



syl-LAB-le em-PHAS-is

Seven Rules for Accenting English Words

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What is the accent?

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines accent as a distinctive manner of expression.

- a. An individual's distinctive or characteristic inflection, tone, or choice of words.
- b. A way of speaking typical of a particular group of people and especially of the natives or residents of a region.

While more simply, The Cambridge Dictionary of American English defines accent as "the way in which people in a particular area or country pronounce words."



What is the accent and why is it important?

In words with 2 or more syllables, one of those syllables will be stressed or emphasized. This is important for -

- > Reading (decoding and pronunciation)
- > Spelling
- > Fluency (oral and silent)
- > Vocabulary





To correct an Englishman's pronunciation is to imply that he is not quite a gentleman.

-George Bernard Shaw



Building Awareness through Phonological Awareness

- ABC's
- Call the dog.
- Light housekeeping
- Lighthouse keeping
- He is sick.
- He is sick.
- He is sick.
- Stop.
- Stop?
- Stop!



Dictionaries

1755 - *Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson

- o Order of Consideration
 - i. Orthography
 - ii. Pronunciation
 - iii. Etymology
 - iv. Morphology
 - v. Syntax
 - vi. Collocation (multiple usages)
 - vii. Meaning

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The Schwa Sound

- > A reduced vowel sound in unaccented syllables.
- > Most common sound in English
- > Sounds like “uh” or even “i.”
- > The schwa sound can be found in an open, closed, r-controlled, and c + le syllable.
- > All vowels can make this sound:

vitθmin

cθndition

θelectric

sθpport

experθment

analθsis

/ə/

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Schwa, Dictionaries, and Gillingham

- Gillingham’s Green Manual (6th edition - 1960) adopted schwa to conform to Webster’s dictionary.
- “In many words, pronunciation of the vowels in the final syllables has disappeared completely and the old rules of syllable division no longer apply. Loss of the basic phonetic spelling is creating a hopeless memory load for poor spellers.”

*Jane McClelland, “Gillingham: Contemporary after 76 years.” 1989

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But accenting can bring back the phonetic clues!

“The spelling of the morphemes is constant, but the pronunciation of the morphemes varies.”

-Louisa Moats,
"How Spelling Supports Reading: And Why It Is More Regular and Predictable Than You May Think"

- d@ fine -----> def@nition
- symb@l -----> symbol@ic
- val@d -----> v@l@idity

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When to begin

- As students begin to divide two syllable words and build words with affixes, they need to be taught about accent and schwa.
 - VCCV
- There are seven rules that govern where the accent is on English words.
- The first one you teach students is that the accent usually falls on the root!

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**All
Seven
Rules**

* See handout for further description.

Rule I: 1st syllable; root

Rule II: -ic, -ical, -ity & Latin suffixes
-tion, -sion, -cial, etc.

Rule III: Silent e, count back 3.

Rule IV: Connectives

Rule V: Nouns and verbs

Rule VI: -oon and -eer

Rule VII: -ia

Rule I - Part 1

We usually accent the first syllable of a two syllable word.

bonnet

devil

tuna

cruel



Rule I - Part 2

We usually accent a root and not a prefix or a suffix

selfish

repair

unhelpful

flavorless



2-1-1 Doubling Rule

In a multisyllabic word ending in 1 consonant and 1 short vowel with the accent on the final syllable, double the final consonant when adding a vowel suffix.

***** Think of this as an extension of the 1-1-1 with an accented syllable*****

begin + ing = _____

forbid + en = _____

travel + ed = _____

commit + ment = _____



Word Origins - Germanic or Romance?

-Because English is a layered language beginning with its Germanic roots, we have to take into account the stress patterns of word's origins.

- Germanic words
- French words
- Latin words

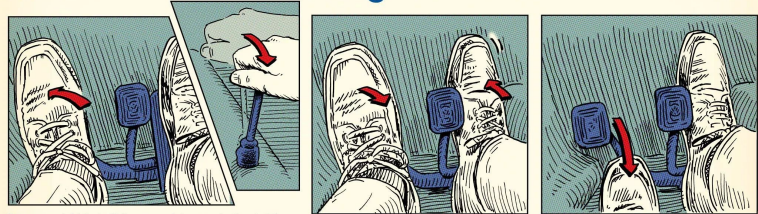




You cannot be rigid with syllable types and syllable division.

You need to find a balance between phonology, morphology, and etymology. .

Shifting Gears



Rule V

When the same word can be a noun or a verb,
Nouns accents the prefix; verbs accents the root.

conduct

conduct

produce

produce

address

address

Rule II - Part 1

Accent the syllable before -ic, -ical, & -ity

domestic

historical

festivity



Latin Suffixes with -ci-, -si-, -ti-, or -xi- construction

consonant	+	i	+	suffix
(e)jec		t	i	on
(offi)		c	i	al
(pa)		t	i	ent

Container Rule



Long and strong:

a, o, & u

Wimpy:

i

Rule II - Part 2

Accent the syllable before suffixes that begin with -ci, -si, -ti, & -xi.

racial

magician

confession

version

construction

initial

complexion

anxious

Connectives i, u, ul, & ol



Root	+ connective +	suffix
mater	i	al
virt	u	ous
pend	ul	ul

Sounds of the connective i

Connective i

- When before a vowel suffix, the sound is “ē.”
- When before a consonant suffix, the sound is “ĭ” (or “uh”).
- When following an l or n, the sound is “y.”

Rule IV

Accent the syllable before a connective *i, u or ul*.

obedient

familiar

ambiguous

perpendicular



Rule VI

Accent the suffixes *-oon* and *-eer*.

pioneer

volunteer

balloon

pantaloon



Rule VII

Accent the syllable before *-ia*.

dyslexia

petunia

Arabia

hysteria



Assimilated Prefixes

Prefixes that change spelling to match the root.
The change happens for euphony.

adversity ----> attribute
committee ----> corruption

* See handout for full deck.

Rule III

In words of three or more syllables which end in silent e, count back three syllables and accent. (Don't forget c +le!)

ultimate

sensitive

spectacle

destructible



Language is more fashion than science, and matters of usage, spelling and pronunciation tend to wander around like hemlines.

-Bill Bryson

ACCENTING RULES REFERENCE

Rule I: We usually accent the first syllable of a two syllable word.
We usually accent a root and not a prefix or a suffix

self' ish de rail' pre cau' tion

Rule II: Accent the syllable before these suffixes:

-ic	-ci-	-cian	-cious -cient
-ical	-si-	-sion	
-ity	-ti-	-tion	-tious -tient
	-xi-	-xion	

Rule III: In words of three or more syllables which end in silent *e*, count back three syllables and accent. If it ends in consonant + *le*, count the last *e*.

dif' fer ence syl' la ble

Rule IV: Accent the syllable before a connective *i, u or ul*.

ex per' i ence e val' u ate reg' ul ar

Rule V: When the same word can be a noun or a verb,

- ◆ noun accents the prefix.
- ◆ verb accents the root.

con' duct (noun) con duct' (verb)

Rule VI: Accent the suffixes *-oon* and *-eer*.

buf foon' pi o neer'

Rule VII: Accent the syllable before *-ia*.

Cal i for' ni a sub ur' bi a

ACCENTING RULE II

Underline the vowel sounds. Then, divide, and accent the following words.
Read them aloud.

Accenting Rule II - Accent the syllable before these suffixes:

-ic

-ical

-ity

Latin suffixes that begin with -

-ci-

-ti-

-si-

-xi-

curiosity

magician

revision

sympathetic

propulsion

historical

fanatical

initial

abrasion

official

vicious

noxious

Extension questions -

1. Row 1 - Which word "killed the cat?"; explain that saying.
2. Row 2: Which word is a noun?
3. Row 3: Use the word *initial* in two ways.
4. Row 4: Why does the word *official* use -cial as a suffix and not -tial?
5. Column 1: What part of speech is *sympathetic*? Change the suffix to make it a verb?
6. Column 2: Which word has a prefix that means forward?
7. Column 3: Use the word *abrasion* in a context rich sentence.
8. Complete the analogy with any word above - devotee : fanatical :: cruel : _____

Extra Practice Accenting
(Accent and write the Roman Numeral for the rule that applies)

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. gradual | 17. activity |
| 2. Ethiopia | 18. stimulant |
| 3. dinnerless | 19. automatic |
| 4. parachute | 20. object |
| 5. escort | 21. intelligence |
| 6. privateer | 22. sanitarium |
| 7. volunteer | 23. cheerfulness |
| 8. political | 24. solarium |
| 9. librarian | 25. ambitious |
| 10. ridiculous | 26. Columbia |
| 11. decrease | 27. preservative |
| 12. project | 28. permit |
| 13. infinitive | 29. cartoon |
| 14. ascension | 30. flavorless |
| 15. nameless | 31. suburbia |
| 16. electrocute | 32. geophysical |

Extra Practice Accenting - KEY
Accented syllable is in bold and capitalized

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. GRAD ual (IV) | 16. e LECT rocute (III) |
| 2. Ethi O pia (VII) | 17. ac TIV ity (II) |
| 3. DIN nerless (I) | 18. STIM ulant (IV) |
| 4. PAR achute (III) | 19. auto MAT ic (II) |
| 5. escort (V) - ES cort; es CORT | 20. Object (V) - OB ject; ob JECT |
| 6. privat EER (VI) | 21. in TEL ligen CE (III) |
| 7. volunt EER (VI) | 22. sani TAR ium (IV) |
| 8. Po LIT ical (II) | 23. CHEER fulness (I) |
| 9. Li BRAR ian (IV) | 24. so LAR ium (IV) |
| 10. ri DIC ulous (IV) | 25. am BI tious (II) |
| 11. decrease (V) - DE crease;
de CREASE | 26. Co LUM bia (VII) |
| 12. project (V) - PRO ject; pro JECT | 27. pre SER vative (III) |
| 13. In FIN itive (III) | 28. permit- (V) - PER mit; per MIT |
| 14. as CEN sion (II) | 29. car TOON (VI) |
| 15. NAME less (I) | 30. FLA vorless (I) |
| | 31. su BUR bia (VII) |