

Finding the Key Syllable

Every word has a key syllable. You will learn to predict the vowel sound of the key syllable first. Then you will expand your prediction skills to other syllables. Therefore it is important to locate the key syllable accurately. This lesson will help you. (See also *Speechcraft* text, W-4, pp. 106-110.) The next lesson presents prediction patterns.

A. Vowel Letters

We make vowel predictions from vowel letters; we cannot make vowel predictions from consonant letters. It is essential that you recognize the difference between vowel letters and consonant letters. This sounds straightforward; however, you need to be careful.

The letters *a*, *e*, *i* and *o* are regularly vowel letters. However, the letters *u*, *y* and *w* are sometimes vowel letters and sometimes not. Here is how you can tell the difference.

- *u* is a vowel letter everywhere, except after *q* (*quaint*), between *g* and a vowel letter (*guest*), and between *g* and a basic ending like *-e* (*rogue*). In these cases it is a consonant letter.
- *y* is a vowel letter after a vowel letter (*say*) and after a consonant letter (*style*). *y* is a consonant letter at the beginning of a word (*yellow*).
- *w* is a vowel letter only after a vowel letter (*snow*). *w* is a consonant letter at the beginning of a word (*winner*) or after a consonant (*twice*).

Do the u, y, and w letters represent vowel (V) or consonant (C) letters? Circle V or C.

- | | | | | | | | | |
|----------|---|---|-------------|---|---|------------|---|---|
| 1. wait | V | C | 8. intrigue | V | C | 15. vowels | V | C |
| 2. raw | V | C | 9. guild | V | C | 16. guitar | V | C |
| 3. war | V | C | 10. gully | V | C | 17. syntax | V | C |
| 4. crypt | V | C | 11. quick | V | C | 18. liquid | V | C |
| 5. yodle | V | C | 12. oblique | V | C | 19. figure | V | C |
| 6. gray | V | C | 13. dwell | V | C | 20. enjoy | V | C |
| 7. clue | V | C | 14. enjoy | V | C | 21. twin | V | C |

B. Endings

Endings play a large role in identifying the key syllable and predicting vowel sounds; you must be able to recognize different types of endings and treat them accordingly. For now, two types of endings are **neutral** and **basic**.

Neutral endings: -s (plural and 3rd person singular verb)
-’s (everywhere)
-ly (on adverbs and adjectives)

Basic endings: -e (everywhere except in *be, he, me, she, the, we*)
-ed (past tense and past participle)
-ing (when attached to another syllable; *wing* has no ending)

How do we treat neutral and basic endings? First, we ignore neutral endings; they play no role in vowel prediction. Second, we note every basic ending because it may play a role in vowel prediction. To distinguish the two endings, we use a strike-out mark (/) for a neutral ending and an open-parenthesis mark (() before a basic ending. Only **one** neutral ending and **one** basic ending per word is possible.

Strike through any neutral ending. Separate any basic ending with (: part(ing&, thre(e

- | | | | |
|--------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| 1. alive | 4. rancid | 7. freely | 10. swing |
| 2. devotedly | 5. hatchling’s | 8. the | 11. values |
| 3. knees | 6. ruined | 9. agreed | 12. bed |

C. Key Syllable

You are now prepared to identify one of the two most important syllables in a word, the **key syllable**. Where is it?

1. The key syllable is at the end of a word or immediately to the left of an ending.
2. The key syllable consists of
 - a. all adjacent vowel letters (special cases will be treated below) and
 - b. any consonant letters up to the end of the word or up to an ending.

Note the key syllable as underlined in these words.

peach sequel straps bargain(ed engin(es

Each key syllable contains one vowel sound. Sometimes that vowel sound is spelled with one vowel letter; sometimes it is spelled with two vowel letters. However, there are two special situations in which two vowel letters spell **two** vowel sounds. Since only one vowel sound can be in the key, we have to accept only one vowel letter in the key.

The key syllable consists of all adjacent vowel letters **except** when the two vowel letters are iV spellings or uV spellings. An iV spelling is *ia, io, iu, iet, or ienC*. A uV spelling is *ua, ue, ui, or uo*. In these cases, only the second letter is in the key. *Study these examples.*

bias(ed) dieti(ng) clienties' refuelu(ing)

To find the key syllable, we use the **Key Search Strategy**, a step-by-step procedure to locate the key accurately in each word.

1. Work from the end of a word toward the beginning: *mailings* ←
2. Use a strike-out mark (/) to mark off any neutral ending: *mailings*
3. Use an open parenthesis to separate any basic ending: *mail(ings*
4. Look to the left until you find all adjacent vowel letters: *mail(ings*
5. Underline all vowel letters, but only the V of iV and uV spellings, and all consonant letters up to the end of a word or up to an open parenthesis or neutral ending: *mail(ings*

Use the Key Search Strategy to underline the key syllable in the following words.

- | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. eagle's | 9. squelched | 17. biased | 25. grip |
| 2. cruelly | 10. foreign | 18. value | 26. degrees |
| 3. tempest | 11. essay | 19. (two) solos | 27. bounced |
| 4. ruining | 12. brogue | 20. mellowing | 28. anointing |
| 5. motley | 13. revue | 21. extrudes | 29. twelfths |
| 6. captain's | 14. dueling | 22. embarrassing | 30. squintingly |
| 7. scion | 15. guile | 23. quits | 31. sciences |
| 8. hoax | 16. believing | 24. nuances | 32. nymphs |

With the information of this lesson, you can now find the key syllable in the words you will need to pronounce. In the next lesson, you will learn to use vowel prediction patterns to identify the key vowel precisely.

Check your answers: p. 1. 1. C; 2. V; 3. C; 4. V; 5. C; 6. V; 7. V; 8. C; 9. C; 10. V; 11. C; 12. C; 13. C; 14. V; 15. V; 16. C; 17. V; 18. C; 19. V; 20. V; 21. C. p. 2. 1. aliv(e; 2. devot(ed)t; 3. kne(es; 4. rancid; 5. hatchl(ing's; 7. fre(e; 8. the; 9. agre(ed; 10. swing; 11. valu(es; 12. bed. p. 3. 1. eagl; 2. el; 3. est; 4. in; 5. ey; 6. ain; 7. on; 8. oax; 9. elch; 10. eign; 11. ay; 12. ogu; 13. u; 14. el; 15. il; 16. iev; 17. as; 18. u; 19. o; 20. ow; 21. ud; 22. ass; 23. it; 24. anc; 25. ip; 26. e; 27. ounc; 28. oint; 29. elfth; 30. int; 31. enc; 32. ymph.