

Syllable division

This is a way of working out how to spell most two-syllable words and what happens when adding suffixes.

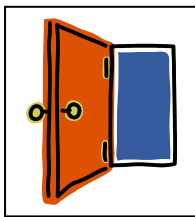
Vowels are: a e i o u and sometimes y.

They can be short or long, e.g. cǎp or cāpe, hǒp or hōpe. 'Y' acts like a vowel if it sounds like a vowel, e.g. in 'cry' (ī) and 'happy' (ē) or (ī), depending on your accent.

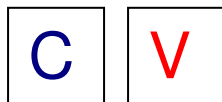
A syllable: is a beat in a word, e.g. pic nic.

Syllables can be open as in 'no' or 'be'.

Here the vowel is long because there is no consonant wall blocking it.



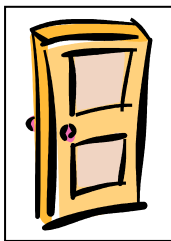
open syllable



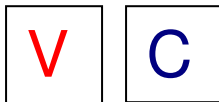
n ō

Or they can be closed as in 'not' and 'bet'.

Here we have a consonant wall blocking in the vowel and keeping it short.



closed syllable



n ɔ t

If we turn 'not' into 'note' we need double-vowel power.

Double-vowel power logic goes like this: if there is only one consonant wall, the extra vowel 'e' can break down that wall and turn the short (ǒ) into a long (ō).

Two syllable words

In words of two syllables, if we treat each syllable independently, we can easily work out how to spell and read them.

To split words logically into syllables, mark the vowel with a 'V' for vowel and mark the consonants between the vowels with a 'C' for consonant.

If there are two consonants, always divide between the consonants as in:

vc/cv

met/ric

Here, the first syllable is closed and therefore has a short vowel sound – *met*.

If there is only one consonant between the vowels, we usually divide before the consonant like this:

v/cv

o/pen

The first syllable is open: 'o', therefore it has a long vowel sound (ō).

Regrettably, there are some exceptions, e.g. 'robin', but these tend to be common words, which are either already known or can be learnt as exceptions.

Adding suffixes

A suffix is a letter, or group of letters added to a base or root word. There are *vowel suffixes* that start with a vowel, e.g. 'ing', 'ed', 'y', 'able' or *consonant suffixes* that start with a consonant, e.g. 'ly', 'ness', 'ful', 'ment'. The spelling of suffixes never changes.

Vowel suffixes

The double-vowel power logic we've learned becomes really useful when adding vowel suffixes and there are virtually no exceptions here.

The word 'hop' is a closed syllable and therefore has a short vowel sound. What happens when we add 'ing'?

We need to keep the first vowel short when we add 'ing', so we must prevent double-vowel power by adding an extra consonant wall.

hǒp + p + ing = hop/ping (the first syllable is closed so the vowel is short).

Try this one: 'māke' (here the 'e' is doing its double-vowel power act, lengthening the 'a') + 'ing'.

We now have a vowel suffix that will perform the double-vowel-power function instead of the 'e'.
(You cannot have triple vowel power.)

v/cv

Therefore: make + ing = mā/king (the first syllable is open, so the vowel is long).

Try some more: mate + ing = mat + ing

rate + ing = rat + ing

Learners will need lots of practice, and to begin with they will need to work out the logic every time. Later they will be able to spot syllable patterns when reading and hear whether to double or drop when adding suffixes for spelling.

Consonant suffixes

Adding consonant suffixes is even easier.

Remember consonant suffixes start with a consonant, e.g. 'ly', 'ty', 'ful', 'ment', 'ness', 'less'. The rule here is this: when adding a consonant suffix, you leave the base word alone. (There is only one exception and that is when the base word ends in 'y'.)

So if you know how to spell the base word and you know how to spell the suffix, you can't go wrong, for example:

love + ly = lovely

faith + ful + ly = faithfully

hope + ful = hopeful

sincere + ly = sincerely