

When another syllable is added, for instance **-en** to form the plural, the final consonant must be doubled so that the syllable remains closed:

mannen	men	potten	pots
bedden	beds	vullen	we, they fill
zitten	we, they sit		

Note: Remember that (except in a few loanwords) you never see any doubled consonants at the end of a word.

When one of the above vowels occurs in a word of one syllable where it is already followed by more than one consonant, no change needs to be made when a syllable is added:

arm, armen	arm, arms	word, worden	I become, they become
kerk, kerken	church, churches	kust, kusten	coast, coasts
ding, dingen	thing, things		

2.1.1 Summary

The short vowels **a, e, i, o, u** are always followed by at least one consonant. When another syllable follows, they must be followed by two or more consonants.

The rest of the Dutch vowels, including all the diphthongs, can (but might not!) occur in an open syllable. All such vowels are spelled with two letters when they happen to stand in a closed syllable:

laan	avenue	<i>diphthongs</i>	
peer	pear	trein	train
boom	tree	dijk	dike
buur	neighbor	ruik	smell
fout	mistake		
dier	animal		
deur	door		
boek	book		

These vowels might stand in an open syllable (a) in a word of one syllable without a following consonant or (b) when another syllable is added. Then the vowels spelled with a double letter (the first four, above) drop one of these letters. The logic here is that the single following consonant (a) or the absence of any consonant (b) is enough to indicate that the syllable is open:

lanen	avenues	sla	lettuce
peren	pears	—	
bomen	trees	zo	so
buren	neighbors	nu	now

Notice the blank in the second column. An *ee* at the end of a word must always be written with two letters (for instance *zee* “sea”) to distinguish it from the unaccented vowel as in English “soda” which is regularly spelled with *e* (for instance *ze* “she”). This distinction is not made inside the word, however, resulting in an occasional ambiguity such as **regeren** (*re-gee-ren*) “to govern” but **regelen** (*ree-ge-len*) “to adjust.”

Note, however, that in accordance with the rule given above, the doubled letters are used whenever the syllable is closed (that is, when the vowel is followed by two or more consonants), whether or not another syllable follows:

paarden	[paar-den]	horses
feesten	[fees-ten]	parties
hoofden	[hoof-den]	heads
buurten	[buur-ten]	neighborhoods

The doubled vowels in the diphthongs *aai*, *ooi*, *eeu*, *oei*, *ieu* never change:

taai, taaie	tough
mooi, mooie	nice
leeuw, leeuwen	lion, lions
groei, groeien	I grow, they grow

The vowels spelled with two different letters remain unchanged when another syllable is added. Remember that a spelling with two different letters does not necessarily indicate a diphthong!

dieren	animals	treinen	trains
deuren	doors	dijken	dikes
boeken	books	fouten	mistakes
		tuinen	yards, gardens

2.1.2 Summary

- 1 The vowels **aa**, **ee**, **oo**, **uu** are spelled with two letters when in a closed syllable but with one letter when in an open syllable.
- 2 The vowels and diphthongs written with two or more different letters remain unchanged whether the syllable is closed or open.
- 3 All the vowels that can occur in an open syllable, with the exception of **ie**, **oe**, **uu**, before consonants other than **r**, are pronounced longer than the vowels that occur only in a closed syllable. For this reason, many texts call **aa**, **ee**, **oo**, **uu**, **ie**, **eu**, **oe**—the vowels that can occur only in open syllable—LONG vowels, and **a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u** SHORT vowels.

Note that when we apply rule 1 of this summary and write **aa**, **ee**, **oo**, **uu** with a single letter in an open syllable, only the following consonants distinguish them from the closed-syllable short vowels, for instance:

zaken	affairs	zakken	pockets
redde	reason	redde	to save
bome	trees	bomme	bombs
man	moons	manne	men
spel	they play	spelle	they spell
slap	they sleep	slappe	flabby

2.2 The relationship between **f** and **v**, **s** and **z**

- 1 Many words end in an **f** or an **s**, such as **brief** “letter,” **huis** “house.” When we add an ending and this consonant comes to serve as the first consonant of a following syllable, it is replaced by, respectively, **v** or **z**. The consonant may be preceded by **l** or **r**:

raaf	ra-ven	ravens
geloof	gelo-ven	believe
brief	brie-ven	letters
wolf	wol-ven	wolves
werf	wer-ven	shipyards
roos	ro-zen	roses
huis	hui-zen	houses
gans	gan-zen	geese
vers	ver-zen	verses
beurs	beur-zen	scholarships

This does not happen, however, when the s is preceded by **p**, **t** or **k**:

rup	rupsen	caterpillars
fietsen	fietsen	bicycles
heks	heksen	witches

This should feel familiar, because we do the same in English in “wife, wives,” “wolf, wolves” and “house, houses” (though in this last example the spelling does not show how we really pronounce it).

- 2 When we double an **f** or **s** on addition of another syllable, we do not change to **v** or **z**:

stof	stoffen	materials
das	dassen	neckties

- 3 Some exceptions to the rule given in point 1 are:

biograaf	biografen	biographers
elf	elfen	elves
kous	kousen	stockings
dans	dansen	dances

All the above words illustrating the rules for the replacement of f and s by v and z when a vowel follows have been nouns. But these are general pronunciation and spelling rules that hold for all parts of speech, especially adjectives and verbs:

lief	lieve
serieus	serieuze
grijs	grijze, grijzer

2.3 Pronunciation of the ending -en

In spoken Dutch, especially in the western part of the Netherlands, the -n of the common ending -en is normally dropped. So:

lopen to walk	is pronounced as if	[lope]
spreken (we, they) speak		[spreke]
gesproken spoken		[gesproke]
houten wooden		[houte]
brieven letters		[brieve]
ziekenhuis hospital		[ziekehuis]

These words are, however, never *written* without the -n. Notice that the remaining sound is the short vowel common in unstressed syllables (Chapter 1).

2.3.1 Let's try it

Add the ending -en to the following words:

tak	maan	reus	brief
feest	kous	zoon	pit
bloem	das	woord	

Add the ending -e to the following words:

leuk	vies	dik	boos
raar	serieus	mooi	arm