

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e.g. with + drawn = withdrawn.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/necessary = 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.

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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, busyness.

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.

Examples:

destroy - destroyed, destroyer.

stray - strayed, straying.

DO REMEMBER these exceptions:

day - daily.

say - said.

pay - paid.

gay - gaily.

lay - laid.

The rule is:

Consonant + y - change the y to ie.

Vowel + y - keep the y.

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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.

Examples:

acquire + ing = acquiring.

declare + ing = declaring.

persuade + ing = persuading.

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

Examples:

face + less = faceless.

like + ly = likely.

As before, there are exceptions; remember these:

Argue + ment = argument.

true + ly = truly.

Whole + ly = wholly.

Furthermore, words that end with "ce" or "ge", keep the "e" when the suffixes "able" or "ous" are added. This keeps the soft sound of the "c" or the "g".

Examples:

courage + ous = courageous.

notice + able = noticeable.

Rule 5.

Words ending with a single consonant.

Words ending with a single consonant (e.g. blot), double that consonant when a suffix beginning with a vowel is added.

Examples:

blot + ing = blotting.

travel + er = traveller.

forget + ing = forgetting.

forgot + en = forgotten.

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However, DO NOT double the consonant if the suffix begins with another consonant.

Example:

forget + ful = forgetful.

develop + ment = development

Rule 6.

Joining "full" to another word.

The rule is that when "full" is joined to another word, it loses one "l".

Example:

forget + full = forgetful.

disgrace + full = disgraceful.

Care + full = careful.

If you take your new word (e.g. careful) and add the suffix "ly", then you will be back with another double "l" at the join.

Example:

care + full = careful.

careful + y = carefully.

However, when "full" is added to another word that ends with double "l", then both words lose an "l".

Example:

full + fill = fulfil.

skill + full = skilful.

will + full = wilful.

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

Example:

skilful + ly = skilfully.

fulfil + ment = fulfilment.

Remember also the consonant rule in Rule 5.

Example:

fulfil + ing = fulfilling.

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fulfil + ed = fulfilled.

Activity 1:

hope + full =

permit + ed =

change + able =

commit + ment =

inspire + ing =

pain + full =

try + ing =

un + fit + ed =

Activity 1 Response:

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.

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.

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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.

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200 most commonly misspelled words:

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

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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 (R.E.) Right side is 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.

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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 2:

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.
4. He has been (sighted/cited/sited) in a divorce case which comes up next week.
5. In a religious ceremony, certain (rights/writes/rites) must be performed.
6. The tinker peddled his (wares/wears) from door to door, but sold hardly anything that day.

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?

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Activity 3:

Jot down 10 parts or groups of words next to each point below and then compare them with the Responses.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Activity 3 Response:

1. weather/whether.
2. beech/beach.
3. their/there/they're.
4. confident/confidant.
5. draft/draught.
6. cereal/serial.
7. Descent/dissent.
8. counsellor/counselor.
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

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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.

Activity 4: Spell the following "Americanisms" in the English way.

1. labor;
2. color;
3. program;
4. rumor;
5. theatre.

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".

Activity 5: Can you define in English the following American words and phrases?

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.

Activity 5 Response:

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

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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.