



Reading from Scratch

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Spelling Rules

ENGLISH SPELLING RULES Short and Long Vowels

1. To spell a short vowel sound, only one letter is needed:

at red it hot up

2. To spell a long sound you must add a second vowel. The second may be next to the first, in the VVC pattern (boat, maid, cue, etc.) or it may be separated from the first one by a consonant in the VCV pattern (made, ride, tide, etc.). If the second vowel is separated from the first by two spaces, it does not affect the first one. This is the VCCV pattern in which the first vowel remains short. Thus, doubling a consonant can be called "protecting" a short vowel because it prevents an incoming vowel from getting close enough to the first one to change its sound from short to long:

maid, made, but madder; dine, diner, but dinner.

Spelling the Sound /k/

This sound can be spelled in any one of four ways:

1. c 2. cc 3. k 4. ck

1. The single letter, c , is the most common spelling. It may be used anywhere in a word:

cat corn actor victim direct mica
scat bacon public cactus inflict pecan

2. Sometimes the letter c must be doubled to cc to protect the sound of a short vowel:

stucco baccalaureate hiccups
Mecca tobacco buccaneer
occupy raccoon succulent

3. The letter k is substituted for c if /k/ is followed by an e, i, or y.

kin make sketch poker kind risky
skin token skill keep liking flaky

(Boring examples? How about kyphosis, kylix, keratosis, and dyskinesia?)

4. Similarly, the spelling ck, is substituted for cc if the following letter is an e, i, or y:

lucky picking rocking finicky
blackest mackintosh frolicked ducking

Kentucky picnicking stocking Quebecker

5. The letters, k and ck are more than substitutes for c and cc. They are used to spell /k/ at the end of a monosyllable. The digraph, ck, ALWAYS follows a short vowel:

sack duck lick stick wreck clock

(Forget about yak. Your student will never need it.)

The letter, k, follows any other sound:

milk	soak	make	bark
tank	peek	bike	cork
tusk	hawk	duke	perk

The Sound, /j/

The sound, /j/ is spelled in three ways: j ge and dge.

1. The letter j is usually used if the sound is followed by an a, o, or u.

just	jam	jungle	injure	major	adjacent
jog	jar	Japan	jury	job	Benjamin
adjust	jacket	jolly	jaguar	jump	jalousie

2. Since the letter g has the soft sound of /j/ when it is followed by an e, i, or y, it is usually used in this situation:

gentle	ginger	aging	algebra
Egyptologist	gem	origin	gym

2. If /j/ follows a short vowel sound, it is usually spelled with dge. This is because the letter j, is never doubled in English.

badge	ridge	dodge	partridge	gadget
judge	edge	smudge	judgement	budget

The Sound, /ch/

The sound /ch/ has two spellings: tch after a short vowel, ch anywhere else:

witch	sketch	botch	satchel
catch	hatchet	kitchen	escutcheon

Exceptions:

Which, rich, much, such, touch, bachelor, attach, sandwich, and ostrich.

The Sound, /kw/

This sound is ALWAYS spelled with the letters, qu, never anything else.

Using -le

Words ending in -le, such as little, require care. If the vowel sound is short, there must be two consonants between the vowel and the -le. Otherwise, one consonant is enough.

li **tt** le ha **nd** le ti **ck** le a **mp** le
 bo **tt** le pu **zz** le cru **mb** le a **ng** le

bugle able poodle dawdle needle idle people

Odds and Ends

1. The consonants, v, j, k, w, and x are never doubled.
2. No normal English words ends with the letter v. A final /v/ is always spelled with ve, no matter what the preceding vowel sound may be:

have give sleeve cove
 receive love connive brave

Adding Endings

There are two kinds of suffixes, those that begin with a vowel and those that begin with a consonant. As usual, the spelling problems occur with the vowels:

Vowel Suffixes		Consonant Suffixes	
--- age	-- -ist	--- ness	--- cess
--- ant	--- ish	-- -less	-- -ment
-- -ance	--- ing	-- -ly	--- ty
--- al	--- ar	-- -ful	--- ry
-- -ism	--- o	-- -hood	-- -ward
--- able	-- -on	-- -wise	
-- -an	-- -ous		
--- a	--- or		
--- es	--- ual		
--- ed	-- -unt		
--- er	-- -um		
--- est	--- us		
-- -y	-- -ive		

1. Words that end in the letter y must have the y changed to i before adding any suffix:

body - bodily	marry - marriage
many - manifold	family - familiar
happy - happiness	puppy - puppies
beauty - beautiful	vary - various

company - companion fury - furious
 plenty - plentiful merry - merriment

2. In words that end in a silent e you must drop it before you add a vowel suffix. The silent e is no longer needed to make the preceding vowel long as the incoming vowel will do the trick:

ride - riding cure - curable use - usual age - aging
 fame - famous force - forcing refuse - refusal slice - slicing
 pure - purity ice - icicle nose - nosy convince - convincing
 globe - global race - racist pole - polar offense - offensive

3. Words that end in an accented short or modified vowel sound must have the final consonant doubled to protect that sound when you add a vowel suffix:

Quebec - Quebecker remit - remittance confer - conferring refer - referred
 upset - upsetting shellac - shellacking occur - occurred concur - concurrent

Note that this doubling is not done if the accent is not on the last syllable. If the word ends in a schwa, there is no need to "protect" it.

open - opening organ - organize
 focus - focused refer - referee

4. Normally you drop a silent e before adding a vowel suffix. However, if the word ends in -ce or -ge and the incoming vowel is an a, o, or u, you cannot cavalierly toss out that silent e. It is not useless: it is keeping its left-hand letter soft, and your a, o, or u will not do that. Thus:

manage - manageable peace - peaceable
 courage - courageous revenge - vengeance
 surge - surgeon change - changeable
 notice - noticeable outrage - outrageous

Gorgeous George bludgeoned a pigeon noticeably! Tsk.

5. Adding consonant suffixes is easy. You just add them. (Of course you must change a final y to i before you add any suffix.)

peace - peaceful harm - harmless age - ageless
 pity - pitiful child - childhood rifle - riflery

/sh/

When this sound occurs before a vowel suffix, it is spelled ti, si, or ci.

partial cautious patient vacation

special	deficient	suspicion	suction
inertia	delicious	ratio	pension
musician	physician	optician	quotient
electrician	nutrition	statistician	expulsion

/ee/ before a vowel suffix

When /ee/ precedes a vowel suffix, it is usually spelled with the letter i:

Indian	obvious	medium
ingredient	zodiac	material

Spelling Determined by Word Meaning

1. Mist and missed sound alike, as do band and banned. To determine the spelling, remember that **-ed** is a past-tense ending.

- The mist drifted into the harbor.
- I nearly missed my bus.
- The movie was banned in Boston.
- The band played on.

2. The endings of **dentist** and **finest** sound alike. Deciding which one to use can be tricky. One rule helps but doesn't cover all cases:

- ist** is a suffix meaning someone who does something:
artist - machinist - druggist
- est** is the ending used on superlative adjectives:
finest - sweetest - longest

3. The sounds at the end of **musician** and **condition** sound alike. but....

- cian** always means a person, where...
- tion** or **sion** are never used for people.

4. How do you tell whether to use **tion** or **sion**?

- if the root word ends in /t/, use **-tion**: complete, completion
- if the root word ends in /s/ or /d/, use **sion**: extend, extension
suppress, suppression
- If the sound of the last syllable is the "heavy" sound of /zhun/ rather than the light sound, /shun/, use **s**: confusion, vision, adhesion

Exception: The ending, **--mit** becomes **-mission**:

permit - permission	omit - omission
submit - submission	commit - commission

The Hiss

1. The letter **s** between vowels sounds like a z:

nose	result	noise
------	--------	-------

present	partisan	tease
preside	resound	reserve

2. The light "hissy" sound is spelled with either **ss** or **ce**. Predictably, **ss**, like any proper doubled consonant, follows accented short vowels. Soft **c** is used anywhere else. (A soft **c** is one that is followed by **e**, **i**, or **y**).

notice	reticent	massive	bicycle
recent	gossip	russet	rejoice
essence	vessel	discuss	pass

3. The plural ending is always spelled with a single letter **s** unless you can hear a new syllable on the plural word. In that case, use **-es**:

loss, losses	bank, banks	twitch, twitches	tree, trees
box, boxes	list, lists	judge, judges	

No compendium of spelling rules would be complete with the most important rule of all:
WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK (or look it up)

But ask first - it's quicker.

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