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## **The Syllable**

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## 1 .Introduction

A syllable is a unit of pronunciation that forms the building blocks of words. Every syllable has a nucleus, usually a vowel, and may have consonants at the beginning (onset) or end (coda).

Understanding syllables is essential for:

- Pronunciation and stress
- Word rhythm and connected speech
- Phonotactic patterns in English
- Spelling and reading skills

This chapter covers:

- Syllable structure
- Onset, nucleus, and coda
- Types of syllables
- Syllable stress

## 2 .Syllable Structure

The general structure of a syllable can be represented as:

(C)(C)(C)V(C)(C)(C)

- C = consonant
- V = vowel

- Parentheses = optional

Example:

-cat – CVC → /kæt/

-spring – CCCVC → /sprɪŋ/

- eat – V → /i:t/

Tip: Teach students to identify onset, nucleus, and coda in every word.

### 3 .Components of a Syllable

#### 3.1 Onset

Consonant(s) before the vowel. Optional.

-cat → /k/ is onset

- spring → /spr/ is onset

#### 3.2 Nucleus

The vowel or syllabic consonant at the heart of the syllable. Mandatory.

-cat → /æ/ is nucleus

-bottle → /əl/ (syllabic /l/)

#### 3.3 Coda

Consonant(s) after the vowel. Optional.

- cat → /t/ is coda

- see → no coda

Tip: Students should practice breaking words into onset, nucleus, and coda for transcription and pronunciation.

#### 4 .Types of Syllables

English syllables can be classified by structure:

- Open syllable: ends with a vowel → go /gəʊ/
- Closed syllable: ends with a consonant → cat /kæt/
- Complex syllable: multiple consonants in onset or coda → spring /sprɪŋ/

Tip: Teach students to recognize syllable types for correct stress placement.

#### 5 .Syllabic Consonants

Some consonants can form the nucleus of a syllable, usually in unstressed syllables:

/ l/ – bottle → /'bɒt.l/

/ n/ – button → /'bʌt.n/

/ m/ – rhythm → /'rɪð.m/

Tip: Highlight how syllabic consonants replace vowels in fast speech.

#### 6 .Syllable Stress

Stress is the emphasis placed on a syllable. Stressed syllables are louder, longer, and higher in pitch.

## 6.1 Word Stress

- record (noun) → /'rek.ɔ:d/
- record (verb) → /rɪ'kɔ:d/

Tip: Word stress can change meaning.

## 6.2 Sentence Stress

- Content words usually stressed: nouns, main verbs, adjectives, adverbs
- Function words usually unstressed: prepositions, articles, auxiliary verbs

Example:

- The cat is sleeping on the mat.  
→stressed words: cat, sleeping, mat

## 7 .Phonotactics

Phonotactics refers to permissible combinations of sounds in English syllables:

- Onset clusters: /spl/ in splash
- Coda clusters: /ŋθ/ in strengths

Tip: Some clusters are difficult for non-native speakers. Practice slowly, then increase speed.

## 8 .Syllable Division Practice

- happy → /'hæp.i/ → two syllables: hap – py
- extra → /'ek.strə/ → two syllables: ex – tra

- strengths → /streŋkθs/ → one complex syllable

Exercise: Divide words into onset, nucleus, coda and mark stress.

## 9 .Summary

-A syllable = onset + nucleus + coda

- Open syllables end with vowels; closed syllables end with consonants

-Syllabic consonants can form a nucleus in unstressed syllables

-Stress is important for word meaning and sentence rhythm

- Phonotactic rules govern consonant clusters and syllable structure