Breaking Words into Syllables

Breaking words into syllables

Two quick tricks for breaking big words into simple words are to 1) separate out familiar words, (i.e. unforgettable has the word “forget” in the middle), and 2) separate out prefixes and suffixes (i.e. “un” and “able” in “unforgettable”). Adult and adolescent learners typically have a pretty large vocabulary of words, prefixes, and suffixes that they recognize on sight. Often, just these two steps can help students “attack” a word that seems unfamiliar. After these initial tricks, here are a few suggestions for breaking words into syllables.

1) First look at the word to see how many vowels you see.
   a) Apron - 2 vowels
   b) consonant - 3 vowels
   c) number - 2 vowels
   d) repeat - 3 vowels
   e) bedside- 3 vowels
   f) handle- 2 vowels

2) Look to see if the vowels are together or separated by consonants.
   a) apron- 2 vowels- separated by consonants
   b) consonant - 3 vowels separated by consonants
   c) number - 2 vowels- separated by consonants
   d) repeat - 3 vowels 1 separate, 2 together
   e) bedside- 3 vowels, separated by consonants
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f) handle- 2 vowels- separated by consonants

3) Underline each vowel. If the vowels are next to each other underline both vowels together.
   a) apron- 2 vowels- separated by consonants
   b) consonant - 3 vowels separated by consonants
   c) number - 2 vowels- separated by consonants
   d) repeat - 3 vowels 1 separate, 2 together
   e) bedside-3 vowels separated by consonants
   f) handle- 2 vowels- separated by consonants

4) Count the number of underlines; this will tell you the number of syllables in the word. Of course there are some exceptions to this rule.
   a) apron - 2 underlines= 2 syllables
   b) consonant - 3 underlines= 3 syllables
   c) number - 2 underlines= 2 syllables
   d) repeat - 2 underlines= 2 syllables, even though there are 3 vowels
   e) bedside- Now here is an exception. When the e is at the end of the word, it is usually a part of the syllable before it, so in most cases we will NOT count an e at the end of a word as a separate syllable. So aside from the e at the end there are 2 underlined vowels, so this word has two syllables.
   f) handle- 2 underlines= 2 syllables- E at the end usually is not a separate syllable, but it is when preceded by a consonant + l
5) Look for consonants that are next to each other. Separate the consonants to divide the syllables UNLESS the consonants are blends (i.e. bl, pr, sc, etc.) or digraphs (ch, sh, th) because two consonants in a blend work together. In that case, treat them as ONE consonant.
   a) apron—we would NOT divide the p and r, because they are a blend and they work together; we would treat them as a single consonant.
   b) consonant - divide between the n and the s
   c) num/berr - divide between the m and the b
   d) repeat - there are not two syllables together
   e) bed/side- divide between the d and the s
   f) han/dle- divide between the n and the d. Now this one is tricky because there are 3 consonants together (n, d, l). We know to separate the n and d, because the dle is a separate syllable type (consonant+ l, e)

6) Next look for the syllable types:
   a) Closed syllables are easier to spot because they are usually a consonant, vowel, and consonant as in kin. Keep in mind that consonant blends also act as a consonant, so skin would also be a closed syllable. Closed syllables end in a consonant, and have a short vowel sound.
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i) *a-pron-pron* would be a closed syllable, so the vowel would be a short o.

ii) *con-son-ant -con* and *son* are closed syllables with a consonant, vowel, and consonant, and *ant* is a closed syllable with a consonant blend. These would both have short vowel sounds.

iii) *num-ber - num* is a closed syllable and would have a short vowel sound.

iv) repeat - there are no closed syllables in this word.

b) Once you find the closed syllables, it is easier to spot the open syllables. Open syllables end and a vowel and have a long vowel sound.

i) *a-pron-* the *a* in *apron* is an open syllable. The sound would be a long vowel sound. Long vowels say their own name.

ii) repeat - the *re* in *repeat* is an open syllable. The sound would be a long vowel sound. *Re* is also a common prefix, so it might be easy to spot.

c) Next look for consonant-vowel-e syllables. From our examples, only the word *bedside* has a syllable that contains the vowel-consonant-e. The vowel here would be a long vowel sound.
thanks to the silent e. Since we split the consonants that are side-by-side, we know that the s belongs with the ide.

d) *Next look for vowel teams.* From our examples, only the word *repeat* has a syllable that contains a vowel team. So *repeat* has an open syllable (re) and a vowel team syllable (peat).

e) *Consonant-l-e -* From our examples, only the word *handle* has a syllable that contains a consonant-l-e.

f) *R-controlled syllables -* R-controlled syllables contain a vowel followed by an “r.” From our examples, only the word *number* has a syllable that is classified as an r-controlled syllable (ber).