



BASIC FACTS ABOUT SPELLING IN ENGLISH

Every word consists of at least one letter.

Every word must have at least one vowel. Some words are just a vowel (l, a).

The vowels are: a, e, i, o, u and sometimes y (e.g. cry)

A consonant blend is when we put two or three consonants next to each other: e.g. br; cl; spr.

A consonant digraph is when we put two consonants next to each other to create a sound different to the separate consonants: e.g. sh, th, ph, ch.

A vowel digraph is when we put two vowels, or a vowel and a consonant, together to make a new vowel sound: e.g. ar; oy; ea; ai.

A split vowel digraph is when the two vowels in a digraph are split by a consonant. The second vowel is always -e. (This rule used to be called 'magic e'!) e.g. bake, wine, pole, tube, these.

Spelling rules in English

English is a very difficult language to spell correctly. There are some rules, but there are nearly always exceptions to them. Much of English spelling has to be learned off by heart, which is why some people find it so difficult.

Some of the basic and most useful rules are explained below.

If you are not very good at spelling, don't worry. It does not mean you are stupid! You might have to work harder than other people at learning spellings, though.

THE 'FLOSSY' RULE

This rule tells you when to end a word with a double letter:

-ff, -ss, -ll, -zz

It also tells you when to use -tch or -ch, and when to use -ck or -k.

If a single syllable word has a single vowel, then you should use the double letters, -tch or -ck.

Examples

staff	mass	call	jazz	match	lack
cliff	less	bell	fizz	fetch	wreck
cuff	hiss	sill	buzz	hitch	sick
	loss	doll		botch	lock
	fuss	bull		hutch	truck



However, if a single-syllable word contains a vowel digraph*, then it does not end with a double letter.

Instead of -ff -f
 Instead of -ll -l
 Instead of -ck -k

Instead of -ss -se
 Instead of -tch -ch

Examples

leaf	house	peel	reach	beak
loaf	please	seal	leech	seek
roof	noise	coil	porch	pork
reef	moose	howl	couch	squawk
half	coarse	foul		

Also, if another consonant comes after a single vowel, before the final consonant, then the single letter, or -ch, is used:

Examples

gulf	tense	belch	milk
self	lapse	filch	sulk
	else	gulch	bank
		branch	wink
		stench	risk
		finch	dusk

*a vowel digraph is two letters making one vowel sound: e.g. ee, ea, oi, ar, or,ow, aw, au etc.

You can also have vowel trigraphs: e.g. our, ear, eer, air, etc.

RULES ABOUT ADDING SUFFIXES

A suffix is a letter or letters added to the end of a word to change its meaning.

A vowel suffix is a suffix which begins with a vowel, e.g.: -ed, -ing, -ous, -ure, etc

A consonant suffix is a suffix which begins with a consonant, e.g.: -ful, -less, -ment

The doubling rule

If a single-syllable word ends -VC (-vowel/consonant), then the final letter doubles when you add a vowel suffix*.

Examples

run	running	-	runner		
rap	rapping	rapped	rapper		
star	starring	starred	-	-	starry
fat	-	-	fatter	fattest	fatty
slim	slimming	slimmed	slimmer	slimmest	



beg	begging	begged	*beggar			
rub	rubbing	rubbed	rubber			
mad	-	-	madder	maddest	-	madden

NB The rule also applies if these words have prefixes added

debug	debugging	debugged
unjam	unjamming	unjammed
recap	recapping	recapped

If a multi-syllabic word ends -VC, then the final letter only doubles if the stress is on the final syllable.

Say these words to yourself and listen to the difference:

harden prefer

Harden has the stress on the first syllable - /hard/ - this is the part of the word which you pronounce more strongly.

Prefer has the stress on the second syllable - /fer/ - this is the part of the word which you pronounce more strongly.

So, the -n in harden does not double, but the r at the end of prefer does double.

Examples

prefer	preferring	preferred		
admit	admitting	admitted	admittance	
begin	beginning	-	-	beginner

NB Watch out! These words do NOT double:

focus focusing focused

*a vowel suffix is a suffix which begins with a vowel: e.g. -ing, -er, -ive, -ous, -y

The drop -e rule

If a word ends in -e, the final -e is dropped when a vowel suffix* is added.

Examples

scare	scaring	scary		
stone	stoning	stony		
shine	shining	shiny		
revise	revising			
admire	admiring	-	admirable	
expense	-	-	-	expensive
desire	desiring	-	desirable	- desirous



exercise	exercising
communicate	communicating
pursue	pursuing

The final -e is NOT dropped only when it has to remain to make the letters c or g 'soft'.
(i.e. c sounds like s and g sounds like j)

Examples

change	changeable
manage	manageable
courage	courageous
place	irreplaceable
peace	peaceable

*a vowel suffix is a suffix which begins with a vowel: e.g. -ing, -er, -ive, -ous, -y, -able

The y to i rule

When a word ends in -Cy (-consonant/y), the y changes to i when any suffix is added, except the suffix -ing.

Examples

dry	drying	dries	dried	drier	driest	*dryness
spy	spying	spies	spied			
tidy	tidying	tidies	tidied	tidier	tidiest	tidiness
penny	-	pennies	-	-	-	penniless

happy	happiness	happily
merry	merriment	merrily
pity	pitiful	pitiless
city	cities	citizen
funny	funnily	
memory	memories	memorial
victory	victories	victorious
dictionary	dictionaries	



Be careful when a word ends - Vy (-vowel/y). There is no change when you add a suffix.

Examples

day	days	daytime		(Exception: daily)	
boy	boys	boyhood			
grey	greys	greyness			
valley	valleys				
decay	decays	decaying	decayed		
enjoy	enjoys	enjoying	enjoyed	enjoyment	
employ	employs	employing	employed	employment	employer



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