# Charlie and Carinne's Quest for the jobs of the "final, non-syllabic <e>!"

In our last session we took words from your spelling test at school that was targeting what they called v-c-e syllable words for school: *maze, flame, grade, smile, spoke, shape, strike, whine, close, trades* and to "bonus trick words" *move* and *talk*.

From the list it seems that they were targeting the convention that a final-non-syllabic <e> can signal a previous single vowel letter represents the sound of its name when there is only one vowel letter between them.
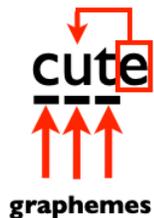
This is definitely one of the jobs of the final, non-syllabic <e>. We can see an example with the diagram of the spelling of the word "cute" for "that puppy is so cute!"

Notice that the first three letters in this word are single-letter graphemes. The final <e>, however, is not a grapheme. That is because *graphemes* (base <graph> for "writing or mark") are the written structures that represent *phonemes* (base <phone> for "speech, sound"). The final, non-syllabic <e> is not representing any phoneme in the word "cute" so it is not actually a grapheme. Instead we can think of it as a "marker." It is a letter being used not as a grapheme, but instead as a way to mark the pronunciation of another grapheme — in this case the <u>.

The problem is the list they gave you sends the message that this is the ONE job of the final, non-syllabic <e>. When they give you the word "move" with that same spelling pattern, but the word is not pronounced with a "long vowel," it was listed as a "trick word."

The message from this test is that when a word has a final, non-syllabic <e> but it is not marking that long vowel pronunciation, that spelling is somehow "tricky" or an "exception". However, you knew more about spelling than whoever made this test Charlie! When I asked you about the reason for the final non-syllabic <e> in <move>, you explained that it prevents the word from ending in <v>. You know this because we because we learned that no complete English word is allowed to end in <v>!

Ah ha! So there is not ONE job of this "final, non-syllabic <e> (also called the single, silent <e>). As you already knew before this test, it has at least two jobs. This means we have to be very careful about how we word the convention this test is targeting. We should not say "single, silent <e>s makes a vowel letter long." If we say that, every time we see a word where this <e> is not marking that pronunciation, we are likely to think it is a "tricky spelling" or an "exception" as your test suggested. That's why I say, "ONE job of the final, non-syllabic <e> is to mark that a single vowel letter (with a single consonant letter between it) represents the sound of its name." When we say "one job" we imply that there are other jobs, like the one you already knew — to prevent complete English words from ending in <v>.

When we studied the words in your spelling test, we actually found that this "marker <e>" can even do more than job at a time! For example, we looked at the word "maze" for "I got lost in that maze and couldn't find my way out." I showed you that there is another word, "maize" that is pronounced exactly the same, but totally unrelated in meaning. The word spelled <maize> is another word for the corn the plant.

We've already studied the "homophone principle." That's the idea that when we have two words that can be pronounced the same, whenever possible we have different spellings to signal that difference in meaning. So in <maze> we spell the "long a" (the /eɪ/ phoneme) with the <a> grapheme, marked by the final, non-syllabic <e>. But fortunately we have other ways of spelling that /eɪ/ phoneme. We can use the <ai> digraph for the /eɪ/ phoneme and that lets us signal that "maize" and "maze" have nothing to do with each other even though they happen to be pronounced the same.

But then we noticed something else! The word "maize" for "corn" has a final, non-syllabic <e> too! In this word, however, there is not a single-letter vowel grapheme before the single consonant, but a digraph <ai>. If that <e> is not marking the pronunciation of the vowel, what is this final <e> doing?

I happened to know another spelling convention that helped us sort it out. You already knew the convention that complete English words do not end in <v> and the final, non-syllabic <e> can be used to avoid final <v>s. It turns out that there is also a convention that complete English words don't end in a single <z>. We went to the word searcher to test that hypothesis. That machine went through the 60,000 words in its bank ending in a final, single <z> and gave us the list at right.

If we study these words, we will find that they are either not English (loan words) or they are not "complete." The word "jeez" is considered an "informal" word, and so it is not constrained by the conventions of complete English spellings either.

So we are now up to three jobs of that final, non-syllabic <e>! It can signal the pronunciation of a single vowel letter grapheme, and it can be used to prevent words from ending in a single <v> or <z>!

Before going on to the other great observations you made in our last session, I wanted to remind you that we thought the word "trades" was an odd one to include in the main list. That *word* does not even end in an <e>! But we worked out its structure with a word sum (trade/ + s —> trades) and saw that the base in this word *does* have a final, non-syllabic <e> that is doing the job they were trying to teach. It's just a bit harder to see it as a final, non-syllabic <e> when it has a suffix after it!

We also thought "talk" was an odd word even for the "tricky" bonus words. I suppose it was just calling it an "exception" because it has that <l> that is not pronounced. But we remembered that this <l> is also not a grapheme in this word. Instead it is another "marker" that signals the link in meaning between the related words "talk" and "tell" and "tale."

So <e> is an "orthographic marker" in <move> and the <l> is an orthographic marker in <talk>. It's so helpful to know that a key job of the letters of the alphabet is to be used for graphemes to represent phonemes, but they are not always graphemes or part of digraphs or trigraphs. Letters can also be used as "orthographic markers" doing all sorts of interesting jobs.

With that beginning of our lesson, you read a couple of silly paragraphs I wrote with a lot of words planted with final, non-syllabic <e>s for all sorts of different jobs.

Below is the text you read:

Charlie! Can you please help me find some jobs of the final, non-syllabic <e>? The first thing we need to do is to be able find them. Perhaps you will stumble on some here…

*A big **care package** with a bow on it arrived. It turned out to be an **apple** pie! I gave **everyone** a **piece** at lunch, **because** after all, who doesn't **love apple** pie? It was **fortunate** that we still had **ice** cream to add to the delicious desert!*

The words bolded in the second paragraph are the ones you found with final, non-syllabic <e>s. We started to study those to see if we could find even more jobs of this orthographic marker <e>.

As you often do, you noticed something off the start that I did not even plan! You saw the final letter <e> in your own name. That made you wonder for a second if your name had a "marker <e>." I asked you to spell your name out-loud. We worked out all the graphemes in your name and spelled it out like this:

<p align="center">"Ch-ar-l-ie"</p>

We discovered that your name is almost all digraphs! Only the <l> is a single letter grapheme. The <ch>, <ar> and <ie> are all digraphs. And since <ie> is a digraph — that final <e> is not a final, non-syllabic <e>! It's just a part of a common digraph.

Now we know that to find a single, final, non-syllabic <e>, it is not enough to see it at the end of a word, you also need to make sure it is not part of a digraph or trigraph. You also didn't get confused by the word "me." That word has a final <e>, but it is clearly syllabic as it is the only vowel grapheme in that word.

You were not done yet! one of the words you highlighted was the word "package." We could see that this word is not pronounced with a "long a," so this final non-syllabic <e> must be doing something else. Once again, you already knew the reason from some of our previous studies. That <e> is not there to signal the pronunciation of a vowel, but to signal the pronunciation of the consonant grapheme <g> as we see in the diagram at right in the word "large."
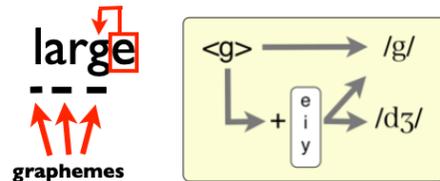
On the next page are all the jobs of the final, non-syllabic <e>s that we discovered together in our session. I've also pasted the text we studied so that you can look for more. Remember the words bolded are the ones you found that have a final, non-syllabic <e>, but we have not necessarily figured out what all of their jobs are. We didn't bold any words in the first paragraph, but there are more words to find in there too.

I look forward to what you and your Mom find!

Happy questing for the jobs of the final, non-syllabic <e>!

Pete

Charlie and Carinne's Quest for the jobs of the "final, non-syllabic <e>!"

The text below helped you find many of the jobs of this <e> listed below. But it still has words with other jobs to find!

> *Charlie! Can you please help me find some jobs of the final, non-syllabic <e>? The first thing we need to do is to be able find them. Perhaps you will stumble on some here…*
>
> *A big **care package** with a bow on it arrived. It turned out to be an **apple** pie! I gave **everyone** a **piece** at lunch, **because** after all, who doesn't **love apple** pie? It was **fortunate** that we still had **ice** cream to add to the delicious desert!*

Jobs of the final, non-syllabic <e> that Charlie already found!

Remember, it is not that one of these jobs is "better" or "more normal" and the others are "tricky." Also remember that in a given word, a final, non-syllabic <e> can do more than one job at a time!

1. It can mark that a previous single vowel grapheme, represents the sound of its letter name if there is only one consonant between the <e> and that vowel grapheme.

2. It can be used to prevent a complete English word from ending in <v>.

3. It can be used to prevent a complete English word from ending in a single <z>.

4. It can mark the pronunciation of a <g> as "soft" (e.g., /dʒ/ phoneme as in "package") instead of "hard" (e.g., the /g/ phoneme in "get").

I'm looking forward to hypotheses you and your Mom come up with for other jobs of this fascinating final, non-syllabic <e>!

PS for those following along with Charlie's learning, in our next session we discovered a bunch of new jobs. I'm sharing those discoveries below as well…

5. It can be used to signal that a <c> grapheme represents /s/ or /ʃ/. (see <ice>)

6. It can provide a vowel letter needed for the convention that - we should expect at least one vowel letter for every syllable we perceive in a word. (see <able> and <stumble>)

7. It can link words of similar history and meaning together. (We found this by analyzing "everyone" to see one of its bases <one> and linking it to <alone> and <lone>. We also considered the final <e> in the words <are> and <were>)

8. It may just be the final letter in a suffix (We found the <-ate> of "fortunate" <fortune/ + ate>. We also looked at the <-ine> of "imagine" <image/ + ine>)

9. It may act to mark a word as a lexical word, not a function word. It can make sure a lexical word has at least 3 letters! (We saw that the spelling <ice> uses the final, non-syllabic <e> to signal the pronunciation of the vowel <i>, the pronunciation of the consonant <c>, and to make sure that a lexical word has at least three letters! This is our new record for the number jobs of this <e> in one word - and it is only a three-letter word!)

10. It can act as a plural canceling marker. (See <house>, <please>)