

Spelling

Spelling is a rule-governed activity and if you can learn the rules, or least refer to them when you are in doubt, you can improve your spelling. (There are other “tricks” you can also use to help you remember how to spell, but more of those later.)

There are many rules and, unfortunately, many exceptions to them - words that look as though they ought to obey the rules but don't - and these you just have to remember as exceptions.

On the following pages you will find 8 simple spelling rules, each of which deals with a basic spelling point.

Also included, at the end of the section, is a list of the 200 most commonly mis-spelt words.

8 Basic rules

Rule 1.

Spelling “joined-up” words. These can be formed in 3 ways:

- | | | | |
|------|---------------|---|------------|
| 1. | Word + Word | = | New Word. |
| e.g. | with + drawn | = | withdrawn. |
| 2. | Prefix + Word | = | New Word. |
| e.g. | un + kind | = | unkind. |
| 3. | Word + Suffix | = | New Word. |
| e.g. | move + able | = | moveable |

The point at which most people have problems is the join. The rule is:

Never add or subtract a letter at the join; just put the two words together as they stand.

- | | | | |
|------|--------------|---|-------------|
| e.g. | dis/appear | = | disappear |
| | trace/able | = | traceable |
| | un/neccssary | = | unnecessary |
| | over/ride | = | override |
| | under/rate | = | underrate. |

Rule 2.

The rule is (and you probably remember this rhyme from school):

I before E

Except after C

When the sound is ee.

So, I before E: achieve, niece, thief.

Except after C: ceiling, deceive, conceit.

There are, however, exceptions to this rule and the most notable of these is “Seize”. It is not I before E, even though the word doesn't begin with C and the sound is EE. Rules 3, 4 and 5 depend on you knowing which letters are vowels and which are consonants.

The vowels are: a, e, i, o and u. The letter y is sometimes a vowel and sometimes a consonant. All other letters besides these are consonants and a word cannot be made up of consonants alone; to be a real word, it must contain a vowel.

Rule 3.

Changing the final “y”, when you want to change the word’s ending. If your word ends with the consonant “y”, (e.g. “deny”) and you want to add another ending, change the “y” into “ie” (e.g. “denied”), unless the new ending begins with “i”, (e.g. “denying”).

Other examples:

busy - busier, busiest, business.
heavy - heavier, heavily, heaviness.
easy - easier, easily, easiest

If the last letter before the “y” is a vowel, however, keep the “y” before adding another ending.

e.g. destroy - destroyed, destroyer.
stray - strayed, straying.

DO REMEMBER these exceptions:

day - daily.
say - said.
pay - paid.
gay - gaily.
lay - laid.

So, the rule is:

Consonant + y - change the y to ie.
Vowel + y - keep the y

Rule 4.

Words that end in “e”.

Words that end in the letter “e” lose the “e” when a new ending beginning with a vowel or with “y” is added.

e.g. acquire + ing = acquiring.
declare + ing = declaring.
persuade + ing = persuading.

However, they keep the “e” if the new ending begins with a consonant.

Remember that the rule for joining together still applies: Don't add or take away letters at the join.

e.g. skilful + ly = skilfully.
fulfil + ment = fulfilment.

Remember also the consonant rule. (rule 5)

e.g. fulfil + ing = fulfilling.
fulfil + ed = fulfilled.

Just try the exercise in the next activity to see if you've got the hang of it

Activity B1

Hope + full =

permit + ed =

change + able =

commit + ment =

inspire + ing =

pain + full =

try + ing =

un + fit + ed =

Response B1

hope + full = hopeful.

permit + ed = permitted.

change + able = changeable.

commit + ment = commitment.

inspire + ing = inspiring.

pain + full = painful.

try + ing = trying.

un + fit + ed = unfitted.

Have a look at the last two rules for spelling and familiarise yourself with them.

Rule 7.

Rules for plurals.

1. To make most words plural, you simply add "s".
e.g. cats, dogs, kitchens, hospitals, eggs, computers, machines.
2. If a word ends in "o", add "es".
e.g. potato/potatoes; tomato/tomatoes; piccolo/piccoloes.
3. If a word ends with a consonant + "y", change the "y" into "i" and add "es".
e.g. robbery/robberies; library/libraries.
4. If a word ends with a vowel + "y", keep the "y" and add "s".
e.g. monkey/monkeys; donkey/donkeys.
5. If a word ends with "f", or "fe", change the "f" or "fe" into "v" and add "es".
e.g. wife/wives; knife/knives; calf/calves.
6. A few words don't change at all.
e.g. deer/deer; salmon/salmon; sheep/sheep.
7. A few words simply change their vowels.
e.g. foot/feet; man/men; tooth/teeth.

Rule 8.

“ce” or “se”?

e.g. Is the word you want to use “advice” or “advise”?

What you must remember is that the noun (the name) has a “c”, while the verb (the action) has an “s”.

So, ADVICE is what you give.
 ADVISE is what you do.

Can you think of others like this? What about LICENCE and LICENSE?

Here is an example of their use.

“I have a driving licence but my car is not licensed to carry paying passengers.”

Remember The noun has the “c”.
 The verb has the “s”.

Overleaf there is a list of 200 most commonly misspelled words which should be handy to refer to if you are having trouble.

200 most commonly misspelled words

1. absence accidentally accommodate achieved acknowledge acquainted addresses aerial aggravate aggregate	5. colleagues coming Committee comparative competent completely conscientiousc onscious consistent convenience	9. familiar February financial foreign forty friend fulfilled gauge government genius	13. medicine Mediterranean miniature minutes mischievous murmur necessary negotiate niece noticeable	17. proprietary psychology quiet really received recognise recommended referred relieved repetition
2. agreeable all right amateur among analysis Antarctic Anxiety Apparent appearance appropriate	6. courteous courtesy criticism deceive decision definite desirable desperate disappeared disappointed	10. grammar grievance guard guardian handkerchief height heroes honorary humorous hungry	14. occasional occasionally occurred occurrence omitted omission parliament originally parallel opinion	18. Restaurant rhythm scarcely secretaries seize sentence separate severely shining similar
3. Arctic argument arrangement ascend athletic automation awful bachelor beginning believed	7. disastrous discipline dissatisfied efficiency eighth eliminated embarrassed emphasise enthusiasm equipped	11. hurriedly hypocrisy imagination immediately immigrate incidentally independent indispensable influential intelligence	15. pastime permanent permissible perseverance personnel physical planning pleasant possesses preceding	19. sincerely statutory transferred supersede suppression surprising synonym tendency tragedy successful
4. benefited beneficial Breathe Budgeted Business ceiling certain choice clothes college	8. especially essential exaggerated excellent exercise exhausted existence expenses extremely experience	12. Irresistible knowledge liaison literature livelihood lose losing lying maintenance marriage	16. preference prejudice preliminary prestige privilege procedure proceeds professional professor pronunciation	20. twelfth unconscious undoubtedly unnecessary until usually valuable view Wednesday woollen

Mnemonics

One way of improving your spelling is with the aid of “mnemonics”. Mnemonics are simply memory aids, and they can help you to remember spellings, or points in a talk you are giving, or perhaps points you would want to include in an exam question.

For instance, below is a common ‘mnemonic’ used to remember the colours of the rainbow in their correct order.

Richard	of	York	Gains	Battle	in	Vain
Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Indigo	Violet

In the same way, to remember which is east and which is west, think of the local army regiment, the Royal Engineers. RE meant Right side. East side. A silly trick, but it can work.

A way of remembering the spelling of “necessary”, uses the letters in turn to form a sentence, which is easy to remember:

Never	Eat	Cakes.	Eat	Salmon	Sandwiches	And	Remain	Young
N	E	C	E	S	S	A	R	Y

The spelling of “association” is often mis-spelt, either with double “s”, double “c” or double both. The mnemonic “Two socks and one collar” is a useful mnemonic for this word.

In spelling “advise” and “advice”, try.

S is for the verb and

C is for the noun, so how about:

“The valiant Saviour Never Collapsed.”

Alternatively, use the names of two friends, e.g.

Sarah Voss and Carole Nixon.

Try it for yourself. If you relate the mnemonics specifically to yourself in some way, as explained here with friends’ names, they will be even easier to remember.

Homophones

If you are involved in word-processing, you may well have a “Spell-check” on your machine. This is a great aid to good spelling but do be careful with certain words. The spell-check may be able to correct your spelling of a particular word if it is completely wrong, but what it won’t do is look at the context in which the word is used. If your word

has one sound, but more than one spelling and meaning (e.g.- witch and which) your spell-check may let you use the wrong version, simply because you've spelled it correctly.

For instance, "I don't know witch one to choose," would be incorrect but your spell-check would probably let it pass.

Words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings are called "Homophones", (from the Greek "Homo", meaning "the same" and "phone", meaning "sound".)

Below are some examples and an activity for you to ensure you are aware of the differences.

Activity B2

Underline the word in brackets which has the correct spelling and meaning appropriate to the sentence.

1. The (Principle/Principal) of the college is a very strict man who doesn't allow smoking in lectures.
2. My car was (stationary/stationery) at the time of the accident.
3. The other driver was (wholly/holy) at fault.
4. I will (waive/wave) my rights to compensation if he will just pay for the damage to my car.
5. The (stile/style) in which she dresses is very fashionable.
6. He has been (sighted/cited/sited) in a divorce case which comes up next week.
7. In a religious ceremony, certain (rights/writes/rites) must be performed.
8. The tinker peddled his (wares/wears) from door to door, but sold hardly anything that day.

Response B2

The correct answers are:

- | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|-----------|----------|
| 1. Principal | 2. stationary | 3. wholly | 4. waive |
| 5. style | 6. cited | 7. rites | 8. wares |

If you are unsure of the meanings of any of the words used, then look them up in your dictionary.

Can you think of other homophones, which might cause you problems when relying on a spell-check?

Jot down 10 parts or groups of words in the activity box below and then compare them with the suggestions overleaf.

Activity B3

Response B3

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. weather/whether | 2. beech/beach |
| 2. their/there/they're | 4. confident/confidant |
| 5. draft/draught | 6. cereal/serial |
| 7. Descent/dissent | 8. counsellor/counsellor |
| 9. check/cheque | 10. prophet/profit |

Don't worry if you produced a list that was totally different from this; the number of Homophones to be found in the English language is pretty extensive so the chance of you coming up with the same 10 sets of words is fairly remote.

The important thing is that you are aware of their existence and take care, when using a spell-check, to ensure that you are using the correct version before accepting that the spelling is correct.

“Americanisms”

Something else you should beware of when using a spell-check, are “Americanisms”. The Americans spell many words differently from us, though they may have the same

meanings, and if your machine originates from the States, you may find some variation in spelling.

For example, the Americans often spell “tyre” as “tire”, which for us is incorrect and has a completely different meaning.

For your next activity, spell the following “Americanisms” in the English way.

Activity B4

1. labor
2. color
3. program
4. rumor
5. theater

Notice that in many of our words that end in “our”, the American omit the “u”; watch out for this on a spell-check.

Not only do the Americans frequently spell words differently from the English, they often use them differently as well, or have a completely different word from the one we would use for the same thing.

For example, what we would call a “pavement”, the Americans would term a “sidewalk”.

Can you define in English the following American words and phrases?

Activity B5

1. diaper
2. trunk (of a car)
3. hood (of a car)
4. yard
5. going like a bomb
6. fag or faggot
7. gas
8. attorney

Response B5

1. diaper - baby's nappy
2. trunk of car - the boot
3. hood of a car - the bonnet
4. yard - garden (even if it's green and beautifully landscaped, it's still a yard!)
5. going like a bomb - a dismal failure to Americans, whereas to us it means “it went really well”.
6. fag or faggot - To Americans, this is a slang (and very unpleasant) word for a homosexual, whereas to us, a fag is a slang word for a cigarette, while a faggot is either a bundle of wood or a rather tasty meatball served with peas and gravy.
7. gas - petrol
8. attorney - lawyer

One always has to be particularly careful when using “slang” words to Americans, as one can easily be misunderstood. For example, the following story is true:

Once when I was staying in America with some people I didn't know very well and wanted to make an early start one morning, I asked my host if he would “knock me up” at 6a.m. the next day, not knowing that to be “knocked up” is to be made pregnant. Red faces all round, and an example of the way we use our common language differently.