

Syllabication of Filipino Words

A syllable is one unit of sound that forms the whole or part of a word. In Filipino, a syllable is called *pantig* and the syllabication of a word is called *pagpapantig*. When syllabifying words, syllables are separated by a middle dot called the **interpunct** (·) which is also called the interpoint, middot, or centered dot.

Syllable Forms

A syllable may be comprised of one vowel alone but a consonant needs a vowel to make a syllable. Syllables with two or more letters can have only one vowel. However, a syllable can have one or more consonants. The Filipino word for vowel is *pating* (symbol: P) and the word for consonant is *katinig* (symbol: K).

The table below shows the different forms of Filipino syllables and same examples of Filipino words with those types of syllables.

Syllable Form	Examples (in bold)
P	ako (a ·ko), edad (e ·dad), i·sa (i·sa), noo (no· o), oso (o ·so), ubo (u ·bo)
KP	ba·ka (ba ·ka), dugo (du ·go), relo (re ·lo), si·la (si· la)
PK	akda (ak ·da), isda (is· da), ugnay (ug ·nay), uod (u· od)
KPK	aklat (aklat), bundok (bun ·dok), dahon (da· hon), isip (i· sip)
KKP	bloke (blo ·ke), braso (bra ·so), droga (dro ·ga), gripo (gri ·po), plato (pla ·to)
PKK	abstrak (abs ·trak), ekstra (eks ·tra)
KPKK	disk , fern, gibmefayb (gib·me· fayb) ¹ , iskeyt (is· keyt), isport (is· port), keyk , kontest (kon· test), nars , test
KKPK	blangko (blang ·ko) ² , brilyo (bril ·yo), dyip , dyakpat (dyak ·pat) ³ , ekspres (eks· pres), ispred (is· pred), isprey (is· prey), kyut , plastik (plas ·tik), playwud (play ·wud), prinsesa (prin ·se·sa), swak , trak , tren , tsek , tres , trangkaso (trang ·ka·so) ² , tsamba (tsam ·ba), tsismis (tsis ·mis)
KKPKK	bleyd , breyk , breyslet (breys ·let), treynta (treyn ·ta), tsart
KKPKKK	shorts

¹ From the English expression "Give me five!" (Yes, this is in the UP dictionary.)

² **ng** is one consonant

³ From the English word "jackpot"

Rules in Syllabifying Filipino Words

Listed below are the rules in syllabifying Filipino words as recommended by the *Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino (KWF)* in its document entitled *Ortograpiyang Pambansa* (2013), which is attached to the Department of Education Order No. 34, s. 2013.

Ortography refers to the part of language study concerned with letters and spelling. It also refers to writing words with the correct letters and with accordance to standard or accepted usage.

1. A syllable may be comprised of one vowel alone but a consonant needs a vowel to make a syllable. Syllables with two or more letters can have only one vowel. However, a syllable can have one or more consonants.

Examples: **ako** (a·ko), **sila** (si·la), **ulam** (u·lam), **baul** (ba·ul), **almusal** (al·mu·sal)

2. If there are two or more consecutive vowels in a word, the vowels are separated into different syllables. These consecutive vowels may appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a word.

Examples: **aagaw** (a·a·gaw), **uulan** (u·u·lan), **alaala** (a·la·a·la), **asotea** (a·so·te·a), **baunan** (ba·u·nan), **loob** (lo·ob), **tuon** (tu·on), **babae** (ba·ba·e), **noo** (no·o), **totoo** (to·to·o), **buo** (bu·o)

3. If there are two consecutive consonants in a word, the first consonant joins the vowel before it in one syllable. The second consonant becomes part of the next syllable.

Examples: **ambon** (am·bon), **pinggan** (ping·gan), **madre** (mad·re), **tigre** (tig·re), **serbisyo** (ser·bis·yo), **iskolar** (is·ko·lar), **istorya** (is·tor·ya)

4. If there are three different consecutive consonants somewhere in the middle of a word, the first two consonants join the vowel before them in one syllable. The third consonant becomes part of the next syllable.

Examples: **breyslet** (breys·let), **transportasyon** (trans·por·tas·yon), **inspirasyon** (ins·pi·ras·yon), **ekskursiyon** (eks·kur·si·yon), **eksperimento** (eks·pe·ri·men·to)

5. If there are three consecutive consonants somewhere in the middle of a word, and the first consonant is **m** or **n** and the next two consonants are any of the consonant clusters **bl**, **br**, **dr**, **pl**, or **tr**, then the **m** or **n** joins the vowel before it in one syllable and the consonant cluster becomes part of the next syllable.

Examples: **sum·bre-ro** (sum·bre-ro), **miyembro** (mi·yem·bro), **balandra** (ba·lan·dra), **timpla** (tim·pla), **simple** (sim·ple), **ehemplo** (e·hem·plo), **kompleto** (kom·ple-to), **kontrata** (kon·tra-ta), **entrada** (en·tra-da), **entrega** (en·tre-ga), **Intramuros** (In·tra-mu-ros)

6. If there are four consecutive consonants somewhere in the middle of a word, the first two consonants join the vowel before them in a syllable. The last two consonants become part of the next syllable.

Examples: **abstrak** (abs·trak), **ekstra** (eks·tra), **ekspres** (eks-pres), **eksklusibo** (eks·klu-si-bo), **eksplorasyon** (eks·plo-ras-yon), **ekstremidad** (eks·tre-mi-dad), **transkripsiyon** (trans·krip-si-yon)

Before I continue, I would just like to add that some Filipinos make the mistake of breaking up the letter **ng** into two consonants. Remember that **ng** is considered to be one letter in the Filipino alphabet; it is a consonant. It may appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a word. It cannot be separated into the consonants **n** and **g**, and thus cannot be separated into two different syllables.

Examples: **ngipin** (ngi·pin), **bango** (ba·ngo), **mangga** (mang·ga), **bulong** (bu·long)

It is also important to note that there are Filipino words that have **n** and **g** next to each other but it is not the letter **ng**. The key is in knowing how the word is pronounced.

Changes in Syllabifying Filipino Words

The discussion that follows attempts to show how the syllabification of some Filipino words would be changed if the above rules were followed. I will compare how some Filipino words were syllabified in the 2010 Edition of the *UP Diksiyonaryong Filipino* and how they should be syllabified according to the above rules of the *Ortograpiyang Pambansa* (2013).

Note that the above syllabification rules first appeared in a document by the KWF entitled *Gabay sa Ortograpiya ng Wikang Filipino*, which was attached to DepEd Order No. 104, s. 2009 and implemented by the DepEd since then. Since the UP dictionary was released a year after (2010), it would be understandable that these new syllabification rules were not applied to some words in the dictionary.

- a. A **consonant cluster** or **consonant blend** is a sequence of consonants without a vowel and wherein each consonant sound is heard when the word is

pronounced. Examples of consonants clusters in Filipino are *bl*, *br*, *dr*, *gr*, *pl*, and *pr*.

Some Filipino words have two consecutive consonants (somewhere in the middle of a word) that look like a consonant cluster. Now it would seem that these consonant clusters are not separated into two consonants in different syllables. The consonant cluster would join a vowel or other letters in one syllable.

Since there are no specific syllabication rules on words with two-letter consonant clusters in the middle of the word, such words would have to fall under rule 3 above (words with two consecutive consonants).

The table below shows the comparison between the syllabication of words with consonant clusters in the UP Filipino dictionary and if rule 3 of the *Ortograpiyang Pambansa* were followed.

Consonant cluster	Filipino word	2010 UP Diksiyornaryong Filipino	2013 Ortograpiyang Pambansa
bl	problema	pro·ble·ma	prob·le·ma
	kable	ka·ble	kab·le
	terible	te·ri·ble	te·rib·le
	responsable	res·pon·sa·ble	res·pon·sab·le
br	kobra	ko·bra	kob·ra
	sobra	so·bra	sob·ra
	sobre	so·bre	sob·re
dr	madrasa	ma·dra·sa	mad·ra·sa
	kompadre	kom·pa·dre	kom·pad·re
gr	programa	pro·gra·ma	prog·ra·ma
	telegrama	te·le·gra·ma	te·leg·ra·ma
	sagrado	sa·gra·do	sag·ra·do
	krusigrama	kru·si·gra·ma	kru·sig·ra·ma
kr	burukrasya	bu·ru·kras·ya	bu·ruk·ras·ya
	demokrasya	de·mo·kras·ya	de·mok·ras·ya
pl	eroplano	e·ro·pla·no	e·rop·la·no
	multiplikasyon	mul·ti·pli·kas·yon	mul·tip·li·kas·yon
pr	apritada	a·pri·ta·da	ap·ri·ta·da
	aprobado	a·pro·ba·do	ap·ro·ba·do
	kapritso	ka·pri·tso	kap·rit·so

Consonant cluster	Filipino word	2010 UP Diksiyornaryong Filipino	2013 Ortograpiyang Pambansa
tr	atraso	a·tra·so	at·ra·so
	teatro	te·a·tro	te·at·ro
	salitre	sa·li·tre	sa·lit·re
	buwitre	bu·wi·tre	bu·wit·re
ts	kotse	ko·tse	kot·se
	litson	li·tson	lit·son
	litsugas	li·tsu·gas	lit·su·gas

- b. Two consecutive consonants in some Filipino words look like a consonant cluster but they are separated into two different syllables and are therefore not considered to be a consonant cluster. In these cases, syllabication rule 3 of the *Ortograpiyang Pambansa* applies.

Not a consonant cluster	Filipino word	2010 UP Diksiyornaryong Filipino and 2013 Ortograpiyang Pambansa
b-l	tabla	tab·la
	hibla	hib·la
	Abril	Ab·ril
b-r	abrelata	ab·re·la·ta
	libre	lib·re
	libro	lib·ro
d-r	madrasta	mad·ras·ta
	madre	mad·re
	padre	pad·re
d-y	orkidya	or·kid·ya
g-r	agrabado	ag·rab·ya·do
	agrikultura	ag·ri·kul·tu·ra
	tigre	tig·re
	integridad	in·teg·ri·dad
k-r	sekreto	sek·re·to
	sekretarya	sek·re·tar·ya
p-r	kopra	kop·ra

Not a consonant cluster	Filipino word	2010 UP Diksiyornaryong Filipino and 2013 Ortograpiyang Pambansa
t-r	letra	let·ra
	litrato	lit·ra·to
	litro	lit·ro
t-s	itsa	it·sa
	otso	ot·so
	otsenta	ot·sen·ta
	atsara	at·sa·ra
	atsuwete	at·su·we·te
	kutsara	kut·sa·ra
	kutsero	kut·se·ro
	kutsilyo	kut·sil·yo
	kutsinta	kut·sin·ta
	kutson	kut·son
	titser	tit·ser

- c. There are some Filipino words with three consecutive consonants which do not seem to follow the syllabication rule 4 or 5 stated above. For example, if the last two consonants is a consonant cluster, it seems that the first consonant joins the vowel before it in a syllable and the consonant cluster becomes part of the next syllable.

The table below shows the comparison between the syllabication of words with consonant clusters in the UP Filipino dictionary and if rule 4 of the *Ortograpiyang Pambansa* were followed.

Filipino word	2010 UP Diksiyornaryong Filipino	2013 Ortograpiyang Pambansa
doktrina	dok·tri·na	dokt·ri·na
elektrikal	e·lek·tri·kal	e·lekt·ri·kal
martsa	mar·tsa	mart·sa
kongkreto	kong·kre·to	kongk·re·to
iskrin	is·krin	isk·rin
eskrima	es·kri·ma	esk·ri·ma
ispred	is·pred	isp·red
estranghero	es·trang·he·ro	est·rang·he·ro
estrategiya	es·tra·te·hi·ya	est·ra·te·hi·ya

Filipino word	2010 UP Diksiyornaryong Filipino	2013 Ortograpiyang Pambansa
istroberi	is · tro · be · ri	ist · ro · be · ri
istrikto	is · trik · to	ist · rik · to
distrito	dis · tri · to	dist · ri · to
instrumento	ins · tru · men · to	inst · ru · men · to
orquestra	or · kes · tra	or · kest · ra
sastre	sas · tre	sast · re
ministro	mi · nis · tro	mi · nist · ro
rehistro	re · his · tro	re · hist · ro

If we apply syllabication rule 4 to words with consonant clusters such as those in the table above, the pronunciation of the words would sound a bit awkward. Many Filipinos tend to pronounce these words as they are syllabicated in the UP dictionary.

- d. Filipino words with other consonant clusters (such as *gr* and *pr*) that follow the letters **m** or **n** would not fall under rule 5 but would have to fall under rule 4. The two consonants in the consonant cluster would be separated into different syllables.

The table below shows the comparison between the syllabication of words with consonant clusters in the UP Filipino dictionary and if rule 4 of the *Ortograpiyang Pambansa* were followed.

Filipino word	2010 UP Diksiyornaryong Filipino	2013 Ortograpiyang Pambansa
imprenta	im · pren · ta	imp · ren · ta
impresyon	im · pres · yon	imp · res · yon
impraestruktura	im · pra · es · truk · tu · ra	imp · ra · est · ruk · tu · ra
ingrato	in · gra · to	ing · ra · to
ingreso	in · gre · so	ing · re · so
Kongreso	Kon · gre · so	Kong · re · so

Because DepEd endorses the use of the *Ortograpiyang Pambansa*, the syllabication of the words under this column would be considered correct unless the effect of consonant clusters on the pronunciation of words was overlooked and therefore not included in the syllabication rules.