

Unit 5 • Module 1: Identifying Syllable Structures

Section 1

Slide 1—Title Slide

Welcome to the first module in the Word Study Routines unit, Identifying Syllable Structures.

Slide 2—Reading Intervention Components

This module addresses the instruction of students who were identified in diagnostic assessments as having weak decoding skills. Students still struggling with recognizing basic syllable patterns will need intensive intervention; therefore, very small group sizes would be best. These groups can be formed within existing classes if necessary, though they would ideally constitute a reading intervention class.

Combining knowledge of syllable structures with known morphemes can simplify the reading of words with more than one syllable. Therefore, the second module in this unit will address morphological analysis.

Please locate **Handout 1: TEKS/ELPS Connections**, which explains how this routine will assist students in meeting specific subject area expectations of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS, and the English Language Proficiency Standards, or ELPS.

Slide 3—Objectives

Knowledge of the six syllable types helps students with two key reading skills: quickly and accurately decoding words, and acquiring vocabulary. The ultimate goal of syllable-type instruction is to better equip students to read and understand text.

The objectives of this module are: to understand how increasing knowledge of common syllable patterns improves students' ability to recognize, read, and comprehend the meanings of new words; to learn how to help students analyze words by identifying common syllable patterns; and to apply the three-step process for explicit instruction to help students learn and identify common syllable patterns.

As we begin the module, you may hear or see some unfamiliar terms. These will be explained as we work through the slides.

Slide 4—Tiers II and III Instruction

Please turn to **Handout 2: A Schoolwide Reading Intervention Approach for Middle School**.

You will recall from the overview of the schoolwide approach to reading intervention that students with reading difficulties that cannot be addressed sufficiently through instructional supports in the core educational program will require strategic, or Tier II, intervention. Students who have severe reading difficulties will require targeted, or Tier III, intervention.

The difference between Tier II and Tier III is that Tier III interventions increase the time and intensity of instruction, most notably through maintaining very small group sizes. This is possible, in part, because only a small percentage of students should need Tier III intervention.

Instruction in the identification of syllable structures will probably be a part of the Tier III intervention, but this instruction alone is not sufficient for the intensive intervention that students with severe reading difficulties require.

Instruction in syllable structures may also facilitate the support of students with dyslexia, but it is not intended to replace instruction by a dyslexia specialist.

Slide 5—Important Concepts

A syllable is the smallest unit of speech that contains one vowel sound. Every language has a different way to form its syllables. In English, different letter combinations or patterns represent six syllable types. Many English words can be categorized as one of these syllable types or as a composite of several of these syllable types.

Some letter patterns in syllables may also include consonant blends or consonant digraphs.

Words with letter combinations that do not make their expected or most common sounds are considered irregular words. These would include words with unstressed, or unaccented, syllables pronounced with a schwa sound resembling a short *u* or short *i*.

Knowledge of the different syllable types can help students read a large number of English words. The goal is to achieve automaticity, or the ability to immediately recognize words without having to consciously work through decoding the sounds or syllables. Some students develop these skills easily, while others struggle when faced with longer words. For many students, reading long, multisyllabic words can be an arduous task.

Slide 6—Helping Older Struggling Readers

There is an assumption that students who did not acquire basic decoding skills in early elementary cannot profit from such instruction in the later grades. However, research indicates there is value in teaching struggling adolescent readers to read multisyllabic words by matching syllables to pronunciations.

Even older students can benefit from structured support to develop a sophisticated decoding process that consists of more than just sounding out each letter. A sophisticated decoding process takes advantage of regular language structures such as the six types of syllables. Knowledge of syllable patterns helps students decode longer and more complex words since the visual patterns inherent in the syllable types help students identify and read words with automaticity.

This is equally true for students who are both struggling with decoding skills and simultaneously learning English. Research indicates that until these students are systematically taught the structures of English, they will continue to perceive sounds and syllables in terms of the categories and structures of their native language. Fortunately, the instructional methods that foster word recognition in native English speakers are linked to comparable results for English language learners.

Section 2

Slide 7—Six Common Syllable Patterns

Please locate **Handout 3: Syllable Types**.

These are the six syllable types that occur often in English words and are typically taught in word recognition programs: closed, open, vowel-consonant-*e* or silent-*e*, vowel pairs or teams, *r*-controlled vowels, and consonant-*le*.

The parentheses after each syllable type contain examples of the letter combination patterns that can make that syllable type. The capital letter *C* in the notations stands for *consonant*. The capital letter *V* stands for *vowel*.

Slide 8—Relationship of Syllable Patterns Knowledge and Reading Ability

The letter patterns for the six types of syllables indicate the vowel pronunciation in a syllable. Knowledge of syllable patterns can help students accurately predict the sound of the vowel in a syllable, help students know how to read a syllable, facilitate the automaticity of read-

ing syllables in words, and help students identify syllables more quickly and read longer and more complex words.

We will discuss each syllable type individually in the next six slides. Please peruse Handout 3 for examples of syllable types using content area vocabulary.

The speaker pauses for 30 seconds.

Slide 9—Closed Syllables

Closed syllables are among the earliest to be learned. These syllables end in at least one consonant that “closes off” the vowel from the rest of the word. That vowel will make its short sound. The vowel may be spelled with the letter *y* as in *gym*.

Closed syllables can also be spelled using consonant digraphs, as in *math*, or consonant blends, as in *script*.

Sound out the examples on the slide. The syllables in bold are closed syllables.

The speaker pauses for 5 seconds.

Slide 10—Open Syllables

Open syllables are made up of a single vowel (for example, *i*), the CV pattern (for example, *no*), or a consonant blend or digraph followed by a vowel (for example, *pro* or *she*). The vowel sound in an open syllable may also be spelled with the letter *y* as in *lady* or *fly*.

The vowel in an open syllable is usually pronounced with its long sound. Because the vowel occurs at the end of the syllable, it is left “open” to the rest of the word.

Sound out the examples on the slide. The syllables in bold are open syllables.

The speaker pauses for 5 seconds.

Slide 11—Vowel-Consonant-*e* Syllables

Vowel consonant-*e*, or VC-*e* syllables, end in one vowel, one consonant, and a final *e*. The syllable can start with a consonant, a blend, or a digraph (for example, *shake*), or may contain only the VC-*e*, such as in the word *ate*.

The vowel is long and the final *e* is silent, which is why the VC-*e* is also called a “silent-*e* syllable.”

Sound out the examples on the slide. The syllables in bold are vowel-consonant-*e* syllables.

The speaker pauses for 5 seconds.

Slide 12—*R*-controlled Syllables

Now, we'll learn about *r*-controlled syllables. When the vowel in a syllable is followed by the letter *r*, the vowel makes a unique sound, different from its common short or long sound. These syllables are referred to as *r*-controlled vowels because the vowel and the *r* that follows it make only one sound. You cannot hear the sound of the vowel separately from the sound of the *r*.

Sound out the examples on the slide. The syllables in bold are *r*-controlled syllables.

The speaker pauses for 5 seconds.

Slide 13—Vowel Pair Syllables

Vowel pair syllables have two adjacent vowels (as in *seat* or *mail*) or a vowel followed by *w* or *y* (as in *saw* or *tray*).

Some vowel pairs make more than one sound, such as the double *o* in *tool* versus *wood* or *door*, and the *ea* in *neat* versus *thread*.

Vowel pair syllables are also called *vowel combinations* or *vowel teams*. Notice that consonants can appear before the vowel pair, after the vowel pair, or both.

Sound out the examples on the slide. The syllables in bold are vowel pair syllables.

The speaker pauses for 5 seconds.

Slide 14—Consonant-*le* Syllables

Consonant-*le* syllables have a consonant followed by the letters *le* at the end of the word. Only the consonant and the *l* are sounded; the *e* is silent.

Sound out the examples on the slide. The syllables in bold are consonant-*le* syllables.

The speaker pauses for 5 seconds.

Slide 15—How Will Students Recognize Syllable Patterns?

Students should be taught to recognize and pronounce each syllable type. To help them distinguish all six types, teach each type one at a time, highlighting the salient features that make each syllable type distinctive.

Provide multiple opportunities to practice and verbalize each type. Because learning syllable types can help students predict vowel pronunciation, it is very important to review and practice previously learned types after each new structure is taught.

Older struggling readers will need to apply their knowledge of syllable types to increasingly complex words containing various combinations of the types. Look for appropriate multisyllabic words for practicing and generalizing the skills. Handout 3 lists example words from each subject area. You can also search students' reading materials for appropriate practice words.

Section 3

Slide 16—Sequence of Instruction

The slide lists a suggested order in which to teach the syllable types to students. It is based upon the difficulty and regularity of the vowel pronunciations occurring in the syllables.

Although many words you will want to use for instruction and practice comprise more than one syllable type, it is best to begin instruction with single-syllable words, then gradually increase to two-syllable and multisyllable words. When practicing with words of more than one syllable, focus on only the syllables that exemplify the type or types introduced to students. As you work through the sequence of syllable structures, incorporate multisyllabic words that foster cumulative review of the syllable types learned thus far.

Irregular words can be found for all syllable types. Introduce these after students have had extensive practice identifying the regular syllable structure. Teach students to try the syllable rule and a close approximation of the vowel sound.

Adolescents who are behind in reading need intensive and responsive instruction to accelerate their achievement.

We will now look at an example lesson on the silent-*e* syllable type.

Slide 17—Identifying Syllable Structures: Modeling Phase: / Do

It is important that students know and can explain what a syllable is and how the six types will help them read and pronounce words. As with all instructional routines, begin by stating the purpose and connecting the lesson to students' prior learning. Some of these purposes are to help recognize and pronounce automatically the parts of a word, read multisyllable words, and increase focus on understanding the passage. Review with students what a syllable is: a word part that contains one vowel sound.

Slide 18—Identifying Syllable Structures: Modeling Phase: / Do (cont.)

Next, point out the salient characteristics of the syllable type and the effect of the syllabic pattern on the vowel sound.

You might say, “Today we are going to learn the vowel-consonant-*e* or silent-*e* syllable structure. Vowel-consonant-*e* syllables typically end with one vowel, one consonant, and then the final *e*. The final *e* does not make a sound, and the vowel sound is long.”

Slide 19—Identifying Syllable Structures: Modeling Phase: / Do (cont.)

This slide provides a script to suggest how you might teach a syllable type. These sample lessons are simply a starting place.

Begin your instruction with a relatively easy word with which students are probably familiar. Write the word on the board and mark the appropriate notations on the letters that make up the syllable so the structure is explicit.

When you first pronounce the sample word, exaggerate the long vowel. Pronounce the word for the last time as it would be normally read.

Here’s an example of how it could be done:

“*Bike*. Here we have the vowel *i*, which I will circle to remind me to pronounce it with the long sound. I will draw a line through the silent *e* after the single consonant to remind me that the *e* won’t have a sound. It is silent. What is the word, everyone? *Bike*.”

Slide 20—Identifying Syllable Structures: Modeling Phase: / Do (cont.)

Continue identifying the silent-*e* syllable pattern in sample words. Find the vowel that is followed by one consonant and then the letter *e*. Circle the vowel and draw a line through the *e*. Leave words without a silent-*e* syllable unmarked. Then, read the list of words.

On **Handout 4: Silent-*e* Syllable Words**, you will find three sets of practice words. All words in the first list, Practice 1, have only one syllable, so they are better to use when first introducing the syllable structure. Display this list for your students.

Demonstrate circling the *o* and drawing a line through the silent *e* in *home*.

If a word does not have a silent-*e* syllable, don’t make any marks on the word. For example, *hop* does not follow the vowel-consonant-*e* pattern. It is a closed syllable.

As you work down the list, review and emphasize the salient features of the syllable structure by asking questions like: “What sound do all the circled vowels make? That’s right, the long

sound.”

Or: “Why did we draw a line through the *e*? That’s right. Because it doesn’t have a sound; it is silent.”

As you read over the Practice 1 words, be sure to exaggerate the long vowel sound in each word with a silent-*e* syllable. If you are new to teaching syllable types, the information in this module may seem overwhelming. Tools and resources are provided to assist you in preparing and delivering instruction. Do not hesitate to use these or to keep them with you during your work with students. It is critical that you be accurate and systematic.

You will now watch a classroom video segment that takes place in a reading intervention class and shows a teacher working one-on-one with a student who has both language and cognitive difficulties in reading. You will recall this student from the videos in Unit 4 on the Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment. He was identified as having very weak decoding skills, requiring intensive instruction. As you watch the video, observe what the teacher does to keep the lesson on closed syllables moving at a brisk, but appropriate, pace for the student.

Video: Identifying Syllable Structures: Closed Syllables Review (6:10)

Section 4

Slide 21—Identifying Syllable Structures: Modeling Phase: *I Do* (cont.)

Please turn to Practice 2, which is the second column of Handout 4.

Continue identifying the silent-*e* structure in words with two or more syllables. Remember to display the handout for your modeling. Demonstrate for students how you would draw a line to separate the two syllables in *cupcake*.

As you identify the first syllable, point out the features that make it closed by saying: “It has a consonant, then a vowel, and then another consonant to close it off from the rest of the word.”

Have students review their knowledge of previously learned syllables by asking: “What sound does the vowel in a closed syllable make? That’s right, a short vowel sound.”

Then ask: “How do you pronounce this syllable? That’s right, *cup*.”

As you identify the second syllable, reiterate to students that you circled the vowel as a reminder that it makes the long sound and you drew a line through the *e* to remind you that it was silent.

Pronounce the syllable *cake* and ask students to pronounce it with you. Then, say the word *cupcake* and have students repeat it after you.

Slide 22—Identifying Syllable Structures: Modeling Phase: / Do (cont.)

Continue to identify the syllables in the Practice 2 words.

Think aloud as you decide where to divide the syllables: For example, you might say: “*Nickname* is difficult because it has three consonants in the middle. I know that the letters *ck* can make a consonant digraph, so I should keep those letters together. I can divide between the consonants *k* and *n* to have a closed syllable, *nick*, and then a silent-*e* syllable, *name*.”

“*Cascade* is a little easier. I know that I need a vowel in each syllable and that I should divide between the two consonants. Also, if I leave the *s* with the first syllable, it will make the vowel short: *cas*. I think that’s right, but I’ll check it when I read the whole word. Then, I’ll have the silent-*e* syllable *cade* at the end.”

“*Embrace* starts with a vowel but then has three consonants. I know that blends stay together in the second syllable, so I should divide between the *m* and the blend *br*. Then, I see a vowel followed by one consonant *c* and an *e*. That fits the pattern of the silent-*e* syllable.”

“*Overrule* has a vowel-consonant-*e* at the beginning with the *o-v-e*, but the *e* is followed by an *r*. We haven’t studied this syllable type yet. It’s called an *r*-controlled vowel. I don’t think that will cause a problem here because most of you know the word *over*. Each syllable must have a vowel sound, so I can divide between the open syllable *o* and the *v*. Then, I have the two *r* letters in a row. I know I should divide the syllables between the two consonants. Finally, I have the vowel *u* followed by one consonant *l* and then an *e* at the end. That is a silent-*e* syllable.”

“*Makeshift* doesn’t seem like a silent-*e* syllable at first because I’m used to looking at the end of the word. However, when I divide the two syllables, I can see there is an *a* followed by a *k* and then an *e* in the first syllable. That is a silent-*e* syllable.”

As you teach, be sure to mark the words one by one on your overhead transparency until they look like the example on the slide.

After marking all words, have students read the list with you. First, read each syllable to make sure students pronounce the vowels correctly. Then, read the syllables together to form the word. You may also draw loops under the syllables, as we did in the Pronouncing Words routine in Unit 2, Module 2.

Slide 23—Corrective Feedback

If you hear a student mispronounce a syllable or the whole word, you will need to stop and provide corrective feedback. Redirect students to the syllable that was mispronounced; explain the structure and the vowel sound indicated by that structure. Read each part slowly before putting the syllables together to form the whole word.

Even if only one student makes an error, have the entire class repeat the pronunciation of the syllables and the word. This is to ensure the correct vowel sounds are reinforced.

You may use the script on the slide to guide your corrective feedback. Please take a moment to review it.

The speaker pauses for 10 seconds.

Slide 24—Identifying Syllable Structures: Guided Practice Phase: *WE Do*

Now turn to Practice 3, which is the third column of Handout 4.

Reviewing the purpose for the activity will help students learn how and when to apply this knowledge in other classes and lessons.

Guided practice in combining their knowledge of syllable types to read words from a content area text will also reinforce that the goal is to read and understand text. The words in Practice 3 were taken from a science lesson and contain the three syllable types that students might have learned to this point: closed, open, and silent-*e* syllables.

Slide 25—Identifying Syllable Structures: Guided Practice Phase: *WE Do* (cont.)

The information on this slide is reproduced on **Handout 5: Instruction in Syllable Types**, which you can use as a reference when planning lessons.

As you proceed with your instruction in the silent-*e* syllable type, you will increase the complexity of the practice. Display Practice 3 for your students. Working through the list of words one at a time, prompt students to complete each step as provided on the slide. Have them verbalize their explanations so you can monitor their understanding.

Draw particular attention to the silent-*e* syllable type because that is the focus of this lesson. Provide corrective feedback as necessary.

Now take a few seconds to mark up Practice List 3 as you would for a class.

The speaker pauses for 30 seconds.

Slide 26—Identifying Syllable Structures: Guided Practice Phase: *WE Do* (cont.)

When you have finished the guided practice, the list of words in Practice 3 should be marked to look something like this.

Next you'll watch a classroom video that continues the lesson on closed syllables as the student is asked to work with real and nonsense words. Nonsense words are not “real” in the sense that they do not have a meaning. They are strings of letters used to test a student’s phonics knowledge. Before beginning the activity, the teacher tells the student there will be nonsense words included. As you watch, pay attention to the ways in which the teacher provides instructional feedback to her student.

Video: Identifying Syllable Structures: Closed Syllables Practice (5:04)

Slide 27—Identifying Syllable Structures: Independent Phase: *YOU Do*

Please turn to **Handout 6: Sample Guide for Word Sort by Syllable Type**.

As you continue to work on identifying syllable structures, emphasize to students that the goal in identifying syllable types is to read multisyllabic words and understand text.

Repeatedly review the salient features of each type, what each indicates about the vowel sound, and the sounds each vowel can make. For example, when discussing closed syllables, review the sounds of the short vowels (*a* as in *bat*, *e* as in *egg*) and when introducing vowel-*r* syllables, review the sounds of the *r*-controlled vowels (*ar* as in *car*, *er* as in *her*, *ir* as in *sir*, *or* as in *for*, and *ur* as in *fur*).

Students should be provided multiple opportunities to practice their cumulative knowledge of the syllable types. This can be accomplished with various word-sort activities using words from the texts and materials students will encounter in their classes. Students can work in pairs or individually to sort these words into their appropriate syllable types.

Now, take a minute to practice. The 16 words in the word list at the bottom of Handout 6 come from the novel *Iqbal*, by Francesco D’Adamo. Some are only one-syllable words that you can sort directly into one of three types of syllables: closed, open, or silent-*e*. Some words are multisyllabic. For those, only one syllable type has been underlined. That is the syllable you need to sort. Once you’ve finished sorting the words, proceed to the next section.

Section 5

Slide 28—Practice Identifying Syllable Structures

Let's see how you did on the word sort. Check your answers against the slide.

The speaker pauses for 10 seconds.

Keep in mind that the purpose of the activity is to practice reading words students will need to know in other content areas and settings. Students should not, therefore, stop after sorting but should be asked to apply what they learned in the activity to their reading of the passage.

Slide 29—Scaffolding

Now, turn to **Handout 7: Scaffolding the Identification of Syllable Types**, which lists the scaffolding steps presented on this and the following slide.

To achieve automaticity, students must regularly apply their knowledge of syllable types to read words. Make identifying the syllable structures a part of the routine of figuring out new and unfamiliar words.

Students may not be successful in applying their knowledge all of the time. The number of irregular words can cause confusion, so you should not allow students to struggle to the point of frustration. If the syllable fits one of the six common syllable types, return to explicitly modeling syllable type identification and pronunciation of the vowel. If the word is irregular, tell students the letters do not represent their usual sounds. Then, tell students how to say the word, and ask them to repeat the word with you three times in a row.

When introducing a syllable type, it is easiest to work with monosyllabic and known words. However, one of your goals should be to get students to generalize their knowledge to new words so that they can apply their skills while reading for school or pleasure. You want to gradually increase the length of the words as well as the difficulty related to having combinations of different syllable types. Be sure to monitor students as they work with these words. If students are struggling to identify the syllable types, you may have chosen a word that is too difficult. Before returning to explicitly teaching the syllable structure or vowel sound, try giving students a somewhat easier word with which to practice.

It can be motivating for students themselves to choose the words for cumulative practice. You can invite students to bring words with the various syllable types for the class to practice identifying. Have students look for additional examples in various texts, including newspapers, advertisements, books, manuals, and brochures. Practice this in class at least once to provide instructional feedback, especially for the irregular words students are sure to find.

With respect to the silent-*e* syllable type lesson, students may find such words as *have*, *some*, *love*, *image*, *encourage*, *imagine*, and *improve*.

Finally, students may need instruction in syllabication rules as you move to multisyllabic words. Guidance is provided in **Handout 8: Rules of Syllable Division**.

Slide 30—Scaffolding (cont.)

Students with severe reading difficulties may not have enough knowledge of phonics to work on syllable types. For those students, it is first necessary to work on preskills, such as short vowels, long vowels, consonant blends, consonant digraphs, and the more complex phonics such as the letter combination *i-g-h* that makes the *-igh* sound in words like *sigh*. Only then can instruction in syllable types be useful.

Slide 31—The Goal of Word Study

The most important thing is that students have a chance to read for meaning and to discuss their understanding of authentic texts. Identifying syllable structures should not solely consist of drilling students on isolated skills. The goal is to help students achieve automaticity in word recognition so they can concentrate on the meaning of text. Students must be provided opportunities to read and discuss texts with partners, small groups, and the teacher.

Slide 32—Summary

The objectives of this module were: to understand how increasing knowledge of common syllable patterns improves students' ability to recognize, read, and comprehend the meanings of new words; to learn how to help students analyze words by identifying common syllable patterns; and to apply the three-step process for explicit instruction to help students learn and identify common syllable patterns.