

Name (in Romaji):	→
Student Number:	→
Class Day + Period (examples: Monday 2, Friday 3):	→

SYLLABLES

Syllables are very important in English for many reasons. They can help you pronounce words correctly, and they also help in word conjugation. Just remember: syllables in English are a little different from syllables (mora) in Japanese.

How do you say “syllable” in Japanese?

Answer: _____

For this activity you will need a good dictionary (a paperback dictionary or an electronic dictionary). Look up the word “student” in the dictionary. It should look just like it is written below:



stu • dent



If you have a good dictionary, each word will include something very small within each listing. Did you notice what it is?

Why is that dot in the middle of the word? That dot is there to indicate how many syllables are in the word (and also where to cut the word into syllables). For the word “student,” how many syllables are there?

Answer: _____



Native Japanese who speak English often put more syllables into English words than necessary. This is because the Japanese language is almost completely made up of **consonant-vowel** combinations.

What is a consonant? _____

Give some examples from the English alphabet: _____

What is a vowel? _____

Give some examples from the English alphabet: _____

In Japanese, a consonant is always followed by a vowel (with the exception of ん).

か ka て te の no み mi

The consonants above cannot be separated from the vowels in Japanese, though of course vowels in Japanese can stand alone: あ, い, う, え, お.

The vowels in English are **a e i o u**. Vowels are actually very important with regard to syllables. For most words, a vowel represents a syllable. Take a look at the following words:

1 vowel/1 syllable:	right	glass
2 vowels/2 syllables:	basic	summit
3 vowels/3 syllables:	computer	buffalo
4 vowels/4 syllables:	independent	calculator

In these cases, 1 vowel corresponds to 1 syllable (clap your hands as you say each syllable if it helps). However, there are some notable exceptions to the 1 to 1 rule:



- (1) In some cases, 2 vowels together make 1 vowel sound.

Examples: *school* *meet* *meat*

This does not always happen, though.

Examples: *cooperation* *react*

- (2) The letter “y” can be considered a vowel – and hence a syllable – in some words.

Examples: *cry* *finally*

In other regular words, “y” does not act like a vowel.

Examples: *yes* *yellow*

- (3) Many words have a *silent “e”* on the end. This “e” does not make a syllable because it is not pronounced.

Examples: *fat* → *fate* *sit* → *site*

However, an “e” on the end of some words affects the letters nearby, causing them to be sounded, thus making a syllable.

Examples: *apple* *bubble*

Also realize that the silent “e” can change the sound of consonants and still not be a syllable, or in some cases (like words ending in “v”) there is no change at all.

Examples: *orange* *change* *have* *give*

Because most consonants in Japanese are found with vowels attached to them, Japanese speakers have the habit of placing extra vowels in words when speaking in English. These additional vowels add extra syllables. Many common Japanese words taken from English use the typical consonant-vowel construction. For example:



English word	English syllables	Japanese word	Japanese syllables
textbook	text • book	テキストブック	te • ki • su • to • bu • kku
national	na • tion • al	ナショナル	na • sho • na • ru
milk	milk	ミルク	mi • ru • ku
pilot	pi • lot	パイロット	pa • i • ro • tto

This habit is often accidentally used when pronouncing words that have not been taken from English before and made into Japanese words. For example:

English word	English syllables	Japanese word	Japanese syllables
disguise	dis • guise	ディスガイズ	di • su • ga • i • zu
himself	him • self	ヒムセルフ	hi • mu • se • ru • fu
spiral	spi • ral	スパイラル	su • pa • i • ra • ru
macabre	ma • ca • bre	マカブラ	ma • ka • bu • ra

To improve your pronunciation, look carefully at the words you look up in the dictionary. How many syllables do they have? If you at least get the number of syllables right, your pronunciation should be very close.

When speaking English, avoid additional vowels (and additional syllables). This may make the words “sound” correct because they are spoken with a Japanese accent (especially Japanese-English words), but native speakers may have a difficult time understanding what you say. For example, my family name is **Rubrecht**, which has 2 syllables. Those 2 syllables become 5 syllables when said with a Japanese accent, making it sound VERY different: **Ruburekuto!**



Do you know how many syllables are in these words? Based on the information discussed so far, try to guess how many syllables there are in each word, then check yourself by using your dictionary. How many did you get correct?

create → _____ syllables

complete → _____ syllables

rely → _____ syllables

keyboard → _____ syllables

fascinate → _____ syllables

soundtrack → _____ syllables

constitution → _____ syllables

astronomy → _____ syllables

incredible → _____ syllables

syllable → _____ syllables

*NOTE: On rare occasions your dictionary will not give you all the dots in a word! This usually happens when the dictionary presents the stress or accent marks for a word, or if the word presented is being conjugated.

Now, look up some words randomly in your dictionary. If you have a paperback dictionary, just open to any page and look at the first word you see. If you have an electronic dictionary, start typing letters of the alphabet and see what words come out.

- (1) Write 10 words from your dictionary in the boxes on the left. They should be long words with at least three syllables. Do not put dots in the words.
- (2) Give your paper to your classmate. Without using a dictionary, they will rewrite the words and put the dots in the correct places to indicate syllables.



Your Words	The Words Rewritten with Syllable Dots
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

