

# Syllables in Spanish

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What is a syllable?

**Syllable:** A syllable is a segment or unit of sound in a word. A word may be one syllable (book) or may be divided into many syllables (justification).

**Think about how to divide  
the following into syllables:**

**-reason**

**-dog**

**-cupcake**

**-California**

**-identical**

In Spanish, a syllable must consist of at least a **vowel**. Usually, though, a syllable will consist of one or two **consonants** followed by a vowel.

Syllables “like” to start with a consonant wherever possible. This is why a consonant between two vowels will usually stick with the second vowel.

Two vowels that are pronounced together as if they were one vowel sound is known as a **diphthong** (like the “ua” in “agua”).

## Examples:

agua → a-gua

sábana → sá-ba-na

caso → ca-so

oro → o-ro

gasolina → ga-so-li-na

gato → ga-to

## Two Consecutive Consonants:

When there is one consonant right after another within a word, these consonants will usually be separated.

\*However, think of the letters “ll, rr, and ch” not as two consonants, but more like one consonant sound. Because of this, we would not separate them.

## Examples:

**cuando → cuan-do**

**costa → cos-ta**

**alcanzar → al-can-zar**

**\* amarillo → a-ma-ri-llo**

**\* hecho → he-cho**

**\* carro → ca-rro**



Here's the exception:

If there are two consonants right at the beginning of the word, like in "blanco," "clase" or "problema," then you know they stay together. If a consonant pair (two consonants together) can be found at the beginning of the word, then it will also stay together in the same syllable anywhere inside the word.

## Examples:

**aplicar → a-pli-car (“pl” is found in “plato”)**

**sobre → so-bre (“br” is found in “brisa”)**

**ladrillo → la-dri-llo (“dr” is found in “droga”)**

## Three Consecutive Consonants:

When there are three consonants in a row, the first one will be separated from the second and third ones. In other words, the second and third consonants will start the next syllable.

## Examples:

**inglés → in-glés**

**sombrero → som-bre-ro**

**comprar → com-prar**

## Spanish has two types of vowels:

**Strong vowels** → (a, e, o)

**Weak vowels** → (i, u)

\* “y” is a weak vowel when it sounds like “i”

Rules:

1. Two **weak** vowels combine into one syllable → fui, muy
2. A **weak** vowel plus a **strong** vowel combine into one syllable  
→ Juan
3. Two **strong** vowels in a row are separated into different syllables → fe-o, te-a-tro

## Examples:

reina → rei-na

ciudad → ciu-dad

toalla → to-a-lla

leer → le-er

guapo → gua-po

camináis → ca-mi-náis

\*Sometimes a written accent (which indicates emphasis) will force two vowels apart that would otherwise stay together in the same syllable. Notice that this happens in a pair with a weak and strong vowel where the weak vowel takes the emphasis.

**tío → tí-o**

**baúl → ba-úl**

**día → dí-a**

**reúno → re-ú-no**

**\*When the strong vowel carries the accent,  
we consider it one syllable:**

**reunión → reu-nión**

**tenéis → te-néis**