

The Syllable Dictionary

This document provides an explanation of the file Syllable_dictionary.txt.

1. Each row in the syllable dictionary corresponds to a word that appears in Shakespeare's sonnets. All words in Shakespeare's sonnets are represented in this dictionary; however, words that appear in Spenser's sonnets but *not* in Shakespeare's sonnets are not included.
2. This list treats hyphenated word combinations as single words. If your team wishes to treat hyphenated words differently, then additional processing may be required.
3. Each line in the file specifies the number of syllables corresponding to the word in question. For example, the line "wrinkle 2" indicates that the word "wrinkle" has 2 syllables.
4. Note that in a significant number of cases, the same word corresponds to multiple numbers of syllables. For example, in Shakespeare's iambic pentameter, the word "being" sometimes corresponds to 1 syllable and sometimes corresponds to 2 syllables. This is denoted in the syllable dictionary as follows: "being 1 2". Here, '1' and '2' are the allowable numbers of syllables corresponding to "being" in Shakespeare's sonnets. To better illustrate, here are examples of lines from the sonnets where the word "being" takes on 1 and 2 syllables, respectively:

a. *As thou being mine, mine is thy good report.*

b. *Then being asked, where all thy beauty lies,*

5. In many cases, Shakespeare places a word at the end of a line which brings the sentence over 10 syllables. For example, consider the following line from sonnet 144:

a. *And would corrupt my saint to be a devil:*

Look at where the stresses fall in the iambic pentameter rhythm. It looks like the line has 11 syllables rather than 10, with the "de" of "devil" being the stressed word on the 10th syllable. In this case, it can be best to count the whole word "devil" as a single syllable for purposes of meter. In the syllable dictionary, the entry for "devil" appears as "devil E1 2". The "E" stands for "end," and this means that "devil" has effectively 1 syllable everywhere where it occurs at the end of a line, and has 2 syllables anytime it occurs anywhere else within a line. There are many such cases, where a word appears to be taken to have fewer syllables specifically when it occurs as the last word in a line.

6. Note that in a number of cases, the syllable counts differ from those found in present-day English. For example, everywhere where it occurs in the sonnets, the word "power" has only one syllable.