

Pronouncing Multisyllabic Vocabulary

When teachers say words like 'tessellation,' we want to hear our students say 'tessellation,' right back. What kinds of activities can we do to improve the chances that our students will attempt to use multisyllabic vocabulary when speaking?

Call and Response

One way to help students pronounce long words is to break down long words into syllables and then practice saying them aloud. Be sure to use math and science vocabulary words when you practice syllabication in language arts.

Here is a fun call and response game that can be played whenever you have a few seconds of time to fill with your students. Simply have the students repeat what you say:

Math

Math - e

Math - e - mat

Math - e - mat - ic

Math - e - mat - ics

Mathematics!

I

I - so

I - so - scel

I - so - scel - es

Isosceles!

Sed -

Sed - i

Sed - i - ment

Sed - i - ment - ar -

Sed - i - ment - ar - y

Sedimentary!

Spa -

Spa - ghet -

Spa - ghet - ti

Spaghetti!

E

E - quil

E - quil - at

E - quil - at - er

E - quil - at - er - al

Equilateral!

Tess

Tess ell

Tess - ell - a

Tess - ell - a - tion

Tessellation!

Variations on this game would include preparing signs for each word you plan to use in this way. On each sign have the syllables of the word highlighted in different colors. You may wish to use the same colors to indicate stressed or unstressed syllables. These signs could be displayed on a bulletin board when not in use. This is one way to create a single bulletin board that gets updated all year long.

Play this game with students while you wait for others to gather at circle time or as students line up. This is a great way to make the most of every minute of class time.

Hum the Syllables

Humming each syllable as they hear the word in their mind, will help students determine the breaks between syllables. Humming also helps the students practice 'saying' a long word.

Teach this strategy using familiar words to start with. Then move on to new, more complex words.

Here are some examples:

Vocabulary Word	Imagine	Hum the word
Saturday	Sat - ur - day	Hum - hum - hum
elbow	el-bow	Hum - hum
geography	Ge- o - graph - y	Hum - hum - hum - hum
equality	E - qual - i - ty	Hum- hum - hum - hum

As your students progress, invite them to listen to the stressed or unstressed hums in each word. Counting the hums is a fantastic - and relatively quiet - way for students to count syllables. This technique gives students a method to use when they are trying to figure out how to pronounce a word by themselves.

Study Collections of Words Together

Academic vocabulary provides students with a wonderful way to explore word families. For example, think of all the words related to 'equal.' Many will come from math, however, there are others with social and everyday meanings in English that are not related to math. Still, it makes sense to collect the words related to 'equal' and tackle their pronunciation as a group.

Equal Word Family	Syllabication
equality	E - qual - i - ty
equilateral	E - quil - at - er - al
equation	E - qua - tion
unequal	Un- e - qual
equatorial	E - qua- tor - i - al

Other words include: equinox, equalize, equate, equator, equidistant, equilibrium, equivalence, inequity, and so on.

By grouping words in this way, students become more confident in pronouncing all the words in the family. This method is more efficient than learning each word by itself. Collecting words in families not only helps students with pronunciation but with understanding their meaning as well.

Greek and Latin Roots

Many scientific and mathematical words have Greek or Latin roots. Understanding the meaning and pronunciation of the Greek or Latin root, gives students insight into the meaning, pronunciation, and spelling of these vocabulary words.

Root	Classical meaning	Related English words
Photo - phos	Light	Photograph, telephoto, phosphorus, photon
Bi - bin - bis -	Two, twice, in twos	Bicycle, bicentenary, biscotti, bifocal, binoculars

This detail oriented approach will foster greater understanding of words. For example, rather than simply accepting 'biscotti' in the collection of words stemming from the Latin root for 'two,' curious students will discover that these cookies earned their name by being twice baked - once before the dough is sliced and once after.

Collecting words that stem from the same classical roots also helps students grow their vocabulary by keeping an eye out for new words from familiar roots. They will have to be careful, though, as not every word with similar spelling will have come from a classical root. Encourage your students to keep lists of examples and counterexamples in order to avoid any misunderstandings.

Review Different Kinds of Syllables

Most of the above strategies and games depend upon your students' understanding of the different kinds of syllables and how they affect pronunciation in English.

There are various ways to teach students about the different kinds of syllables found in English. Use the descriptions and nomenclature taught in your school or district when you review the rules for pronouncing different kinds of syllables with your class.

Regardless of how the different types of syllables are explained, the basic concepts are the same.

A syllable is made of consonants connected to a single vowel sound. In speech we hear a single vowel sound in each syllable. In writing we may see one or more vowel letters in each

syllable, yet still we only hear one vowel sound. A syllable might be an entire word, or it could be part of a word. A syllable might be a single vowel letter or it could have a lot of letters.

Type of Syllable	Pronunciation of vowel	Examples in English
Open - ends with vowel letter	Usually long	Sky, paper, sudoku
Closed - ends with consonant	Usually short	Gym, sandwich, telescope
V-c-e or magic e	Usually long	Bite, alike,
R controlled vowel	Vowel sound changed by r	art, circus,
Vowel team	2 vowel letters = one vowel sound	Tea, read, believe
diphthong	2 vowel letters = two vowel sounds slide together	Boy, pair, day
c-le	Unstressed syllable	Bubble, ladle, jumble, puzzle

Encourage your students to relate the type of syllable with the feeling of saying the syllable in their mouth. An open syllable literally leaves their mouth open. A closed syllable ends with their mouth more or less shut. When they pronounce the diphthongs slowly they can hear the change in vowel sounds.

Paying attention to the number of times their chin drops when saying words, is a great way to count syllables quietly. Their chin drops when their mouth opens. Their mouth opens when saying a vowel sound. Since there's only one vowel sound per syllable, counting the times their chin drops open when whispering a word, will give them the number of syllables in that word. They can place a couple fingers lightly on their chin in order to count syllables in this way.

Let the music teacher or choir conductor know that your students are studying vowel sounds and syllables. They will be able to give your students more tips while singing syllables.

Celebrate Use of Vocabulary Words

Make a big deal of hearing students use multisyllabic words in speech and in writing. Congratulate them on their effort to include new words in their conversations and assignments. Remind them that the more words they know and use, the easier their academic studies will be. Invite your students to list ways that having a large vocabulary will make school easier. Always encourage your students to intentionally expand their personal lexicons.

Multilingual students may discover similarities between academic vocabulary in English and in their other languages. Share these discoveries with monolingual classmates in order to expand

their understanding of how words and languages are structured as well as to encourage them to learn another language.

Teachers know that expanding academic vocabulary is essential for student success - and yet - vocabulary building can still be fun.

