

Open and Closed Syllables · Introduction

PRIMARY RULE

A syllable is open if that syllable ends in a vowel. (The syllable is closed if that syllable ends in a consonant.)

so; o = open

Tee; e = open

Mensa – a = open

desto – o = open

Rock – o = closed

Deck – closed

Wrack – e = closed

Post – o = closed

SYLLABIC DIVISION

In orthographic convention, single consonants belong to the following syllable (to the oncoming syllable).

In instances where multiple consonants divide the syllable, at least one consonant closes the preceding syllable.

Divide syllables between multiple consonants.

beten: be – ten (be = open)

Faden: Fa – den (Fa = open)

Güte: Gü – te (Gü = open)

Josef: Jo – sef (Jo = open)

Betten: Bet – ten (Bet = closed)

Katze: Kat – ze (Kat = closed)

Mücke: Muc – ke (Muc = closed)

binden: bin – den (bin = closed)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OPEN/CLOSED & TENSE/LAX

Vowels in open syllables are pronounced tense. Vowels in closed syllables are pronounced lax.

lösen: lö = open / ö = tense

Faden: Fa = open / a = tense

Lider: Li = open / i = tense

Besen: Be = open / e = tense

löschen: lösch – closed / ö = lax

Fasching: Fasch – closed / a = lax

Linsen: Lin – closed / i = lax

Becker: Bec(k) – closed / i = lax

ORTHOGRAPHIC DIFFICULTIES

There are problematic spellings where two letters are written to indicate a single consonant (primarily with *ch*).

The pronunciations of such words must be memorized.

The unstressed vowel in final “e, er, el & en” is always reduced.

The vowel in prefixes “ge” and “be” are always reduced even though the syllable appears to be open.

Bücher: Bü – cher (Bü = tense vowel)

(des) Tuches: Tu – ches (Tu = tense vowel)

hoch: (o = tense vowel)

bitte: (e = reduced in final position)

Löffel (e = reduced in final position)

süchtig: süch – tig (süch – closed syllable = lax vowel)

sich: (closed syllable = lax vowel)

Loch: (closed syllable = lax vowel)

Bescheid: (e = reduced in prefix “be”)

gesund: (e = reduced in prefix “ge”)

GRAMMATICAL FORMS

Tense vowels found in grammatical variations of a word remain tense even in simplified forms of the word.

The shortest form of a word is not necessarily indicative of its vocalic qualities.

Examine monosyllabic words for any grammatical variations. (Look for plural, genitive and adjectival endings, etc.)

If a syllable is open in any of its various grammatical forms, it is considered to be open in all its other forms.

rot (ro – te; ro – tes; ro – ter) ro = open; o = tense

Tag (des Ta – ges; die Ta – ge) Ta = open; a = tense

groß (gro – ße; gro – ßes; gro – ßer) gro = open; o = tense

Tat (Tä – ter; Ta – ten) Ta = open; a = tense

gut (gu – te; gu – ten) gu = open; u = tense

Motte (Mot = closed; o = lax)

Acker (Ack = closed; a = lax)

gegossen (gos = closed; o = lax)

Natter (Nat = closed; a = lax)

Futter (Fut = closed; u = lax)

VERB FORMS

The stem vowel of regular verbs remains constant in all the various conjugations as well as in the participle.

Many irregular and strong verbs follow the same pattern, as well. Present stem vowel change is unpredictable.

loben (infinitive = open / tense) – (er) lobt (tense)

sagen (infinitive = open / tense) – (du) sagst (tense)

beben (infinitive = open / tense) – (hat) gebebt (tense)

gären (infinitive = open / tense) – (hat) gegärt (tense)

haben; hast, gehabt (tense)

betrügen; betrugt (tense)

Note the following:

nehmen (tense); nimmt (lax); genommen (lax)