SPELLING IN ENGLISH

Use patterns to help you spell correctly
In English, spelling and pronunciation don’t always match. While there are many baffling aspects of spelling, there are a few useful patterns that can help.

TIP
- Use i before e except after c.
- Use silent e to make sounds long.
- Use double consonants to keep sounds short.
- Change y to i and add es and ed.
- Add es after o and for an extra sound.

Use i before e except after c
There’s an old rhyme that helps us remember to write thief with ie and ceiling with ei. It goes like this:

Use i before e
Except after c
And in words that sound ay
Like neighbour and weigh.

Use silent e to make sounds long
We can think of vowels (a, e, i, o and u) as short (e.g. the i in bit), or long (e.g. the i in bite), depending on the time they take to say. Adding an extra vowel (e.g. silent e) after a consonant lengthens the sound:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short vowels Vowel-consonant</th>
<th>Long vowels Vowel-consonant-e</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hat</td>
<td>hate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pet</td>
<td>Pete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fin</td>
<td>fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mop</td>
<td>mope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut</td>
<td>cute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use double consonants to keep sounds short
You might have wondered why words sometimes change their spelling when endings like en, ed and ing are added. We can keep a single vowel sound short when it is followed by a consonant-vowel by adding an extra consonant like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short sounds Vowel-consonant</th>
<th>Long sounds Vowel-cc-vowel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>writ</td>
<td>written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plan</td>
<td>planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hop</td>
<td>hopping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This principle generally applies to stressed (emphasised) syllables rather than unstressed syllables. Hence we have two ns in penned (a single stressed syllable) but only one n in opened (where o receives the stress).

Change y to i and add es and ed
When we have a consonant plus y at the end of words (e.g. steady), we change the y to i and add es (e.g. steadies) and ed (e.g. steadied) to change the form of the word. This pattern doesn’t apply when a vowel comes before the y (consider plays and played), but it generally applies otherwise. See the table overleaf:
Add es after o and for an extra sound
There are other words that add es when they change form. Words that end in o (e.g. go) typically add es (e.g. goes). So too do words where it would be too difficult to pronounce the final s without an extra syllable. The es signals this extra sound:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>es endings</th>
<th>ed endings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>party</td>
<td>parties</td>
<td>partied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>study</td>
<td>studies</td>
<td>studied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worry</td>
<td>worries</td>
<td>worried</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TIP**

Get a spelling journal and note the spelling of five new words every day. Test yourself or get a friend to test you regularly.

Be careful with commonly confused words!
It’s easy to confuse words that have different spellings and meanings, but identical or almost identical sounds. The only way to avoid confusion is to learn them by heart. Examples include:

**Accept/except** – If we accept (agree) that plagiarism is wrong, we will reference all ideas except (excluding) our own.

**Adapt/adopt** – Many students have to adopt (take on) new habits in order to adapt to (adjust to) university study.

**Affect/effect** – Researchers are studying how we affect (influence) the environment and the extent to which this is causing effects (results) such as climate change.

**Assure/ensure/insure** – The company assured (promised) them that it had ensured (made sure) the car was insured (secured against damages).

**It’s/its** – Because the university has changed its (the ones belonging to it) courses, it’s (it is) much easier to study a broad range of units.

**Cite/site/sight** – They cited (referred to) Lonely Planet, indicating that sites (places) in Australia’s southwest had been recognised as the most magnificent sights (views) to see worldwide.

**Their/they’re/there** – Although they initially lost their (pertaining to them) way, they managed to get back on track, and now they’re (they are) almost there (at that place).

**TIP**

Fun ways to improve your spelling include playing Scrabble, Boggle and Hangman, or doing crossword puzzles.

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