

Syllable

A syllable is a unit of speech consisting minimally of one vowel and maximally of a vowel preceded by a consonant or consonant cluster and followed by a consonant or consonant cluster. For example, the English word ‘introductions’ consists of four syllables: in-tro-duc-tions.

A word that consists of a single syllable (e.g., *dog*) is called a **monosyllable**, while a word consisting of two syllables (like ‘puppy’) is called a **disyllable**. A word consisting of three syllables (such as ‘continent’) is called a **trissyllable**. A word consisting of more than three syllables (such as ‘rhinoceros’) is called a **polysyllable**.

Syllables are often considered the phonological ‘building blocks’ of words. They can influence the rhythm of a language, its prosody, its poetic meter, its stress patterns, and so on. In phonology, the syllable is defined by the way in which vowels and consonants combine to form various sequences. Vowels can form a syllable on their own (e.g. ‘oh!’) or they can be the ‘centre’ of a syllable, preceded or followed by one or more consonants, e.g. ‘bay’, ‘ate’, ‘bait’. Syllables that end in a vowel are open syllables, e.g. the first syllables in English ‘open’, ‘highway’, ‘even’. Syllables that end in one or more consonants are closed syllables, e.g. the first syllables in English ‘magpie’, ‘pantry’, ‘completion’.

A syllable can be divided into three parts:

- i.* The beginning, called the **onset**
- ii.* The central part, called the **nucleus** or **peak**
- iii.* The end, called the **coda** or **final**

In the English word *bite*, /b/ is the onset, /aɪ/ the nucleus, and /t/ the coda.