The Six Basic Syllable Types

and

Consistent Generalizations

about Spelling and the English Language

Developed by C. Wilson Anderson, Jr., M.A.T., F/AOGPE

(Modified in 2008 by Stephanie Bieberly, M.Ed.)

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Notes: In the text below . . .

- Bold letters within quotation marks, like "**ck**," refers to the names of the letters. If the bold letters are located between two forward slashes, like /**ch**/, that refers to the specific sound the letters make.

- Words used as examples are **bold** without quotation marks.

- The columns "**I**" and "**M**" have been included to assist you when using this summary in a teaching situation. As you progress through the generalizations, you can check off each one when it is introduced, and again when it is mastered.

I.   CLOSED SYLLABLE

- When a single vowel is "closed in" (or "blocked") by one or more consonants, it is a closed syllable.

- The vowel is usually short, as in **d<u>a</u>d**, **bl<u>a</u>ck**, **c<u>a</u>t**, **g<u>e</u>t**, **<u>i</u>t**, **m<u>o</u>m**, **n<u>o</u>t**, and **h<u>u</u>nt**.

- In upper level phonics, the vowel can have the "schwa" sound of /**uh**/, as in **s<u>o</u>n**, **<u>a</u>t/tach**, **<u>a</u>s/sist**, and **c<u>o</u>m/plete**. (Note that the "schwa" sound is in the unaccented syllable.)

GENERALIZATIONS FOR CLOSED SYLLABLES

I	**M**	
		I = Introduced **M** = Mastered
____	____	1. A single vowel in the middle of a syllable is usually short (e.g., **pic/nic**, **cab/in**).
____	____	2. The letters "**-ck**" are used for /**k**/ at the end of a one-syllable word after one short vowel (e.g., **back**, **deck**, **sick**, **cluck**).
____	____	3. The letters "**-tch**" are used for /**ch**/ at the end of a one-syllable word after one short vowel (e.g., **patch**, **etch**, **ditch**). Common exceptions are **such**, **much**, **which**, and **rich**.
____	____	4. The letters "**-dge**" are used for /**j**/ at the end of a one-syllable word after one short vowel (e.g., **badge**, **edge**, **bridge**).
____	____	5. In one-syllable words, the final letters "**f**," "**l**," "**s**," and "**z**" are usually doubled after one short vowel (e.g., **off**, **fluff**, **tell**, **hill**, **class**, **guess**, **fizz**, **buzz**). (The FLOSS rule). An exception would be **quiz**.

_____ _____ 6. When a vowel comes before a double consonant, it is almost always short (e.g., **dipper**, **supper**, **bonnet**).

_____ _____ 7. The letter "**c**" is used for the final /**k**/ sound when the word has two or more syllables (e.g., **Atlantic**, **magic**, **terrific**).

_____ _____ 8. When one consonant stands between two vowels, the consonant may belong to the first syllable (**tra<u>v</u>/el**, **re<u>b</u>/el**), which is a closed syllable; or it may belong to the second syllable (**be/<u>l</u>ong**, **re/<u>b</u>el**), leaving the first syllable open as shown in these examples. (See open syllables in the next section below.)

_____ _____ 9. When two consonants stand between two vowels, the syllable division usually occurs between the two consonants. (e.g., **na<u>p</u>/<u>k</u>in**, **ten/<u>n</u>is**, **bu<u>t</u>/ter**).

_____ _____ 10. When three consonants stand between two vowels, the division occurs between a consonant blend and the other consonant (e.g., **mo<u>n</u>/<u>st</u>er**, **pu<u>mp</u>/<u>k</u>in**).

II.   OPEN SYLLABLE

- The most common syllable in English is the open syllable.

- It is called an open syllable because a single vowel is at the end of the syllable and usually says its name, as in **h<u>i</u>**, **m<u>e</u>**, **s<u>o</u>**, and **b<u>a</u>/b<u>y</u>**. (See generalization for the letter "**y**" on page 120, number 1.)

- When the vowel says its name, the accent is usually on that syllable (e.g., **m<u>a</u>/jor**, **m<u>i</u>/nor**).

- In upper level phonics, the vowel in an open syllable can also have the "schwa" sound of /**uh**/, as in **<u>a</u>/way** or **b<u>a</u>/na/n<u>a</u>**. Again, the "schwa" syllable is unaccented.

GENERALIZATION FOR OPEN SYLLABLES

I   **M**   **I** = Introduced   **M** = Mastered

_____ _____ 1. A vowel at the end of an open syllable is usually long (e.g., **v<u>a</u>/c<u>a</u>/tion**, **pr<u>e</u>/tend**, **w<u>e</u>**, **p<u>i</u>/lot**, **n<u>o</u>**, **l<u>o</u>/cate**, **c<u>u</u>/bic**, **b<u>y</u>**).

III.   MAGIC "**E**" SYLLABLE

- It is also called the silent "**e**" syllable, but we suggest using the name Magic "**e**" in order to eliminate any confusion with the consonant-"**le**" syllable, which also ends in a silent "**e**."

- The "**e**" indicates that the preceding vowel is usually long (or says its name).

- In beginning phonics, if the student counts back three letters (beginning with the final "**e**") and lands on a vowel, then the vowel usually says its name (e.g., **b<u>a</u>ke**, **comp<u>e</u>te**, **l<u>i</u>ke**).

- In upper level phonics, the magic "**e**" syllable may also take on the "schwa" sound of /**uh**/, as in **sur/f<u>a</u>ce**; or a "semi-schwa" short sound, as in **consider/<u>a</u>te**. Either way, it is a magic "**e**" syllable.

GENERALIZATIONS FOR MAGIC "E" SYLLABLES

I   **M**   **I** = Introduced   **M** = Mastered

_____ _____   1.   A magic "**e**" syllable on the end of a word usually makes the preceding vowel long (e.g., **n**a**me**, **P**e**te**, **h**i**ke**, **comp**o**se**, **m**u**le**).

Unusual Magic "E" Generalizations

_____ _____   2.   No words in English end in "**v**." Instead, they end with "**-ve**," no matter whether the vowel is long (e.g., **gave**, **l**i**ve**, **dr**o**ve**) or short (e.g., **h**a**ve**, **l**i**ve**, **l**o**ve**). The magic "**e**" generalization above is not consistent with "**-ve**" words.

_____ _____   3.   Words almost never end with a single "**z**." Instead, they end in "**-ze**" after a long vowel sound or a double vowel (e.g., **fr**o**ze**, **fr**ee**ze**).

IV.   *VOWEL TEAM SYLLABLE*

- The most difficult of all the syllable types is the vowel team syllable. (Two vowels together are also referred to as a vowel pair, vowel partners, or a double vowel syllable.)

- Vowel teams can have a completely unique pronunciation, or up to six different pronunciations (e.g., "**ough**," as in **dough**, **cough**, **rough**, **bough**, **bought**, and **through**).

- There are 24 sub-types, and each letter combination has to be individually learned (e.g., **A**u**gust**, **s**aw, **s**ay, **cl**ou**d**, **s**ou**p**, **av**oi**d**, **m**ea**t**, **h**ea**d**, **st**ea**k**, **s**igh, **e**igh**t**, etc.).

GENERALIZATIONS FOR VOWEL TEAM SYLLABLES

I   **M**   **I** = Introduced   **M** = Mastered

_____ _____   1.   The old rule says to use "**i**" before "**e**" except after "**c**," and when the syllable says /**ā**/, as in **n**eigh**bor** or **w**eigh (e.g., **pr**ie**st**, **ch**ie**f**; **rec**ei**ve**, **c**ei**ling**; **v**ei**n**, **fr**ei**ght**). Some common exceptions include **weird**, **seize**, **science**, and **efficient**.

_____ _____   2.   "**Ai**" is most often followed by an "**n**," "**l**," or "**d**" (e.g., **rain**, **sail**, **aid**).

_____ _____   3.   "**Oa**" is almost always used in one-syllable words (e.g., **boar**, **roast**, **oat**).

_____ _____   4.   "**Ough**," "**augh**," and "**igh**" are commonly followed by a "**t**" (e.g., **ought**, **caught**, **night**).

_____ _____   5.   The letters "**se**" are used instead of "**s**" at the end of one-syllable words with vowel teams so the words are not mistakenly assumed to be plural (e.g., **grease**, **grouse**, **house**).

V.   *CONSONANT-"LE" SYLLABLE*

- There are only ten consonant-"**le**" syllables: "**ble**," "**cle**," "**dle**," "**fle**," "**gle**," "**kle**," "**ple**," "**sle**," "**tle**," and "**zle**."

- In most words that have a consonant-"**le**" syllable, the "**e**" is almost always silent and not pronounced. (An exception would be **nu/cle/ous**.)

GENERALIZATIONS FOR CONSONANT-"LE" SYLLABLES

I   **M**   **I** = Introduced   **M** = Mastered

____ ____ 1. The consonant-"**le**" syllable is never the first syllable in a word.

____ ____ 2. The preceding syllable may be open (e.g., **a/ble**, **cra/dle**, **bu/gle**, **terri/ble**); or closed (e.g., **an/kle**, **puz/zle**, **gig/gle**.)

____ ____ 3. If "**tle**" follows an "**s**," the "**t**" is usually silent (e.g., **castle**, **whistle**, **wrestle**.)

VI.   "R"-CONTROLLED SYLLABLE

- When a syllable has a single vowel followed by an "**r**," it is called an "**r**"-controlled syllable.

- The letter "**r**" is so strong that it changes the vowel sound so it is no longer short.

GENERALIZATIONS FOR "R"-CONTROLLED SYLLABLES

I   **M**   **I** = Introduced   **M** = Mastered

____ ____ 1. The vowel "**a**" followed by an "**r**" usually says /**ar**/, as in **car**, but can also say /**air**/, as in **par/ent** and **ar/row**.

____ ____ 2. The vowel "**e**" followed by an "**r**" usually says /**er**/, as in **her**, but can also say /**air**/, as in **errand**.

____ ____ 3. The vowel "**i**" followed by an "**r**" usually says /**er**/, as in **bird**, but can also say /ĭr/, as in **spirit**.

____ ____ 4. The vowel "**o**" followed by an "**r**" usually says /**or**/, as in **corn**.

____ ____ 5. The vowel "**u**" followed by an "**r**" usually says /**er**/, as in **turn**.

____ ____ 6. The vowel team "**ea**" followed by an "**r**" usually says /**ear**/, as in **hear**, but can also say /**air**/, as in **bear**.

____ ____ 7. Unaccented "**r**"-controlled vowels such as "**ar**" and "**or**" sometimes say /**er**/, as in **collar** and **color**.

____ ____ 8. When the letter "**w**" comes before an "**r**"-controlled vowel, it can also change the usual vowel sound (e.g., **farm**, **warm**; **cord**, **word**; **form**, **worm**).

(VII.) PLUS CATEGORY

- The Plus Category is designed to be a "catch-all" for anything that doesn't specifically fit into the six basic syllable types (e.g., sight words such as **was**, **does**, and **other**; and words or syllables with unusual letter combinations such as <u>s</u>**ing** and **ba**<u>ll</u>).

- In addition, the Plus Category gives students a place to put any syllable they don't fully understand. This can become a valuable diagnostic tool for teachers.

GENERALIZATIONS THAT APPLY TO MULTIPLE SYLLABLE TYPES

I   **M**   **I** = Introduced   **M** = Mastered

____ ____ 1. When used as a vowel, the letter "**y**" does not have its own sound but borrows sounds from either "**i**" or "**e**" (e.g., **sky**, **myth**, **puppy**).

____ ____ 2. The letter "**c**" has the soft sound of /**s**/ when "**e**," "**i**," or "**y**" follows it (e.g., **center**, **city**, **cyclone**).

____ ____ 3. The letter "**g**" has the soft sound of /**j**/ when "**e**," "**i**," or "**y**" follows it (e.g., **gentle**, **ginger**, **gym**).

____ ____ 4. To keep the hard sound for the letter "**g**," it is followed with a "**u**" when used before an "**i**" or "**e**" (e.g., **guide**, **guess**, **guest**).

____ ____ 5. The letter "**q**" is always followed by a "**u**" and at least one other vowel (e.g., **quack**, **quail**, **quality**, **quantity**, **quarter**, **question**, **quick**, **quiet**, **quit**, **quote**).

____ ____ 6. The letters "**wr**" are used instead of "**r**" for words that imply the meaning "to twist" (e.g., **wrap**, **wreck**, **wrench**, **wrest**, **wring**, **wrist**, **write**, **wrought**, **wry**).

Note: The information and generalizations regarding the above syllable types primarily apply to the words themselves, not to their prefixes or suffixes. When learning suffix rules and generalizations (see next section), the most important thing students should focus upon is whether the suffix begins with a vowel or a consonant. In order to avoid confusion, always separate any prefixes or suffixes from the whole word or root before breaking the word or root into syllables and determining which generalizations apply to them as outlined above (e.g., **inter|con/nect|ed**, **non|re|fund|able**, **pre|vent|ing**, **trans|port|ed**, **un|mer/ci|ful|ly**).

Suffix Generalizations

A. *Suffix Generalizations That Apply to Closed Syllables*

   I   **M**   **I** = Introduced   **M** = Mastered

_____ _____ 1. ***Doubling Rule:*** (1+1+1)

In a one-syllable word, with one short vowel, ending in one consonant, double the final consonant (in order to keep the vowel short) before adding a suffix beginning with a vowel such as "**-er**," "**-est**," or "**-ing**" (e.g., **sad**, **sadder**, **saddest**; **ship**, **shipping**).

Notes: Do not double the final consonant when adding a suffix beginning with a consonant such as "**-ly**," "**-s**," or "**-ment**" (e.g., **sadly**, **ships**, **shipment**). Also, never double the consonants "**v**" or "**x**."

_____ _____ 2. ***Extended Doubling Rule:*** (2+1+1)

If you are adding a suffix beginning with a vowel such as "**-ing**" or "**-ed**" to a word with two or more syllables, and the final syllable has one short vowel and ends in one consonant, double the final consonant only if the syllable is accented (e.g., **begin**, **beginning**; **omit**, **omitted**; but not **happen**, **happening)**.

B. *Suffix Generalizations That Apply to Open Syllables*

_____ _____ 1. ***Change the "Y" Rule:*** (When consonants precede the "**y**")

If a word ends in a consonant "**-y**" combination such as "**ry**" or "**ly**," usually change the final "**-y**" to "**i**" before adding suffixes, unless the suffix begins with an "**i**" (e.g., **try**, **tried**, **tries**; **rely**, **relied**, **relies**, **reliable**; but not **trying** or **relying**).

Note: Nouns ending in a consonant "**-y**" combination such as "**dy**" or "**ny**" are made plural by changing the "**y**" to "**i**" and adding "**es**" (e.g., **lady**, **ladies**; **pony**, **ponies**).

_____ _____ 2. Nouns ending in a vowel "**-o**" combination are made plural by adding "**s**" (e.g., **radio**, **radios**; **studio**, **studios**).

Note: Nouns ending in a consonant "**-o**" combination have no consistent generalization for plural forms; the dictionary must be used in each case to determine the proper spelling of the plural (e.g., **piano**, **pianos**; **potato**, **potatoes**; **domino**, either **dominos** or **dominoes**).

C. Suffix Generalizations That Apply to Magic "E" Syllables

_____ _____ 1. **Drop the "E" Rule:** Usually drop the final "e" on words when you add a suffix beginning with a vowel such as "**-er,**" "**-ed,**" or "**-ous**" (e.g., **late, later**; **shine, shined**; **fame, famous)**.

_____ _____ 2. Keep the final "e" when adding suffixes beginning with a consonant (e.g., **shameless, movement**).

D. Suffix Generalizations That Apply to Vowel Team Syllables

_____ _____ 1. **Change the "Y" Rule:** (When vowels precede the "y")

If the word ends in a vowel "**-y**" combination (or an "**i**"), just add the suffix (e.g., **play, played, player, playing**; **ski, skied, skier, skiing**).

Note: The only word in English that has a double "i" is **skiing**.

_____ _____ 2. Nouns ending in a vowel "**-y**" combination such as "**ay,**" "**oy,**" and "**ey**" are made plural by adding "**s**" (e.g., **days, boys, donkeys**).

_____ _____ 3. Most nouns with a vowel team ending in "**f**" also form their plurals by adding "**s**" (e.g., **roofs, chiefs**).

E. Suffix Generalizations That Apply to Consonant-"LE" Syllables

See magic "e" generalizations in topic "**C**" above. They also apply here.

F. Suffix Generalizations That Apply to "R"-Controlled Syllables

There are no generalizations that apply specifically to "**r**"-controlled syllables.

G. Suffix Generalizations That Apply to Multiple Syllable Types

Plurals

_____ _____ 1. For most words, add "s" to make them plural (e.g., **dogs, apples, doughnuts**).

_____ _____ 2. When a noun ends in "**s,**" "**x,**" "**z,**" "**ch,**" or "**sh,**" add "**es**" to make it plural (e.g., **gases, taxes, quizzes, marches, brushes**). (Note the double "**z**" in **quizzes**.)

_____ _____ 3. Many common nouns have irregular plural forms (e.g., **man, men; mouse, mice; goose, geese; wolf, wolves; cactus, cacti; child, children; person, people**).

Comparisons

_____ _____ 4. Use "**-er**" as the suffix when comparing two things (e.g., **taller, younger, nicer**).

_____ _____ 5. Use "**-est**" as the suffix when comparing three or more things (e.g., **tallest, youngest, nicest**).

People Who Do Things

____ ____ 6. Use "**-ist**" for types of people (nouns) who do things (e.g., **artist**, **projectionist**, **activist**, **dentist**, **typist**).

____ ____ 7. Usually use "**-er**" as the suffix for a one-syllable word when it refers to a person who "does" (e.g., **diner**, **jumper**, **hopper**, **runner**, **surfer**, **teacher**).

____ ____ 8. Use "**-or**" as the suffix for a two or more syllable word that refers to a person or thing that "does" (e.g., **professor**, **editor**, **translator**, **incinerator**). Common exceptions include **actor**, **doctor**, and **tractor**.

____ ____ 9. Additional suffixes used to indicate people who do things include: "**-ee**," "**-cian**," "**-eer**," and "**-ier**" (e.g., **employee**, **musician**, **engineer**, **carrier**).

- Use "**-ess**" to indicate female (e.g., **princess**, **actress**, **hostess**, **waitress**).

Other Suffix Generalizations

____ ____ 10. Use "**-an**" for the suffix sound /**n**/ that indicates a nationality or a religion (e.g. **American**, **Lutheran**).

- Use "**-ian**" for the suffix sound /**eyun**/ that indicates a person, a nationality, or a religion (e.g., **Indian**, **Canadian**, **Christian**).

- Usually use "**-en**" for the suffix sound /**n**/ that indicates a "verbish" quality (e.g., **ripen**, **redden**, **deaden**, **broaden**, **lighten**, **darken**).

____ ____ 11. Use the suffix "**-ar**" to form an adjective (e.g., **singular**, **regular**, **popular**).

____ ____ 12. Also use the suffix "**-ous**" to form an adjective (e.g., **dangerous**, **marvelous**).

- Use "**-us**" as the suffix when the word is a noun (e.g., **sinus**, **ruckus**).

____ ____ 13. Use "**-ize**" as the suffix to add to whole words or to roots that imply "to cause or make" (e.g., **modernize**, **authorize**, **galvanize**, **theorize**, **criticize***, **publicize***).

__Note:__ Some people confuse the use of "**cise**" with "**c-ize**" (which may be just a spelling issue), but "**cise**" is not a suffix at all. It is a common Latin root which means "to cut," and it only makes sense when used with a prefix (e.g., **excise**, **incise**), or with a prefix and suffix combination (e.g., **excised**, **incision**, **incisor**).

____ ____ 14. Usually use the suffix "**-able**" when you are adding it to a whole word and it means "able" (e.g., **capable**, **manageable**, **serviceable**, **workable**).

____ ____ 15. Also usually use the suffix "**-able**" when the root word ends in a hard "**c**" or "**g**" (e.g., **despicable**, **huggable**).

____ ____ 16. Use the suffix "**-ible**" when adding to a Latin root word (e.g., **visible**, **edible**).

____ ____ 17. Also use the suffix "**-ible**" when the root word ends in a soft "**c**" or "**g**" (e.g., **forcible, legible**).