

Syllable Rules

A **syllable** is a basic unit of written and spoken language. It is a unit consisting of uninterrupted sound that can be used to make up words. For example, the word *hotel* has two syllables: *ho* and *tel*. These will be marked here as in *ho/tel*.

Counting Syllables

To find the number of syllables in a word, use the following steps:

1. Count the vowels in the word.
2. Subtract any silent vowels, (like the silent *e* at the end of a word, or the second vowel when two vowels are together in a syllable.)
3. Subtract one vowel from every [diphthong](#) (diphthongs only count as one vowel sound.)
4. The number of vowel sounds left is the same as the number of syllables.

The number of syllables that you hear when you pronounce a word is the same as the number of vowel sounds heard. For example:

- The word *came* has 2 vowels, but the *e* is silent, leaving one vowel sound and one syllable.
- The word *outside* has 4 vowels, but the *e* is silent and the *ou* is a diphthong which counts as only one sound, so this word has only two vowel sounds and therefore, two syllables.

Six Kinds of Syllables

There are six different kinds of syllables in English:

1. **Closed Syllables:** A closed syllable has one and only one vowel, and it ends in a consonant. Examples include *in*, *ask*, *truck*, *sock*, *stretch*, *twelfth*, and *on*.
2. **Open Syllables:** An open syllable has one and only one vowel, and that vowel occurs at the end of the syllable. Examples include *no*, *she*, *I*, *a*, and *spry*.
3. **Silent-E Syllables:** A silent-e syllable ends in an *e*, has one and only one consonant before that *e*, and has one and only one vowel before that consonant. Examples include *ate*, *ice*, *tune*, *slope*, *strobe*, and *these*.
4. **Vowel Combination Syllables:** A vowel combination syllable has a cluster of two or three vowels or a vowel-consonant unit with a sound or sounds particular to that unit. Examples include *rain*, *day*, *see*, *veil*, *pie*, *piece*, *noise*, *toy*, *cue*, and *true*.
5. **Vowel-R Syllables:** A vowel-r syllable is one which includes one and only one vowel followed by an *r*, or one vowel followed by an *r* which is followed by a silent *e*, or a [vowel combination](#) followed by an *r*. Examples include *car*, *or*, *care*, *ire*, *air*, and *deer*.
6. **Consonant-L-E Syllables:** In these syllables, a consonant is followed by *le*. The vowel sound in these syllables is the schwa sound that occurs before the *l*. Examples include *-ble*, *-cle*, *-dle*, *-fle*, and *-gle*.

Dividing Words Into Syllables

There are four ways to split up a word into its syllables:

1. Divide between two middle consonants.

Split up words that have two middle consonants. For example:

hap/pen, bas/ket, let/ter, sup/per, din/ner, and Den/nis. The only exceptions are the consonant digraphs. Never split up consonant digraphs as they really represent only one sound. The exceptions are "th", "sh", "ph", "th", "ch", and "wh".

2. Usually divide before a single middle consonant.

When there is only one syllable, you usually divide in front of it, as in:

"o/pen", "i/tem", "e/vil", and "re/port". The only exceptions are those times when the first syllable has an obvious [short sound](#), as in "cab/in".

3. Divide before the consonant before an "-le" syllable.

When you have a word that has the old-style spelling in which the "-le" sounds like "-el", divide before the consonant before the "-le". For example: "a/ble", "fum/ble", "rub/ble", "mum/ble" and "thi/stle". The only exception to this are "ckle" words like "tick/le".

4. Divide off any compound words, [prefixes](#), [suffixes](#) and roots which have vowel sounds.

Split off the parts of compound words like "sports/car" and "house/boat". Divide off prefixes such as "un/happy", "pre/paid", or "re/write". Also divide off suffixes as in the words "farm/er", "teach/er", "hope/less" and "care/ful". In the word "stop/ping", the suffix is actually "-ping" because this word follows the rule that when you add "-ing" to a word with one syllable, you double the last consonant and add the "-ing".