

# Syllabication

## What is it?

A syllable is a unit of speech consisting of one or more letters that represent a unit of spoken language which makes up words. Words can have one or more syllables. We naturally say words using syllables. Young children can discover how words can be broken down into smaller sound units by first feeling the “beats” in words. Syllables can be felt by placing one hand lightly under the chin while speaking. Children can feel one “chin-drop” for each syllable in words. These can also be rocked, clapped or tapped.



## Why is it important

Playing with syllables, “feeling” the beats while saying the word, introduces the concept that spoken words can be divided into smaller units. When children can detect syllables in words they may then break syllables into onsets and rimes (ex: “j-eep”), then into individual phonemes (ex: j/ee/p). Hearing sounds in sequence and blending them together to make words is a precursor skill to reading and writing. Understanding that each syllable needs a vowel, is also very helpful for spelling later on.



## Considerations (what to think about?)

- Be **intentional** with the purpose and clear with the expectations. “We are going to feel and count the syllables or beats in words. When you say words your chin goes up and down. Let’s feel that. Put hand under chin.”
- Use a variety of words to describe “syllables” – beats, taps, claps, parts...
- The task of identifying number of syllables for K-2 is ORAL.
- Each syllable must have a vowel–this is interesting to know as students start being more mindful of spelling



## What to do?

- Use familiar materials – pictures or objects and students’ name cards to explore the beats, chin-drops, sways, claps, stomps, etc. in words.
- Sort by number of syllables using pocket charts, wall graph or baskets.
- Use materials such as scarves, shakers, ribbons, hand-clappers, to emphasize the syllables in a fun way.
- Build a collection of songs, chants and poems that engage children in rhythm and beat.
- Look for character names or objects in read-alouds that could be fun to break into syllables.

## Whole group:

- Use “Rich Routines” (see RR document) to playfully break words into syllables daily during whole group gatherings.
- Take advantage of any opportunities that arise to model syllables. For example, when students bring items from home, food items at recess and lunch, names of big buddies, others teachers etc. This can also be done with a puppet, or “robot talk” (speaking in syllable chunks and having the children guess the word).
- Say the first syllable of a students’ name and have students guess or finish the name.
- Show two words as you say them (such as “horse” and “hippopotamus”) and ask the students to guess which word is which. Show how longer words would have more syllables by comparing the beats in each word and counting the letters.
- Play “Four Corners” by placing a number (either 1, 2, 3, or 4) in each corner of the room. Invite the students to sort themselves into corners according to how many syllables are in their name. Continue playing with different categories of words. For example, “Think of an animal, decide how many syllables you hear in the word and go to that number”. Try family members’ names, food, sports, book characters, etc. Once they have sorted themselves into the corners, have the children share their words and count together.



- Integrate numeracy by tallying or marking the number of syllables in a ten frame with manipulatives.
- Explicitly model chunking words into syllables during shared reading of big books, pocket chart, or poems

### **Small Group (10-minutes):**

- Model and guide the students to chunk syllables in familiar and new words using picture cards or pictures in books.
- Build on what the students know. Find words from familiar books or pictures that have more or less syllables than your name. You can use beads or clear jewels to visually show the syllables and have the students touch them as they chunk the word orally.
- Go on a room hunt and “collect” words. This can be done by taking photos with iPads, drawing simple pictures, or reporting back orally what they saw. Sort the items they found in the room by syllables. Write the words by their drawings or on a whiteboard. Are words with more syllables shorter or longer? This builds confidence in spelling bit by bit.
- Using a ten-frame and pictures of familiar items, add a manipulative for each syllable of a word (e.g. cat = 1, elephant = +3 more), ask “How many words did you need to fill your ten-frame?”



### **What is the rest of the class doing?**

While working with small groups, the remaining students will be engaged in practicing the concepts with purposeful independent activities that they understand the intentions of. For example, they may be sorting pictures cards or familiar objects into syllables piles, finding pictures in books that are a certain number of syllables, or sorting class or family names. Students may also search in a book for the word with the greatest number of letters, mark with a sticky note and explore later as a whole group.

## Extra Scoop

Some children need multiple opportunities to explore, or get “extra scoops”, in order to grasp concepts. Be responsive by providing them opportunities to slow down, go deeper, or try other ways to play with the natural beats in words. Analyze misunderstandings and try a different way of explaining. Take time to work one-on-one with these students in meaningful ways, connecting to their interests, favourite songs and stories, and nudging them forward from what they can currently do.

## What to look for? (Formative assessment entry points)

- Can students say and show (by clapping, swaying, chin-drops, etc.) the syllables in their own name?
- Are students able to orally blend 2 or 3 syllable words?
- Are students able to segment words orally in syllable chunks?
- Do students demonstrate an understanding that the number of letters in a word relates to the number of syllables?

## What next?

1. If a student is having difficulty wonder: about possible hearing/speech issues, do the concepts make sense, have multiple ways been explained, about developmental readiness and after this thoughtful analysis and conversation with the child start from what they know and repeat above ideas watching for “ah-ha’s”.
2. If a student is fluent and confident in their understanding of syllables (and also their letter sounds) have them cut their and their friends names into the syllable chunks. Build their confidence and oral language skills by having them share or mentor others.

## Websites

[http://www.readingfirst.virginia.edu/prof\\_dev/phonemic\\_awareness/words\\_syllables.html](http://www.readingfirst.virginia.edu/prof_dev/phonemic_awareness/words_syllables.html)

## Children’s Literature

Shared Reading books from *Key Links*

*Tanka Tanka Skunk* – by Steve Webb

*Chrysanthemum* – by Kevin Henkes

*Andy that’s My Name* – by Tomie De Paola

*My Name is Elizabeth* – by Annika Dunklee

*Once there was a Bull-Frog* – by Rick Walton (compound words)

