



Syllables

What is a syllable?

A **SYLLABLE** is a unit of a word that contains a vowel sound, and which gives words their characteristic beat when spoken. So, for example, *photo* has two syllables (*pho – to*), *photograph* has three syllables (*pho – to – graph*), and *photography* has four syllables (*pho – to – graph – y*). All words have at least one syllable, e.g. *go*, *hard*, *knock*. The main thing to remember is that it's not the way a word is spelled that's important but how it sounds.

To help you further, think of the popular party song 'Happy Birthday'. Each syllable is a different beat in the song, i.e.

Hap – py Birth – day to you.
Hap – py Birth – day to you.
Hap – py Birth – day dear Da – vid
Hap – py Birth – day to you.

Look at the following words and see if you can work out how many syllables they contain (you may need to say them aloud, as it's the sound that matters).

tent	forest	picnic	Hamsterley	excited
syllable	characteristic	envelope	dog	lovingly
cautious	tray	florist	hippopotamus	penguin
dentistry	button	pretending	invigorating	pie

[Suggested answers are given at the end of the next page]



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Note:

For some words it's not always easy to decide how many syllables there are. For example, how many syllables do you think they are in the following word?

different

If you base your judgment solely on how it's written you may decide that it's three (because it has three vowels), i.e.

diff – er – ent

However, you would have to be a very careful and precise speaker to say this in an everyday conversation with three syllables. It is more usual for this to be shortened to just two syllables when we are in a conversation, i.e.

diff' – rent

Another example is the word *every*. If you were a very careful speaker you may decide that it contains three syllables, i.e.

ev – e – ry

However, again it's more common in conversation to shorten this to just two syllables, i.e.

ev' – ry

It's not always possible to avoid examples like this. However, we've tried to keep these instances to a minimum in this pack. So, if you decide that a particular word has, say, just two syllables instead of three, this shouldn't affect the timing of the exercises too much.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

tent	1	forest	2	picnic	2	Hamsterley	3	excited	2
syllable	3	characteristic	5	envelope	3	dog	1	lovingly	3
cautious	2	tray	1	florist	2	hippopotamus	5	penguin	2
dentistry	3	button	2	pretending	3	invigorating	5	pie	1