word before the consonant. Then try the long sound of the first vowel (EXAMPLES: *tiger*, *pilot*). This works about 55% of the time. If a recognizable word is not formed using the long sound divide the word after the consonant and try the short sound for the first syllable (EXAMPLES: *exit*, *second*). This works about 45% of the time.
  - ◆ When a two-syllable word ends in a consonant plus *le*, the consonant and *le* form the last syllable. If the preceding syllable ends in a consonant, try the short sound of the vowel (EXAMPLES: *wiggle*, *sample*). If the preceding syllable ends with a vowel, try the long sound of the vowel (EXAMPLES: *table*, *bridle*).
  - ◆ When a two-syllable word ends in a consonant plus *re*, the consonant and *re* form the last syllable. If the preceding syllable ends with a vowel, try the long sound of that vowel (EXAMPLES: *acre*).
  - ◆ Never break apart vowel digraphs or diphthongs across syllable boundaries.
  
- \* There are **six basic syllable spelling patterns** in English that children should be familiar with (Moats, 1995):
  1. **closed:** These syllables end in consonant. The vowel sound is generally short (EXAMPLES: *rabbit*, *napkin*).
  2. **open:** These syllables end in a vowel. The vowel sound is generally long (EXAMPLES: *tiger*, *pilot*).
  3. **r-controlled:** When a vowel is followed by *r*, the letter *r* affects the sound of the vowel. The vowel and the *r* appear in the same syllable (EXAMPLES: *bird*, *turtle*).

4. **vowel team:** Many vowel sounds are spelled with vowel digraphs such as *ai, ay, ea, ee, oa, ow, oo, oi, oy, ou, ie, and ei*. The vowel digraphs appear in the same syllable (EXAMPLES: *boat, explain*).
5. **vowel–silent e:** These syllables generally represent long-vowel sounds (EXAMPLES: *compete, decide*).
6. **consonant–le:** Usually when *le* appears at the end of a word and is preceded by a consonant, the consonant + *le* form the final syllable (EXAMPLES: *table, little*). The following chart shows consonant + *le* words that can be used for instruction.

<b>Consonant + le Words</b>			
Bubble	bridle	angle	battle
double	bundle	bugle	bottle
fable	fiddle	eagle	cattle
marble	handle	giggle	gentle
noble	kindle	jungle	kettle
pebble	middle	shingle	little
rumble	needle	single	mantle
stubble	puddle	struggle	rattle
tumble	saddle	wiggle	settle
			title
circle	ankle	apple	dazzle
uncle	crinkle	maple	fizzle
vehicle	sparkle	purple	muzzle
	sprinkle	sample	puzzle
	wrinkle	simple	
		steeple	
		temple	

- \* Begin syllabication instruction in first grade by pointing out compound words, words with double consonants, and words with common prefixes and suffixes such as *un, re, s, es, ing, and ed*. In later grades, focus instruction on additional prefixes and suffixes, as well as common base words. Having children practice recognizing common syllabic units is beneficial.
- \* Teach syllabication strategies using known words, then provide ample opportunities for students to apply each strategy in context.
- \* Most dictionaries divide words according to how a word should be hyphenated when it's breaking across lines. This sometimes has little to do with the division of the word into its syllables for pronunciation. Therefore, use dictionaries with caution.

## Compound Words

after all	beehive	doormat	footstep	keyhole	rowboat	sunburn
afternoon	beeline	doorstep	footstool	lawn mower	sailboat	sunflower
aftershave	birdbath	doorway	give-and-take	lifetime	sandbox	sunlight
air bag	birdcage	doubleheader	goldfish	lighthouse	sandpaper	sunrise
airhole	birdcall	downhill	grapevine	living room	saucepan	sunset
airmail	bird dog	downstairs	grasshopper	lookout	sawdust	sunshine
air mattress	birdhouse	downtown	greenhouse	loudspeaker	scarecrow	supermarket
airplane	birdseed	dragonfly	grown-up	lunchroom	scrapbook	swimming pool
airsick	birthday	dressmaker	headstand	mailbox	sea breeze	tablespoon
airtight	blackbird	driveway	hairbrush	masterpiece	sea captain	teacup
anteater	blackboard	drumstick	haircut	merry-go-round	seacoast	teaspoon
anthill	blindfold	dugout	hairnet	milkshake	seafood	toenail
anybody	blueberry	eardrum	hairpiece	moonbeam	seagull	toe shoe
anyhow	bluebird	earthquake	hairpin	moonlight	sea horse	toolbox
anyone	blueprint	electric guitar	hairstyle	mother-in-law	seaport	toothache
anything	boathouse	everybody	hand-feed	motorboat	seashell	toothbrush
anywhere	book bag	everyday	handbag	motorcycle	seashore	toothpaste
applesauce	bookcase	everyone	handball	mousetrap	seaside	townspeople
armchair	bookmark	everything	handbook	music box	seat belt	treetop
armrest	broomstick	everywhere	handmade	newspaper	seaweed	tugboat
back away	bulldog	eyeball	handpick	nightgown	send-off	underground
backboard	bullfrog	eyeglasses	handsaw	notebook	shopkeeper	underwater
backbone	butterfly	eyelid	handshake	outdoors	shoreline	upstairs
backdoor	buttermilk	eyesight	handstand	outfield	sidewalk	wallpaper
backfield	buttonhole	faraway	handwrite	outside	sideways	washcloth
background	bypass	farmhouse	headache	overlook	skyline	watchdog
backpack	campfire	father-in-law	headband	overnight	skyscraper	waterfall
back room	campground	finger bowl	headphone	overtake	smokestack	whatever
backseat	candlelight	finger hole	henhouse	pancake	snapshot	wheelchair
backstage	candle maker	finger nail	high chair	passer-by	snowball	windmill
backstop	candlestick	finger paint	high jump	peanut	snowfall	windpipe
backstroke	cardboard	fingerprint	high noon	pillowcase	snowflake	windshield
backyard	cheerleader	fingertip	high-rise	pinecone	snowman	wintertime
bagpipe	classroom	fireboat	high school	pinwheel	snowplow	wishbone
bandleader	clothespin	fire drill	hilltop	playground	snowshoe	without
barnyard	clubhouse	fire-eater	homegrown	playhouse	snowstorm	workbench
baseball	coal mine	fire engine	homemade	playpen	snowsuit	workday
basketball	collarbone	fire escape	home plate	pocketbook	somebody	worktable
bath mat	cookbook	firefighter	homeroom	poison ivy	someday	wristwatch
bathrobe	cornbread	firefly	home run	polar bear	someone	
bathroom	corncob	firehouse	homesick	popcorn	something	
bath tub	cornfield	firelight	hometown	postcard	someway	
bathwater	countdown	fireplace	homework	railroad	spaceship	
beanbag	cowboy	fire station	horseback	rainbow	spacesuit	
beanpod	crossword	fire truck	horsefly	raincoat	springtime	
beanpole	cupcake	firewood	horseshoe	raindrop	starfish	
bed rest	daydream	fireworks	hotdog	rainfall	starlight	
bedroll	daylight	flowerpot	houseboat	ringmaster	starship	
bedroom	diving board	football	iceberg	roadside	steamboat	
bedside	doghouse	footbridge	ice skate	roof garden	stepladder	
bedspread	dollhouse	footpath	ice-skater	rooftop	storehouse	
bedspring	doorbell	footprint	inside	rosebud	storeroom	
bedtime	doorknob	footrest	jellyfish	rosebush	storyteller	