

LESSON 31: What is a Syllable?

Phonics Focus: A syllable is one unit of sound in English. Every syllable must have a vowel. A syllable cannot have more than one sound. Some words have one syllable, some may have many syllables. As we learn how to break a complicated word into its individual syllables, the word becomes easier to read. The simplest is an open syllable. This is made up of a consonant “c” and a vowel “v”. For example, in the word we, the “e” says its name because there is no other consonant to box it in or close the door. When a consonant is added after the vowel, as in wet, the vowel is boxed in or closed in and only says its short sound.

Examples of “c” consonant “v” vowel or **open syllables** are:

we she me he be re ze de

no go so lo po ro po/lo so/lo po/ta/to

my by cry fry dry ply try why fly spy sly shy

hi I tri di bri hu nu stu ta ba ra

A closed syllable uses the pattern “consonant-vowel-consonant”, or the c-v-c rule. The vowel is shut in and can only say its short sound. A few examples are:

cat mat wet met pig dig cot pot sub mud
sat fat set met jig rid bid mop tot hug bug

The easiest words to divide are the **rabbit words**, or the “v-c/c-v” You divide between the two consonants:

rabbit rab/bit	muffin muf/fin
apple ap/ple	little lit/tle
supper sup/per	follow fol/low
office of/fice	blizzard bliz/zard
misspell mis/spell	cattail cat/tail
penny pen/ny	hurry hur/ry
winner win/ner	spelling spel/ling
running run/ning	butter but/ter
happy hap/py	chopping chop/ping

The silent “e” syllable is also a very easy one to recognize. The pattern is a vowel-consonant-silent “e” (v c “e”). The vowel makes its long or name sound.

Examples:

cape	hate	cute	fade	pipe
dime	fine	rode	ride	slide
made	plane	spine	bake	rake
robe	cane	snake	grade	choke
rep/tile	prize	vol/ume	home	

A consonant + Le syllable is a final syllable in a word. It is made up of a consonant followed by an L, plus a silent “e”. It is always at the end of the word. The consonant plus “Le” becomes its own syllable. The consonants that can join with a silent “e” are:

ble, cle, fle, gle, tle, kle, dle, ple, zle, and tle.

ble

table ta/ble

cable ca/ble

Bible Bi/ble

stable sta/ble

tumble tum/ble

noble no/ble

cle

cycle cy/cle

popsicle pop/si/cle

circle cir/cle

uncle un/cle

article ar/ti/cle

cubicle cu/bi/cle

miracle mir/a/cle

obstacle ob/sta/cle

dle

puddle pud/dle

bundle bun/dle

candle can/dle

middle mid/dle

cuddle cud/dle

saddle sad/dle

poodle poo/dle

idle i/dle

cradle cra/dle

hurdle hur/dle

gle

bugle bu/gle

giggle gig/gle

triangle tri/an/gle

google goo/gle

struggle strug/gle

jungle jun/gle

wiggle wig/gle

goggle gog/gle

single sin/gle

wran/gle

kle

sparkle spar/kle

pickle pic/kle

speckle spec/kle

freckle frec/kle

ankle an/kle

tickle tic/kle

buckle buc/kle

crinkle crin/kle

twinkle twin/kle

sprinkle sprin/kle

tle

little lit/tle

bottle bot/tle

cattle cat/tle

gentle gen/tle

battle bat/tle

beetle bee/tle

kettle ket/tle

title ti/tle

turtle tur/tle

settle set/tle

zle

puzzle puz/zle

sizzle siz/zle

dazzle daz/zle

drizzle driz/zle

embezzle em/bez/zle

muzzle muz/zle

fizzle fiz/zle

nozzle noz/zle

guzzle guz/zle

raz/zle/daz/zle

fle

waffle waf/fle

raffle raf/fle

shuffle shuf/fle

ruffle ruf/fle

scuffle scuf/fle

sniffle snif/fle

rifle ri/fle

baffle baf/fle

trifle tri/fle

truffle truf/fle

ple

purple pur/ple

apple ap/ple

dapple dap/ple

maple ma/ple

pimple pim/ple

topple top/ple

people peo/ple

staple sta/ple

simple sim/ple

sample sam/ple

crumple crum/ple

ample am/ple

tle

(In this combination the “t” is silent.)

castle cas/tle

bristle bris/tle

thistle this/tle

apostle a/pos/tle

hustle hus/tle

nestle nes/tle

rustle rus/tle

gristle gris/tle

epistle e/pis/tle

wrestle wres/tle

An R-controlled syllable is a syllable in which the vowel is controlled by the letter “r” and its sound.

The vowel does not make its regular long or short sound.

The “r” **controlled syllables** are: **ar, or, er, ir,** and **ur.** Don’t split them apart when dividing the words into syllables.

ar

shark	garden gar/den
gargle gar/gle	remark re/mark
depart de/part	harmony har/mo/ny
harvest har/vest	farmer farm/er
carpet car/pet	barley bar/ley
market mark/et	cartoon car/toon
target tar/get	parsley pars/ley
smarter smart/er	hardest hard/est

or

morning morn/ing

organize or/gan/ize

adore a/dore

report re/port

snorkel snor/kel

carport car/port

organ or/gan

before be/fore

border bor/der

corner corn/er

snorkeling snor/kel/ing

shoreline shore/line

er, ir, ur

hermit her/mit

sister sis/ter

sermon ser/mon

burning burn/ing

hurry hur/ry

curvy curv/y

surrender sur/ren/der

burger bur/ger

serving serv/ing

squirted squirt/ed

hurdle hur/dle

sturdy stur/dy

birddog bird/dog

surprise sur/prise

Vowel Teams or Vowel Digraphs

A digraph is a combination of two letters which make one sound. Digraphs which are made up of vowels can also be called “Vowel Teams”. In a word, vowel teams work together to make one sound; a long or a unique sound. When dividing these words into syllables, keep the vowel team together. This rule is not perfect, especially for some words coming from Latin, but for the beginning reader we will use the easily recognized teams.

Long a teams: ai ay eigh ey

Long e teams: ea ee ey

Long i teams: ie igh ild ind ign

Long o teams: oa oe old oll olt ow

Long u teams: ue ui ew

LONG A SOUND

Long A Team **ai**:

rain

praise

remain re/main
contain con/tain
painful pain/ful

repair re/pair
railroad rail/road
complain com/plain

Long A Team **ay**:

pray
today to/day
driveway drive/way

prayer pray/er
dismay dis/may
highway high/way

Long A Team **ei, eigh**:

vein	reigning reign/ing
weigh	their
eight/een	weightlifting weight/lift/ing
neigh/bor	reindeer rein/deer

Long A Team **ey**:

obey	prey
------	------

survey
surveyor sur/vey/or

disobey dis/obey
heyday hey/day

LONG E SOUND

Long E Team **ee**:

bee
cheerful cheer/ful
between be/tween

beehive bee/hive
sweetest sweet/est
teenager teen/ag/er

Long E Team **ea**:

leader lead/er
disappear dis/ap/pear
teapot tea/pot
season sea/son

cleaning clean/ing
increase in/crease
daydream day/dream
reasonable rea/son/able

Long E Team **ie** (in the middle of a root word):

thief

field

niece

pier

windshield wind/shield

briefly brief/ly

LONG I SOUND

Long i Team **ie**:

pie

pieplate pie/plate

untie un/tie

necktie neck/tie

magpie mag/pie

lie

Long i Team **igh**:

light

lighter light/er

high

higher high/er

tightly tight/ly

midnight mid/night

tonight to/night

flashlight flash/light

fighter fight/er

Almighty Al/migh/ty

Long i Team **ind**:

kind

kindest

kind/est

behind be/hind

mindful

mind/ful

blinding blind/ing

blindfold

blind/fold

Long i Team **ild**:

wild

wildest wild/est

milder mild/er

child

childish child/ish

childhood child/hood

LONG O SOUND

Long O Team **oa**:

toaster toast/er

railroad rail/road

oatmeal oat/meal

motorboat mo/tor/boat

toadstool toad/stool

roasted roast/ed

Long O Team **oe**:

toe

toenail toe/nail

tiptoe tip/toe

mistletoe mis/tle/toe

hoeing hoe/ing

backhoe back/hoe

geckoes geck/oes

banjoes ban/joes

Long O Team **old**:

gold

golden gold/en

scolding scold/ing

folded fold/ed

holding hold/ing

behold be/hold

bolder bold/er

oldest old/est

LONG U SOUND

Long U Team **ue**:

blue

bluebird blue /bird

clueless clue/less

blueberry blue/ber/ry

rescue res/cue

statue stat/ue

Long U Team **ui**:

suitcase suit/case

cruise

juicy juic/y

bruises bruise/es

fruitful fruit/ful

cruiseline cruise/line

unsuitable un/suitable

lawsuit law/suit

Long U Team **ew**:

flew

renew re/new

newer new/er

curfew cur/few

nephew neph/ew

cashew cash/ew

chewing chew/ing

dewdrop dew/drop

fewer few/er

jewelry jew/el/ry

newspaper news/pa/per

mildew mil/dew

Compound words are words that are made up of two or more words which could stand alone on their own. Each word is at least one syllable long and keeps its full spelling.

book/mark	door/knob	star/fish
book/shelf	wind/shield	short/stop
cook/book	cat/tail	snow/ball
sun/shine	tip/toe	snow/man
day/break	rain/water	lady/bug
cup/cake	rain/bow	lip/stick
sun/rise	blue/berry	shoe/lace
back/pack	dog/house	bird/house

Some compound words are hyphenated:

merry-go-round	mother-in-law	life-size
fifty-five	topsy-turvy	tip-off