



syllables are sometimes described as the beats in words. Other teachers may refer to them as "claps" or "chin-droppers". "Chin-droppers?" I hear you ask... Well, try it; say a few long words with the back of your hand under your chin. Whenever your chin drops, that's one syllable! This is a handy technique to use when a student is having trouble perceiving syllables.

Syllables play a vital role in reading and writing for young learners but also for advanced readers and writers.



NOD SYLLABLES... It's common practice for many teachers to model the "clapping out" of syllables.

Although this can be fun for young learners, it's not cool for adolescents. It's also an impossible task to do while writing long words with a pen - and really, this is the ultimate goal. For this reason, in early tasks, I always model and encourage the use of nodding at the same time as clapping. In later literacy tasks, the nodding of syllables can be used discreetly when a student is spelling multisyllabic words... and it's not so noisy!

#### SYLLABLES IN EARLY LEARNING - SYLLABLE AWARENESS

- **Syllable awareness** is something that can help young learners "tune in" to the sound structure of words. **Syllable awareness** allows a young child to think of "caterpillar", not only as a word associated with something wriggly in the garden, but as a word that has four syllables (or beats).
- Being aware of syllables in words (syllable awareness) develops before the
  awareness of sounds in words (phonemic awareness). This is because the
  chunks are bigger and more obvious. Syllable awareness and phonemic
  awareness are both parts of phonological awareness. (By the way, how many
  syllables are there in phonological?)
- Early syllable awareness tasks are <u>oral tasks</u> that involve listening and speaking (not writing). They include:
  - 1) Syllable Segmentation (or 'syllabification'). This involves saying the word in its syllable chunks. Later, this is important for spelling long words. 'Syllable isolation' is an advanced task related to syllable segmentation. It requires just one of the syllables to be said. 2) Syllable Blending. This involves listening to syllable chunks and pulling them together to make a word. Later, this is important for reading long words.
- Some students in the later years of primary school or even in secondary school
  may not have mastered basic syllable segmentation and blending. For these
  students "early" syllable tasks will be still relevant. Of course, the ageappropriateness of the activities needs to be considered.



The articles in the

LITERACY VITALS series
are written by Australian
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based on research and
anecdotes from her
clinical practice and
consulting experience.

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This is a happy tree





**Make it Visual** As with all my learning tips, I suggest that you pair a new concept ("syllable") with visual cues.



Use a *character* that represents syllables: A puppet is an example of a character. He or she is brought out when syllable activities are done (like Billy Bull who likes syllables. www.puppetsforlearning.com.au ).

## Visual cues help children quickly link new concepts to their meaning.

Use a gesture: When students are starting out with formal literacy programs they come in contact with a whole batch of new terms; words, sounds, letters, rhyme, syllables etc... These terms can be very confusing for students who have a language-learning impairment. Using a gesture as you talk about each new concept can help students learn their meaning and access the related information more quickly when required. When I say "syllable" I always clap my hands together and nod my head. Use this gesture throughout your teaching – not just in the introductory stages. For example, you might prompt a student to "think about the syllables" when they are tackling the spelling of a long word. Use the gesture for "syllable" when you say the word.



Blending syllables can tax 'working memory'. It may be hard for some students to hold on to more than two syllables in their head in order to blend them. If blending is problematic, an assessment of working memory is recommended. Note also that it's easier to blend syllables that eventuate in a word that is familiar to the student. This is just one way that a good vocabulary is related to success in reading.



#### **DIFFICULTY SAYING MULTISYLLABICS**

Some students have trouble saying long words. This can be fine at a preschool level, but has usually resolved by school entry. Students might leave off unstressed syllables (e.g. say "puter" for "computer"), or they may add, drop, change or jumble the sounds (e.g. say "hopstipal" for "hospital" or "ahind" for "behind"). Naturally, if a student can't say the word, correct segmentation will be difficult. If this is the case, segmentation by the teacher can assist the student master the correct production. The teacher should say the word, syllable by syllable, clapping and nodding for each. The teacher should be sure to say each syllable as they are pronounced (NOT as they are spelt). For example, "t-mar-toe" for "tomato", not "toe-mar-toe". Next, have the student copy slowly and then again with less duration between the syllables. Finally, the student should attempt the word as a whole. If the student has difficulty saying a lot of multisyllabic words at school entry, a referral to a speech pathologist is recommended.



**Billy the Grasshopper** is a puppet and program that uses the "Syllable Jumper" concept (see page 4). It contains loads of early and late syllable activities, wordlists, teaching tip and lots more. See <a href="https://www.puppetsforlearning.com.au">www.puppetsforlearning.com.au</a>

#### **EARLY SYLLABLE QUESTIONS AND TIPS**





Dear Love and Reilly, Some of my students have started segmenting one-syllable words as having two syllables? For example, "day-ay" for "day". What should I do? - Jane White

Dear Jay-ane, As with all tasks, allow the student to observe/hear you segmenting lots of single-syllable words (as you do the gesture). Have them copy immediately after your demonstration. When they become more independent in segmenting words and they make an error, ask the student to say the word "as they usually say it when we talk". Get them to use the "chin-dropper" technique and have them count the number of drops. If they still say "day-ay", ask them "When we talk, is the word "day-ay" or "day"?"

If this continues to be problematic, focus on longer words. In other words, just avoid single syllable words.

Good luck with it Jay-ane,

Love,



Love and Reilly.

**SEGMENT IT LIKE YOU SAY IT...** Some words are have more syllables in their written form than in their spoken form. *"What?"* I hear you screech.

Have a think about the word "primary". Early learners segment this word (quite correctly) as having two syllables. It sounds like "prime - ree". PLEASE in early syllable segmentation, segment words like "battery", "library" and "cemetery" in the way you say them rather than how they are spelt... Remember, we are focusing only on the sound of the word initially.



Dear Love and Reilly, How do I know exactly where to segment a word into syllables?

-Man/dy Pand/y

Hi Mandy, In **early** segmentation tasks, it does not matter exactly where the "split" is made as long as all the sounds are included. For example, "tea-cher" or "teach-er" are both correct examples of segmenting the word "teacher". That's because at this stage the activity is **spoken only.** Be careful that sounds aren't duplicated…"teach — cher" is a no-no. We become a bit more specific with segmentation in later tasks where we tend to split words according to a number of "syllable types". You'll need to read the whole article.

Love,

Love and Reilly

#### SYLLABLES IN EARLY LEARNING - ACTIVITIES



Syllable activities can begin in preschool and are vital for every early literacy program at the start of school. In the early stages, as with the activities below, syllable tasks involve only speech and listening. Having said this, the teacher may show how syllables relate to writing by 1) writing (and nodding) the syllables that have been detected in a word and 2) reading a long word as they nod and say the word syllable by syllable. The activities below are suitable for school students. Those with <sup>(2)</sup> next to the title are also appropriate for pre-schoolers. \*In the segmenting tasks, it is important that the teacher listens carefully to check that students are including all sounds.

**NOD-A- NAME (Blending)** When names need to be called out in class, say each name in syllables, nodding and clapping as each one is said. In time, when this routine is familiar, say only the first syllable. The student who is being called, says the remaining syllable/s (as they clap and nod). This doesn't work so well for the Jacks and Janes in the class!

**SYLLABLE JUMPER** (Blending) © Grab a jumping puppet character, preferably one whose mouth opens and shuts (e.g. a grasshopper, a kangaroo, a rabbit). Call it the SYLLABLE JUMPER. Choose a theme (e.g. animals, food or things in the kitchen). Think of a 2, 3 or 4 syllable word relating to the theme. Have the puppet "say" the word in syllables on each jump. Can students say the whole word that the puppet has jumped? A more challenging task is to jump the puppet towards a student and have them say the final syllable. (Segmenting) In time, let the students have a turn "jumping" the Syllable Jumper as they say a word in syllables. The teacher might provide a set of picture flashcards to provide the words. Billy the Grasshopper is a syllable jumper from <a href="https://www.puppetsforlearning.com.au">www.puppetsforlearning.com.au</a>).

**SILLY BULL (Segmenting)** This is a game that you can make. You'll need a few bull characters (cardboard cut-outs or plastic farm animals) and a board with around 30 squares heading to a FINISH square. Each player is given a word in turn and their bull jumps forward the corresponding number of syllables. This continues until one bull reaches the FINISH.

**SYLLABLE TENNIS (Segmenting)** Say a word and then each "player" claps and nods just one syllable, to and fro until the word is finished. This can be done going around a circle or in pairs.

**SYLLABLE SORTING (Segmenting)** Have students sort pictures from magazines into 1,2,3,4 syllable piles. A more challenging task is to have the student sort the pictures and then for the teacher to pick up a picture and to ask "What was the first, middle or last syllable?"

**WORD JIGSAW (Segmenting)** Find pictures in magazines of 2,3 and 4 syllable words. Cut the pictures into pieces according to their number of syllables. For example, a picture of "margarine" would be cut into three pieces and a picture of an "orange" would be cut into two. Mix up the pictures. Have students find matching pieces and say the syllables as they stick them together on a page.

LINE "WRITING" (Segmenting, syllable isolation) This one is good for older students. Have the student write two lines across a blank sheet of paper. Each line should be around 2-3 cm long. Say a two-syllable word. The student repeats the word in syllables touching each line as they say each syllable. The teacher then touches a line (first or second) and asks the student to say the corresponding syllable. Challenge the student by asking them to think of another word that shares that same syllable in that position. (For example, "station" shares its second syllable with "motion" and shares its first syllable with "stable.") Do this also with three lines/three-syllable words also.



# SYLLABLES IN LATER LEARNING – LINKS TO THE WRITTEN WORD

A good literacy program should teach young learners how to use their early syllable awareness for spelling and reading.

**WRITING:** Think about how you, as an adult, would **spell** a really long and unfamiliar word. You would probably segment it into syllables and then spell each syllable according to the position of the syllable and the spelling patterns you know about.

- For writing long words, students should be shown how using syllables can turn a long word into a series of simple, short chunks. Long words shouldn't be feared if early segmentation has been mastered! All a student needs to do is say the first syllable and then write it, say the next one, write it, and so on... In time, this becomes a silent and automatic process. It is our job as teachers to teach students a systematic and structured way to tackle long words.
- In the initial stages of their spelling attempts, students need to learn and attend to a vital literacy rule: EVERY SYLLABLE MUST HAVE A VOWEL.

  For this rule to make sense, the student needs to be automatic and certain in their knowledge of what constitutes a vowel. In this rule, we are referring to a vowel letter, where the vowel letters are a-e-i-o-u and also y. (You can read more about vowels and their importance in LITERACY VITALS: VOWELS. For now, I'll just tell you the trick that I use to teach vowel letters... I write the letters on students' fingers and hand and then teach them the sign language for the letters. Holding up my five fingers then becomes my gesture for the vowel letters. It works!)
- Students are most likely to forget to include a vowel when they are spelling an **unstressed syllable.** This is because the vowel sound cannot be heard. Take for example, the first syllable in "delight". It sounds like a single /d/ sound, doesn't it? This is why students may write "dlight."



**SAY IT LIKE YOU SPELL IT...** In early activities (those on Page 3), we practised syllabifying (segmenting) words **as they sound**, or **as we say them**. When it comes to spelling, I use a teaching technique called **"Say it like you say it, then say it like you spell it."** This is particularly useful for remembering the spelling of unstressed syllables. For example, I might say: "PRIME-REE" is spelt "PRI – MAR – Y" or "WED-NS-DAY" is spelt "WED – NES – DAY".

When students have mastered writing long words syllable by syllable, using a vowel letter in each syllable, they will be ready to incorporate some of the SEVEN SYLLABLE TYPES into their spelling. These should be taught systematically and explicitly. Learn about them on PAGES 6 – 7 of this document.

# More SYLLABLES IN LATER LEARNING – LINKS TO THE WRITTEN WORD over the page...

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**READING:** Think about how you, as an adult, would **read** a really long and unfamiliar word. You probably look for familiar chunks and then join then together. These "chunks" are often syllables.

- When tackling long words in reading, students should be taught **to look for syllables** and then join them all together. This utilises their syllable blending abilities.
- When blending syllables, a student will often need to adjust the stress or pronunciation of the syllables in order to determine the resultant word.
- Learning to identify syllable segments in a word is greatly assisted by learning the SEVEN SYLLABLE TYPES. This also helps with pronunciation. (See pages 7-9.)
- Even without knowing the seven syllable types, students should divide written words making sure every syllable contains a vowel.
- At this stage of learning, it is beneficial to introduce the concept of an "unstressed syllable".
   Most multisyllabic words have a strong (stressed, longer) syllable and a weak syllable (unstressed, quicker) syllable. The latter contains a schwa vowel sound. (The sound made by Emilio Remote in Pelican Talk's SPEECH SOUND SET). In the activities below, discussion about whether a syllable is stressed or unstressed can be incorporated.
- Remember the vital literacy rule: EVERY SYLLABLE MUST HAVE A VOWEL.

#### **ACTIVITIES**

**LINE "WRITING" (Segmenting, syllable isolation)** This activity begins exactly the same as the activity in the Early Syllable Learning (Page 4), however the student must then go and attempt to spell each syllable on the corresponding line. If the student is learning about including a vowel letter in each syllable, have them highlight the vowel in each.

**SYLLABLE SLASHING (Segmenting)** Provide a list of written words for the student. Have them re-write each word, then slash the word between each syllable and then read it back syllable by syllable. For example, cab/in lem/on/ade. After the SEVEN SYLLABLE TYPES have been learnt, you might ask a student to justify why they placed the slashes where they did and how this affects pronunciation. Eg. stud/ent vs stu/dent.

**STEAL A SYLLABLE** In either of the above tasks, "take" a syllable from one of the words and write it on the board. For example, <u>fy</u>. Say to the class. "I have stolen the final syllable "fy" from Jarrod's "terrify". What are you left with Jarrod?" (He should say "terri"). As a class, see if you can come up with other words that end in the syllable <u>fy</u>. Where possible, discuss the meaning of the syllable, the spelling of the syllable, and its pronunciation. (For example, -fy is a final syllable. It is part of the suffix –ify that means "to make". Usually, if we see -y on the end of a long word, it is pronounced "ee" (as in" pretty"), but not in this case! A variation of this is to ask the student who had the syllable stolen to see if he can replace it with another syllable (or syllables) to make a different word (terri<u>fic</u>, terri<u>er</u>).





The seven points over the next two pages look at common syllable division patterns and rules. They can assist our students in "looking for" where to divide long words (for reading) and prevent students becoming overwhelmed when tackling long words.

The more students work on identifying these syllable types, the more they will become familiar with the spelling patterns for each. This inevitably assists with spelling.

The division points, as discussed over the page also provide the reader with an idea about how the word will be pronounced.

You may find that some words can be divided in more than one way depending on the SYLLABLE TYPE identified. For example, you could divide the word "handy" between the middle blend (Point 6 below) and get "han/dy" or you could keep the word "hand" intact (Point 5) and use the suffix "y" as a syllable (Point 4), and divide it as "hand/y". Both are fine.

The main goal of learning these SYLLABLE TYPES is to create some structure for students tackling a multisyllabic word.

I find that the SYLLABLE TYPES 1 -5 over the page are the most useful to include in teaching for spelling *and* reading. SYLLABLE TYPES 6-7 relate more to reading.



#### **DISCUSS WORDS WITH STUDENTS!**

"Big words aren't so scary when you chop them into syllables."

"Where are you going to chop this word? Can you see one of our SYLLABLE TYPES?"

"How would you spell that first syllable? What sort of syllable do you think it might be?"

Remember to keep using the gesture for syllables.

TRY THIS: How do would YOU divide the word PHONEMIC into syllables?

Possibilities are:

PHON/E/MIC PHON/EM/IC PHO/NE/MIC?

How does each of the above affect the pronunciation?

Note: In each of the points over the next two pages, **V** refers to a **vowel letter** and **C** refers to a **consonant letter. Three dots** ... refer to the **rest of the word.** 

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## **SEVEN SYLLABLE TYPES**



## 1. CVC... $\rightarrow$ CVC/... or VC... $\rightarrow$ VC/...

This is called a **closed syllable** because we are **closing a single vowel in with a consonant (or consonants).** When we close in a vowel, the vowel feels nice and snug and just says its **short vowel sound** (usually). Closed syllables are the most common type of syllable in English, making up just under 50% of the syllables in text. In spelling, CVC words are one of the earliest mastered, so they should be easy! E.g. riv/er op/tion cab/in badg/er pick/et.

#### CLOSED SYLLABLE

CVC/ or VC/

V makes a short sound

## 2. VCV...→ V/CV... or CVC... CV/C...

When we divide after a single V, we leave the vowel out in the open. This is called an open syllable. When a syllable is open, the single vowel is left standing out there all by itself. It gets a bit lonely and calls out its name (which is also the long vowel sound). This is a handy one to teach for spelling. "A long vowel sound on the end of a syllable is usually made by a single lonely vowel letter saying its name". E.g. o/pen lo/tion, ca/ble ba/by Teaching this helps prevent students writing things like low/tion or bay/by.

#### OPEN SYLLABLE

CV/ or V/

V says its name (the long sound)

## 3. ...Cle $\rightarrow$ .../Cle

This is a final syllable and it occurs on the end of lots of words in English.

The C (consonant) can be any of ten letters: b, c, d, f, g, k, p, s, t, z. E.g. han/dle sta/ble ap/ple gen/tle cir/cle

This syllable type can follow a Closed Syllable or an Open Syllable. Look: bu/gle, cud/dle.

This syllable is good one to teach to improve spelling, although, yes, occasionally this sound combination on the end is spelt ...al or... el E.g. sand/al, grav/el

### CONSONANT

/Cle

as a final syllable

### 4. Prefixes and Suffixes

Most prefixes and suffixes are single syllables and these should be learnt and attended to when spelling and reading. It is beneficial to discuss meaning when learning these. Regarding pronunciation, most prefixes and suffixes are unstressed syllables. That is, the vowel sound is the schwa. The "SAY IT LIKE YOU SAY IT then SAY IT LIKE YOU SPELL IT" technique is useful for learning the spelling of prefixes and suffixes. (You can read more about prefixes and suffixes in LITERACY VITALS: PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES).

## PREFIX, SUFFIX

Prefix/ /Suffix

Often the vowel makes the schwa sound

## 5. Compound Words

Can you see or hear two small words within the word? If so, make the split between the two word .E.g. foot/ball to/day eye/sight.

## COMPOUND WORDS

word/word

## **SEVEN SYLLABLE TYPES** (continued...)



## 6. Digraphs and Trigraphs

Digraphs and Trigraphs are Letter Options (graphemes) that contain two or three letters that make just one sound. Some examples are **sh**, **th**, **igh**, **or**, **ea**, **ck**. Never split the letters within these. That's a solid rule that can't be broken. Eg. Push/er rain/y fright/en/ing.

7. ...CCV... → ...C/CV... or ...CCCCV ... → ...C/CCV...

If there are 2 or 3 consonants in the middle of a word, you usually make the split after the first . This will turn the first syllable into a closed one, and thus, the vowel sound will be short. Eg. com/bat hun/dred pil/grim.

### How to Teach the SEVEN SYLLABLE TYPES

- Firstly it really helps if students understand the following terms: consonant letter, vowel letter, digraph, trigraph, short vowel sound, long vowel sound, schwa, unstressed syllable, suffix, prefix.
- The best way to teach the types is to introduce and practise them one by one. Provide LOTS of demonstration and practice with single words that allow the student to see the pattern that you are studying.
- For the first five points, practise both reading AND spelling. Have students draw lines and then fill them in for spelling \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
   Have students use slashes for reading tasks. car/port
- In time, start to incorporate words in your practise lists that target more than one syllable type.
- Encourage discussion and stress that there is not always one correct way to divide words. Explore a small number of words together as a class. Write each word on the board and segment in different ways. Discuss which "rules" or "patterns" you are seeing. Also discuss how this affects pronunciation.
- Encourage students to use their division skills when reading text. Some students will benefit from being shown how to tackle a long word by blocking part of the word (using a finger or a small sliding card) allowing only one syllable at a time to be exposed. Move the finger/card to the right as each syllable is read.

Happy clapping! If you have any questions, please email via the website. Join our Facebook page for more juicy info and tips or come along to a training session where you'll receive lots of goodies (wordlists, activities, digital resources) to use in your teaching and therapy. EMAIL: <a href="mailto:info@loveandreilly.com.au">info@loveandreilly.com.au</a>