SPELLING TIPS

If you find spelling difficult, you may sympathise with the writer of the following poem:

I take it you already know

Of tough and bough and cough and dough?

Others may stumble, but not you,

On hiccough, thorough, cough and through.

Well done! And now you wish, perhaps,

To learn of less familiar traps?

Beware of heard, a dreadful word,

That looks like beard and sounds like bird,

And dead: it's said like bed not bead –

For goodness sake don't call it deed!

Watch out for meat and great and threat –

They rhyme with feet and straight and debt.

A moth is not a moth in mother,

Nor both in bother, broth in brother,

And here is not a match for there,

Nor dear and fear for bear and pear.

Just look them up – and goose and choose

And cork and work and cord and word

And font and front and word and sword

And do and go and thwart and cart –

Come, come, I've hardly made a start!

A dreadful language! Man alive!

I'd mastered it when I was five.
This brief guide starts with some general background information on the development of the English spelling system and the reasons why English spelling can seem so difficult – especially if you rely solely on sound as a guide to spelling. It goes on to suggest other, non-sound based, strategies for learning spellings. Much of this information has been adapted from the BBC publication *Spelling It Out*, by Rhiannedd Pratley. It also includes some guidance on checking your spellings in Word.

**WHY IS ENGLISH SPELLING SO DIFFICULT?**

Many people find English spelling difficult because the way we spell words is not always consistent with how we pronounce them.

Many apparent inconsistencies are due to the way that the English language has developed from a rich variety of sources.

Different peoples have invaded or settled in parts of the British Isles over the years:

- the Anglo Saxons (Germanic Influence)
- the Vikings (Scandinavian influence)
- the Normans (French/Latin influence)

These people have introduced different words into our spoken language and also influenced our spelling system through their own practices of putting sounds into writing.

Increased contact with other parts of the world has given us numerous words from other languages. Our spelling system reflects some of the spelling peculiarities of these other languages.

The growth of Christianity (with its origins in the Roman Empire) and the renewed interest in Greek and Roman culture during the Renaissance meant that Latin (the language of the Romans) had a great influence on our language. Many variable endings of words stem from the Latin grammatical system.

The development of the printing press has also left its mark. Early printers developed many "rules" in an attempt to make spelling more consistent for the wider audience they were trying to reach. Many of the rules were largely to do with the practicalities of the printing press. For example, it became common to add an "e" to words to fill a line of print. They also used rules from their own languages – e.g. the "h" in "ghost" is due to the influence of Flemish printers, whose word was "gheest".

Dictionaries have played an important part in settling the spelling of words. However, they tend to record accepted usage at the time; as usage constantly changes, the distinction between "right" and "wrong" is not always clear.
The spelling system and the spoken word have both changed over the years under these many influences – but not always in line with each other. Any attempt, therefore, to understand English spelling on the basis of a sound link alone is bound to be confusing.

**WHY SOUNDING IT OUT CAN LEAD YOU ASTRAY**

- When the alphabet we now use first came into use in the 7th Century AD our written language corresponded fairly clearly with the spoken language of the time, but the relationship between sound and symbol has grown more remote.

- Every English letter corresponds to more than one sound (or silence).

- The same sound can be made in many different ways – e.g. the “aw” sound in floor, war, more, sure, water, caught, fought, taught.

- Hundreds of words in English sound the same but look different – e.g. here/hear; where/wear; some/sum; way/weigh.

- People speak with different accents!

Relying on **sound alone** can be confusing, although sometimes deliberately mispronouncing a word (e.g. wed-nes-day) can be helpful. Spelling makes more sense if you focus on **meaning** and use strategies that get away from the sound of the word and involve the other senses as well.

Whatever strategy you use, focus on the part of the word that causes you problems – there’s no point wasting time learning the parts you know. You will, of course, need to make sure you get hold of a correct version of the spelling you’re working on first!

**LOOK FOR A CLUE IN THE MEANING**

**Words with a shared origin and meaning** often share a spelling pattern. The sound of the “bold” parts of the following words can either not be heard at all or is not clear – but there is a clue in other words that belong to the same family:

- **Medicine** (from the Latin, Medicus – doctor) belongs with medical/medication.

- **Sign** (from the Latin signum – a mark or token)) belongs with signal, signature and ensign.

- **Admiration** – link with admire

- **Inflammation** – link with inflame
**Word endings**, or suffixes, often contain meaning:

- *-ed* tells us something happened in the past (in some words it might sound like "t", e.g. talked, or "id", e.g. decided)
- *-ette* means the female or a small version of something – e.g. launderette, maisonette
- *-ly* tells us the way something is done – e.g. slowly, cheerfully, sadly

**Word beginnings**, or prefixes, are units of meaning. If you are unsure about spelling the beginning of a word, think carefully about its meaning and use the list below to guide your spelling. The prefix sometimes changes depending on the word that follows – see the forms in brackets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefix Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ab</strong> away from, out of</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ad</strong> to</td>
<td>Adhesive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ante</strong> before</td>
<td>Antenatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti</strong> against</td>
<td>Antidepressant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Auto</strong> self, by oneself</td>
<td>Automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bene</strong> well</td>
<td>Benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bi</strong> two, twice</td>
<td>Bifocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cata</strong> below, down</td>
<td>Catacomb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Co</strong> together</td>
<td>Co-operate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Com (con)</strong> together, with</td>
<td>Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contra</strong> against</td>
<td>Contradict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>De</strong> below, down</td>
<td>Descend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dia</strong> through, across</td>
<td>Diagonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dis</strong> apart, removal</td>
<td>Disperse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ex (e)</strong> away from, out of</td>
<td>Expel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epi</strong> on</td>
<td>Epidermal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hetero</strong> unlike</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homo</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyper</td>
<td>over, in excess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypo</td>
<td>below, down</td>
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<tr>
<td>In</td>
<td>not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infra</td>
<td>below, beneath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter</td>
<td>between, among, across, through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mega</td>
<td>huge, powerful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mis</td>
<td>wrong, ill</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi</td>
<td>many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omni</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ortho</td>
<td>straight, upright, true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palaeo</td>
<td>old, ancient, prehistoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per</td>
<td>through, across, by means of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peri</td>
<td>around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poly</td>
<td>many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro</td>
<td>before, in front of, forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re</td>
<td>again, repeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retro</td>
<td>backwards, after, behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub</td>
<td>below, under, part of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tele</td>
<td>far, distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans</td>
<td>across, through</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LOOK FOR COMMON LETTER PATTERNS

All English words are made from only 26 letters. Many of the same letter combinations appear over and over again.

Collect words with shared letter strings. Try combining them in a silly sentence or paragraph:

Example. When I caught my naughty daughter with a draught bitter she just laughed so I taught her a lesson.

Example. I’ve been through a tough time with this cough. I’ve bought some cough syrup and I’ve brought up lots of phlegm. I do feel rough.

Look for words within words

Often smaller words can be found within larger words. Use the smaller words to help you remember the longer words.

Examples: Opportunity (port, unit); Management (man, age, men)

TRY MEMORY TRICKS

A mnemonic is a memory trick – it can be used to help you remember a difficult spelling: The ruder or funnier the better!

First write out the word you want to learn. Check your version against the correct spelling. Write it out again correctly and underline the part you had a problem with. Now invent a mnemonic to help you remember the difficult part.

Examples of memory tricks:

It is necessary to have one collar and two socks

Emarrassing has two rosy cheeks and two scarlet cheeks.

A secretary must keep a secret.

There is a bus in business.

BEAUTiful – Big Elephants Are Ugly

Never separate a paratrooper from his parachute

There’s a U in four and fourteen – but U can’t be forty!

The CIA have special agents They left their money to their son and heir
Affect is the action, Effect is the result

Compliment puts you in the limelight, complement adds something to make it enough

RHYTHM - Has Your Two Hips Moving

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

Illustrated words

Design a picture around the difficult part of a spelling.

Example: Draw a picture of a parachute around the "para" in separate.

USE SOME MUSCLE!

- The muscles in our writing hand learn movement patterns.
- Writing is an important part of learning spellings
- Use joined writing when practising a spelling
- Certain letter patterns (er, ea, ed, ai, able, ing, etc.) are common to many words - practise words containing the same letter patterns together
- Use LOOK, COVER, WRITE, CHECK
- Choose a word you want to learn – make sure it’s correctly spelt!
- Look at the word – study it to build up a picture of the whole word in your mind. (Say it aloud, too, if it helps.)
- Cover the word.
- Write it in one go without looking back (say it aloud as you write if it helps). (If you get stuck, cross it out and start from the beginning.)
- Check your version against the original.
- If you got it wrong, identify the problem area and pay special attention to that next time
Practise the word regularly

WHAT ABOUT SPELLING RULES?

There are some rules about English spelling but they are often very complicated and there are often exceptions! A few useful rules are given below:

When you add "all" to the beginning of a word, use one "l"

- e.g. although, also, always, almost

When you add "full" to the end of a word, use one "l"

- e.g. wonderful, faithful, hateful, useful

You only ever add "ly" to the end of a word, not "lly". If the word ends in "l" to start with, you finish up with "lly" – e.g. faithful – faithfully; careful – carefully.

Words ending in "y" often change the "y" to "i" before a suffix is added

- e.g. happy – happily, funny – funniest

  Exceptions: where "ing" is added
  e.g. worry – worrying, fly – flying

Words ending in "e" often lose the "e" before a suffix that starts with a vowel

- e.g. believe – believable, expense – expensive, hope – hoping

  Exceptions – some words ending in "ce” or “ge” keep the "e" before “ous” and “able”
  e.g. notice – noticeable, courage – courageous

Checking your spellings in Word

Beware!

The spell checker will not pick out words that are “wrong” but correctly spelled. It will not always present the right word in the selection list. It can’t help you to choose the right word from the list.

Put off by the red wiggly line?
If you want to finish typing your ideas before checking spellings, you can turn off the spell checker! See attached sheet on changing spelling and grammar options.

Word is already set up to automatically correct some words. You can add your own “problem” words, and even groups of words that you use a lot, to “Autocorrect” to save time. See attached sheets on adding words to Autocorrect and saving phrases.

Fed up of using an easy word because you can’t spell the one you want?

Use the thesaurus – highlight the word, go to Tools, Language, Thesaurus.

Fed up of correcting the same problem words?