Helping Students Learn How to Break Words into Syllables

When students come upon a word that they can't read, it is very helpful if they can break that word into syllables. How is this done? Kids need to know one overarching rule:

**Every syllable has one vowel or vowel team.**

If the word has one vowel or vowel team, then, it has one syllable. If it has two vowels or vowel teams it has two syllables and so forth.

Here is how we analyze words and write the formula to reinforce it.

- **brush** 1 v. = 1 syl.
- **mean** 1 v. = 1 syl. Note: this is a vowel team ea is short e, in this word.
- **cabin** 2 v. = 2 syllables
- **meaningful** 3 v. = 3 syllables Note: ea is a vowel team for long e, in this word.

Once students know how many syllables are in the word, then they can use the rules below by G.E. Tompkins, to break the word into syllables.

Rules for Syllabication

**Author: G.E. Tompkins**  **Source: Pearson Allyn Bacon Prentice Hall**

**Rule 1:** When two consonants come between two vowels in a word, divide the syllable between the consonants: cof/fee, bor/der, plas/tic, jour/ney

**Rule 2:** When there are more than two consonants in a word, divide the syllables keeping the blends together: em/ploy, mon/ster, en/trance, bank/rupt.

**Rule 3:** When there is one consonant between two vowels in a word, divide the syllable after the first vowel: ca/jole, bo/nus, plu/ral, gla/cier

(added: This is called **open syllable** and the first vowel is generally a long vowel sound.)

**Rule 4:** If following the previous rules doesn’t make a recognizable word, divide the syllable after the consonant between the two vowels: doz/en, ech/o meth/od, cour/age

**Rule 5:** When two vowels are together, and they are not a long vowel pattern or a diphthong, divide the syllables between the vowels: cli/ent, li/on, qui/et, cha/os
5 Finger Rule

When students are taught these steps, consistently, they will learn how to attack difficult multisyllabic words. These steps are only applied if the student cannot “sound the word out”, first. This strategy card can be given to kids to use independently once they have had enough direct instruction and monitored practice on the use of the 5 Finger Rule for Reading Hard Words.

When I don't know a word, what can I do?

1. Look at the word…. is there a little word I recognize within the word. Does that help me read it?
2. Look for a word part or chunk in the word. Does that help me read it?
3. Write down the word. Underline the vowels and or vowel teams. Next, write the formula: eg. 2 v = 2 syl.
4. Using the rules, make a / (slash) between the syllables.
5. Mark over the vowels: u for short sound, _ for long sound, and ● for the schwa
   Does this help me read it?