The Syllables and Affixes stage of literacy development is a time of expanding reading interests and fine-tuning reading strategies. Students will be expected to read more informational text as classroom instruction shifts to a greater emphasis on content area subjects. It is also a time for students to make new and richer connections among the words they already know and the words they will learn. The Syllable and Affixes stage represents a new point in word analysis because students will learn to look at words in a new way, not as single-syllable units, but as two or more syllabic or meaning units. Developing word knowledge allows students to read more fluently, which in turn allows them to exercise and expand their increasing level of cognitive and language sophistication.

**Types of Sorts in Syllables and Affixes**
- Compound Words
- Inflected Endings
- Open and Closed Syllables
- Accented Syllables
- Unaccented Syllables
- Consonants
- Prefixes and Suffixes
- Homophones and Homographs

**Focus of Instruction**
- Students are introduced to two-syllable words first through compound words. Then they explore plural endings (-s, -es) and how to add other inflected endings (-ed, -ing) to words using the “double, drop, or no change” rules.
- Next, students study the patterns of vowels and consonants at places where syllables meet, called syllable juncture patterns. These include open and closed syllables and their variations.
- Following syllable juncture, the long-vowel patterns students studied at the Within Word Pattern stage are reviewed in the stressed or accented syllables of two-syllable words. Similarly, r-influenced and ambiguous vowels (oy, oi, ow, ou, au, aw, al) are reexamined in two-syllable words.
- Students then look at the unstressed syllables that occur most commonly at the end of two-syllable words, such as -le, -el, -er, and -en, and study some unusual consonant sounds and spellings, such as hard and soft c and g, k, qu, and silent consonants.
- Finally, students are introduced to base words and affixes, focusing on common prefixes, such as re-, un-, dis-, and mis-, and common suffixes, such as -y, -ly, -ness, and -ful, that change the meanings and usage of words in generally straightforward ways. This level ends with a look at homophones and homographs.

**Characteristics of Syllables and Affixes Learners**
Students in the Syllables and Affixes stage of development are usually in the upper elementary grades and middle school (grades 3 through 8).

**Syllables and Affixes Learners**
- are ready to look for familiar vowel patterns in two-syllable words.
- make errors at syllable juncture (where syllables meet in words) and in unaccented syllables.
- read with good fluency and expression.
- read faster silently than orally.
- write responses that are becoming more sophisticated and critical.
Teacher Tip
An important responsibility for word study instruction at this stage is to engage students in examining how word elements—prefixes, suffixes, and base words—combine. Use the following to model how to examine a word for meaningful parts.

- If there are prefixes and/or suffixes, remove them so you can find the base.
- Look at the base to see if you know it or if you can think of a related word (a word that has the same base).
- Reassemble the word, explaining the meanings of the base, the suffix, and then the prefix.
- Try out the meaning in the sentence; check if it makes sense in the context of the sentence and the larger context of the text that is being read.

Pace of Instruction
At this stage, word study should take place in two ways: (1) it should be systematic as you identify stages of development and features students need to study, and (2) it should take place whenever you see an opportunity to draw students’ attention to words that arise in reading, writing, and content areas. However, the pace of instruction should be adjusted to meet students’ needs. The Spell Checks can help you determine the focus and pace of instruction.

For students who catch on quickly, spend less time on a series of sorts or skip some sorts altogether. For those students who are not on track for meeting end-of-year goals, spend more time on instruction and provide more practice by creating additional sorts.

Modifying the pace and using flexible small groups allows you to avoid teaching students what they already know and to spend more time on features that need instruction.

Word Study Routines

Introduce the Sort There are several options for introducing the sort. Here are the basic steps for a teacher-directed sort.

- Read all the words with students and talk about any that may be unfamiliar (timid, rodent) or that have multiple meanings (leaves, ruler). Say the words, define them, and use them in sentences.
- Introduce the categories. Say or point out the headers explicitly so that students know what features they are to look for.
- Model how to sort two or three words in each category and explain why each word goes in that category.
- At this point, you may want to discuss oddballs. Oddballs are words that do not fit the targeted spelling pattern. If necessary, help students identify an oddball word and explain why it is an oddball. This word is uncle. It begins with un-, like the other words in this sort, such as unable and unkind. But the un- in uncle is not a prefix, which makes it an oddball in this sort. Uncle doesn’t fit the pattern.
- Have students help you complete the sort and ask them to explain their word placements.
- Model how to check the words in each column. Have students create a generalization about each set of words. Ask What do you notice about the words in this column? How are they alike? If necessary, prompt with more specific questions: What ending do the words have? What vowel sound do the words have in the first syllable?
- Re-sort. Have students sort the words individually or with a partner. Remind them to check their sort by reading the words in each column and to move a word to another column if they decide it is misplaced.
Interactive Resources You may use the DVD-ROM and/or the CD-ROM printable manipulatives to model, instruct, and provide practice with sorts.

Use the DVD-ROM for interactive whiteboard activities or independent practice on a computer.

• Point out the headers for the columns, which indicate the principle of the sort. Demonstrate how to drag and drop words to complete the sort. Have students take turns sorting, using the whiteboard or a computer.
• Use the whiteboard to introduce the writing sort. Have students complete it.

Use the CD-ROM for printable manipulatives.

• Print out and cut apart the cards for the sort. Introduce the words, identifying any that may be unfamiliar to students. Demonstrate how to sort. Have students use the cards to practice sorting.
• Print out the game that accompanies the sort. Use the game for additional practice with the sort. Have students play in pairs or small groups.

Teacher Tip
Keep dictionaries handy and encourage their use when questions about syllable division, accented syllables, or word meanings arise.

• See Chapter 7 of Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction, 5th ed., for a comprehensive description of the Syllables and Affixes stage of development and additional activities.

Monitor Progress SPELL CHECKS

Spell Checks for Syllables and Affixes are provided here. Administer the Spell Checks as you would any spelling test, reading the words and having students write them. Spell Checks may be used as pretests and posttests.

Spell Check 1
Compound Words Use after Sort 2. This Spell Check assesses students’ ability to spell and write compound words. Use these words:

1. cookbook 8. sideways 15. sunlight
2. downtown 9. outfield 16. snowstorm
3. something 10. headline 17. myself
4. daytime 11. snowplow 18. lighthouse
5. yourself 12. anyone 19. bookcase
6. bookmark 13. outside 20. inside
7. flashlight 14. countdown

If students misspell an unusually high number of compound words, review Sorts 1 and 2.

Spell Check 2
Inflected Endings Use after Sort 11. This Spell Check assesses students’ ability to add -s or -es, ing, and -ed to base words. Use these words:

1. tripped 8. swimming 15. moving
2. chased 9. peaches 16. liked
3. wishes 10. smiled 17. grinning
4. racing 11. horses 18. snowed
5. taxes 12. grabbed 19. pushing
6. needed 13. dreaming 20. standing
7. jogging 14. dressed

If students have difficulty adding -s or -es, review Sort 3. If students have difficulty adding -ing, review Sorts 5–7. If students have difficulty adding -ed, review Sorts 8–10.
Spell Check 3

Open and Closed Syllables Use after Sort 19. This Spell Check assesses students’ ability to recognize syllables when spelling words. Use these words:

1. lazy 2. finish 3. summer 4. English 5. penny 6. river 7. video
15. habit 16. habit 17. pilot 18. complete 19. tulip 20. kingdom
21. student 22. planet 23. pillow 24. inspect

If students have difficulty identifying open and closed syllables, review Sorts 14 and 17. If students have difficulty discriminating syllable juncture in VCV or VCCV words, review Sorts 12–15.

Spell Check 4

Accented Syllables Use after Sort 32. This Spell Check assesses students’ ability to spell and write words with long vowel patterns, ambiguous vowels, and r-influenced vowel patterns in accented syllables. Use these words:


If students have difficulty spelling words with a specific long vowel pattern, ambiguous vowels, or r-influenced vowel patterns, review the corresponding sort.

Spell Check 5

Unaccented Syllables Use after Sort 39. This Spell Check assesses students’ ability to spell and write words with unaccented initial and final syllables. Use these words:


If students miss words with unaccented initial syllables, review Sort 39. If they miss words with a specific unaccented final syllable, review the corresponding sort.

Spell Check 6

Consonants Use after Sort 46. This Spell Check assesses students’ ability to spell and write words with hard and soft c and g, final -s, ck, -ic, -x, qu, gh, ph, and silent consonants. Use these words:


If students have difficulty spelling words with hard and soft c and g, review Sorts 40–42. If they have difficulty spelling words with silent consonants, review Sort 45.

Spell Check 7

Prefixes and Suffixes Use after Sort 53. This Spell Check assesses students’ ability to add prefixes, suffixes, and comparatives to base words. Use these words:


If students miss words with a specific prefix or suffix, review the corresponding sort. If students have difficulty adding suffixes or -er and -est to words that end in y, review Sorts 51 and 52.