**Multisyllable Word Strategy (FIRRM)**  
**Step-by-step instructions**  

**Introduce the Strategy**

1. Ensure slide with FIRRM mnemonic can be projected for easy viewing or create a poster with the FIRRM mnemonic before class begins.

2. Tell students they are going to learn a 5-step strategy to help them read words with more than one syllable. Tell students they will use a mnemonic to help them remember the strategy.

3. Ask students if they know what a mnemonic is and discuss mnemonics. Note the legitimacy of students’ answers but correct misinformation. *If necessary*, explain that a mnemonic is a strategy to improve memory and are used in many different ways including pictures and acronyms.

4. Explain to the students they will learn FIRRM as a strategy for reading unfamiliar multisyllabic words. Explain that FIRRM is not a real word, but a mnemonic device to help them remember the steps of the strategy.

5. Ask students if they know what syllables are and discuss syllabication. Note the legitimacy of students’ answers but correct misinformation. *If necessary*, explain that syllables are the smallest unit of a word. It is centered on ONE vowel sound. A syllable can be as small as 1 vowel. Sometimes, though, there may be two vowels that work together to make one vowel sound (e.g., silent e, diphthongs including oi, oo, au, ou).

6. Explain that the vowels and consonants work together to make these small pronounceable units. Write “picnic”, “veto”, and “debate” on the board. Have students read the words and listen for the different “parts.” Call students to come up and draw a line between the syllables. Have them talk through their thinking process. Assist if needed.

7. Display the FIRRM Multisyllabic Word Strategy slide or poster. Pass out to students their own copy of the FIRRM Multisyllabic Word Strategy.

8. Introduce FIRRM to the students. Tell students the FIRRM strategy has 5 steps. Point to the first step on the slide or poster. Hold up the index finger and call attention to step one, “**Find the vowels.**”

9. Ask students to name the vowels. Tell students that not only do all words have vowels, and remind students that each syllable in a word also has at least one vowel.

10. Ask students to recite the first step of the FIRRM strategy. Students can recite the steps individually or as a group.

11. Hold up the index and middle fingers and call attention to step two, “**Look Inside for word parts you know.**” Tell students they may have heard this called as “word within a word.”
12. Ask students to recite the first and second step of the FIRRM strategy. Students can recite the steps individually or as a group.

13. Hold up the index, middle, and ring fingers and call attention to step three, “Read each word part.” Ask students what they think this means. Correct any misinformation and refer to previous discussion of syllables.

14. Explain to students that they do not have to master the word in one try; but that they can look at the parts they know and read them individually.

15. Ask students to recite the first three steps of the FIRRM strategy. Students can recite the steps individually or as a group.

16. Hold up the index, middle, ring, and pinky fingers and call attention to step four, “Read the parts quickly.” Tell students this step includes taking all of the syllables and putting them together to identify and read the word. Explain that they are putting the word back together.

17. Ask students to recite the first four steps of the FIRRM strategy. Students can recite the steps individually or as a group.

18. Hold up all five fingers and call attention to step five, “Make it sound like a real word.” Tell students this is an extension of step four and let students know that saying words quickly does not always sound real.

19. Ask students to recite the five steps of the FIRRM strategy. Students can recite the steps individually or as a group.

Activity

20. Discuss with the students where and when the students can use the strategy. Tell students they can use this strategy in all of their courses including English, math, science, and social studies/history because they may come across words that are unfamiliar to them.

21. Ask students for the number of textbooks they have for each of their classes. Give students a 4 x 6 index card for each textbook they have for their classes (e.g., 4 textbooks, 4 cards).

22. Tell students they are going to create a bookmark reference card for each textbook. Explain these cards will be a reference for them as they are learning the strategy, will remind them to use the strategy in each of their classes, and will help them memorize the strategy.

23. Model writing FIRRM across the board and writing the numbers 1-5 vertically below FIRRM.

24. Tell students to write FIRRM and the numbers 1-5 on their cards in the same way it is written on the board.
25. Ask students for the first step. Write the first step on the board (*Find the vowels*) next to the number one. Tell students to write the first step on each of their cards.

26. Ask students for the second step. Write the second step on the board (*Look Inside for word parts you know*) next to the number two. Tell students to write the second step on each of their cards.

27. Ask students for the third step. Write the third step on the board (*Read each word part*) next to the number three. Tell students to write the third step on each of their cards.

28. Ask students for the fourth step. Write the fourth step on the board (*Read the parts quickly*) next to the number four. Tell students to write the fourth step on each of their cards.

29. Ask students for the fifth step. Write the fifth step on the board (*Make it sound like a real word*) next to the number five. Tell students to write the fifth step on each of their cards.

30. Remind students, once they have finished their cards, that they should put one card in each of their textbooks.

31. Review the purpose of learning the strategy. Elicit answers from students (e.g., to learn unfamiliar multisyllabic words).

### Applying the Strategy

32. Tell students they will have an opportunity to see how the strategy is applied to multisyllabic words.

33. Write *fantastic* on the board. Write FIRRM on the side of the board. Model the first step for the students. State the following, “What do I do first? The first step of FIRRM is *Find the vowels* (point to the F). I can do that. I see an *a*, another *a*, and an *i*. I think I am going to circle those.” *Circle the vowels in the word fantastic. Cross off the F on FIRRM.*

34. Model the second step for the students. State the following, “I have found the vowels. What do I do next? The second step of FIRRM is *Look Inside for word parts you know* (point to the I). Looking at this word, I see *fan* and *tic*. I think I am going to underline the word parts that I know.” *Underline the word parts that you know in fantastic. Cross off the I on FIRRM.*

35. Model the third step for the students. State the following, “I have finished the first two steps of FIRRM. Now I need to do the third step. The third step of FIRRM is *Read each word part* (point to the R). I can do that. There is *fan*, *tas*, *tic*.” *Point to and state aloud the three word parts. Cross off the R on FIRRM.*

36. Model the fourth step for the students. State the following, “I finished the third step of FIRRM. The next step is *Read the parts quickly* (point to the R). So, if I read the parts quickly, it sound like *fan-tas-tic*. *Point to the word parts and read them quickly. Cross off the R on FIRRM.*
37. Model the fifth step for the students. State the following, “Now I need to do the last step of the FIRRM strategy. The last step is Make it sound real (point to the M). I can do that. Let me read the word quickly and make it sound real. Fantastic, that sounds correct and is a real word. Now I can read this word.” Cross off the M on FIRRM.

38. Ask students if they have any questions about applying the strategy. Remind students of the strategy steps.

39. Tell students they will have the opportunity to apply strategy for a specific content area. Provide students with a list of selected words from a content area.

40. Select one word from the list and write it on the board. Model using the strategy with the selected word similar to modeling using the strategy with the word fantastic.

41. Scaffold students’ use of the strategy. Write a second content word on the board. Ask students to tell you the steps to follow in order to figure out the word. Prompt students if necessary. Repeat this step with a third content word.

42. Allow students the opportunity to practice the FIRRM strategy with a partner. Pair the students (provide students with numbers to pair them together or ask students to turn to the person next to, in front of, or behind them).

43. Tell students to apply the FIRRM strategy to the remaining words on the list (e.g., words 4–10). Encourage students use their index cards to remember the steps of FIRRM and to write FIRRM and cross out each step as they complete it.

44. Circulate around the classroom. Listen to students as they apply the strategy and sound out the multisyllabic words. Assist students with the strategy when necessary.

**Wrap Up**

45. Call the class back together after they have completed reading words 4 – 10. Select pairs of students to read the words. Pairs of students can read the same set of words. After the pairs have read the words ask the students to read the words together aloud.

46. Review the FIRRM strategy. Bring students’ attention to the slide (or poster) or they can use their FIRRM handout. Tell students to hold their hand out in front of them and to repeat the steps while extending the correct finger for each corresponding step. Repeat if necessary.

47. Tell students they will be “tested” on the strategy during the next class (they will not be graded) to help them memorize the strategy. Remind students they can refer to their hand as a reminder of the 5 steps.

48. Remind students to place one of their cards from the activity into each of their text books.