



Recognizing and Counting Syllables in Grades 1-3

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As children grow, learning to read is incredibly different from how they learned spoken language. Babies are hardwired to learn language and pick up words and form sentences simply from listening to and interacting with parents and caregivers. Conversely, learning to read is a much more intentional process! While reading to kids regularly is vital for vocabulary acquisition and forming an early love for reading, they need more help to begin to connect word sounds to written text. That's where syllables come in!

Syllable awareness is a foundational early literacy skill that directly relates to a child's later ability to decode words and build reading fluency. Think of syllable recognition as a way to learn the sound structure of words so they can one day read new words quickly, even if they don't know what they mean. Once fluent in reading, older readers use more advanced skills, like using context clues, to learn even more sophisticated words. As you can see, syllable awareness is just one of the first critical steps in the long journey towards reading like an adult!

As with all literacy skills, building syllable awareness is a process which looks different based upon a student's age, grade, and reading level. Let's take a closer look at how the process looks at each stage.

What Exactly are Syllables? Recognizing Syllables in First Grade

Simply put, a syllable is a unit of sound in spoken language, always built around a vowel sound. For example:

- Dog = 1 syllable
- Laptop = 2 syllables
- Apricot = 3 syllables
- Alligator = 4 syllables

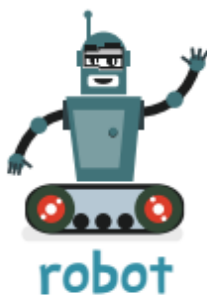
To start, kindergarteners don't learn to recognize syllables visually; instead, they learn them through songs when they chant lyrics, stomp, tap, or clap. As they progress through first grade, they begin to match word sounds and rhythms to written words. Generally, the goal is to teach these learners how to clap out sounds and identify one-, two- and three-syllable words. Eventually, first graders will learn how to break compound words apart and blend syllables together.

When first starting out, exercises should look like these [Learning Syllables](#) and [Finding Syllables](#) worksheets that instruct readers to clap while they say each word:

Learning Syllables

Syllables are parts of words. Some words have just one syllable. Others can have several. Every syllable has a vowel.

Look at the pictures and say the words aloud. Clap your hands for every syllable you hear. Count the number of times you clapped for each word. Now, circle all the two-syllable words.



Finding Syllables

Look at the pictures and say the words aloud. Clap your hands for every syllable you hear. Count the number of times you clapped for each word. In each row, tick the box that indicates the correct number of syllables.

	1	2	3
 kitten	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
 fish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
 kangaroo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
 monkey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
 kite	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The exercise in the first worksheet is for beginners who are just starting to explore syllables in words. With the help of a parent or teacher, they clap for each vowel sound they hear in a word. They learn that sometimes there is only one vowel sound in a word, and sometimes there's more.

Once they can successfully clap out each syllable, they can move on to the next worksheet, in which they begin to clap out sounds while counting each sound they hear. Notice how most words at this stage have only one or two syllables, but there is one word that different from the rest: kangaroo. This allows for reinforcing what they already know while slowly introducing multisyllabic words.

Second Grade: Using Syllables to Decode

Second grade is where the magic happens! This is when syllables become more connected to reading and decoding words. As students continue to recognize multi-syllable words, they notice patterns and learn to break down words by its syllables to decode new words.

For example, consider the word "robot". It's probably a familiar word for children to hear, but if they have never read the it before, they can break it down by its sounds so that it becomes "ro/bot". This may seem simple to most adults, but the word "robot" contains both a closed and open syllable. A closed syllable is one in which a short vowel sound is closed in by two consonants. An open syllable contains a long vowel sound that is not followed by a consonant. Exploring different types of syllables is a major goal in the second grade, and it helps learners to decode new words while reading.

Click on any activity below to start learning.

1st

🕒 4:00 min

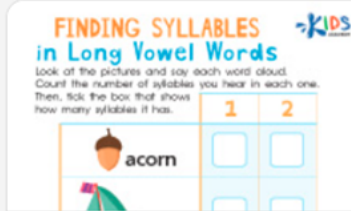


Dividing Words into
Syllables

Video

2nd

🕒 3:00 min



Finding Syllables in
Long Vowel Words
Worksheet

Worksheet

3rd

🕒 4:00 min



Decoding Two-Syllable
Words with Long
Vowels

Quiz

In this grade 2 [lesson](#), children learn more about dividing words into its syllables and distinguishing between types of syllables that use long and short vowel sounds. The video explains open and closed syllables in a kid-friendly way complete with plenty of examples. The worksheet allows learners to practice finding long vowels and to differentiate them from closed syllables. The third task in this lesson is a quiz that assesses mastery, which parents and instructors can use to gauge learning.

Mastering Multisyllabic Words in Third Grade

Older children continue to recognize syllable patterns in words, but the words they decode increasingly become more academic and nuanced. They begin to use syllables to learn how to read and pronounce new vocabulary, and they think more about synonyms and antonyms in multisyllabic words to reinforce their mental library.



In this third grade [lesson](#), teacher Mike explains how to determine antonyms to common words. While not always the case, readers may notice that many antonym pairs have a similar sound or syllable structure, which is exactly how syllable awareness can assist students in determining the right words to use. In the quiz that follows, learners gain even more practice with decoding Multisyllabic words, especially with more complicated words with many syllables.

Overall, syllable awareness is a critical component of every child's literacy journey, which is a process that begins by singing, stomping, and clapping in kindergarten, and gets truly underway in the first through third grades. While it may seem to be such a simple concept, it is a crucial building block that enables students to decode words and build reading fluency. Find all the above exercises, lessons, and much more at www.kidsacademy.mobi and look for our Talented and Gifted app on the AppStore and Google Play!