

How Can I Help My Middle Schooler Read Multisyllabic Words?

— Five Helpful Steps—

Many words that students read in middle school have two or more syllables. These are called multisyllabic words. As children progress through school, the number of multisyllabic words they encounter in texts increases. When struggling readers are confronted with long words in their school texts, they often give up or read the words incorrectly, not understanding that some simple steps and strategies make reading long words easier.

How will you know if your child struggles with multisyllabic words? When helping your child with an assignment, have your child read aloud. Only by listening to your child read aloud can you determine which words are difficult to decode.

By recognizing that long words are made up of familiar units (syllables, root words, prefixes, and suffixes), students can gain confidence in multisyllabic word reading. Following is a simple strategy you and your child can use to help decode long words.

Step	Helpful Directions and Feedback
1. Underline the vowels. Syllables have one vowel sound. Sometimes, two vowels work as a team to make one sound, like <i>ea</i> in <i>eat</i> .	Child: He was int... (interrogated) Parent: Let's underline the vowels in his word. This will help us break it down into syllables. We know that when there is a vowel, there is a syllable.
2. Look for familiar syllables and word parts.	Parent: What syllables do you recognize? Child: I see <i>in-</i> and I know the suffix <i>-ed</i> at the end. I also see the word <i>gate</i> .
3. Read all of the syllables together slowly.	Parent: Excellent. Try to read each part separately from the beginning. Child: /in/ /ter/ /ro/ /ga/ /ted/
4. Read the syllables at a faster, more fluent rate and then read the whole sentence with the word.	Parent: Now, read all of the syllables together faster and let's put it back into the sentence. Child: Interrogate. He was interrogated by his mother when he got home late.
5. Check for understanding.	Parent: What do you think that means? Child: Does that mean that his mom asked him a lot of questions? Parent: You're right!