

Rutgers Learning Centers

At Camden Campus

SPELLING

American English is a continuously growing language. Students complain that there is no order to the system of spelling, but there are some general rules that apply.

§ Rules about Pronunciation:

Use your dictionary to look up each new word you hear or read. While looking at the word, clearly pronounce each syllable as written. Do not add or delete letters.

Athlete (*ath' lete*) has two (not three) syllables.

Sophomore (*soph' o more*) has three (not two) syllables.

Some English word endings frequently are misspelled because they are mispronounced. Notice the sound difference in the following examples; the sound differences will help you to spell similar word constructions correctly:

-tian	-tain	-ssion	-sion
<i>(chun)</i>	<i>(tun)</i>	<i>(shun)</i>	<i>(zhun)</i>
christian	mountain	profession	occasion

§ Rules about Adding Prefixes and Suffixes:

Words are constructed around a root/base. Prefixes, placed before the root, and suffixes, placed after the root, alter the root's meaning.

Prefixes: *dis-*, *mis-*, *un-* end with **one** consonant, "s" and "n." When attaching these prefixes to a root that begins with the same letter, the consonant "s" and "n" will be doubled. If the root begins with another letter, there will be only one.

dis # sent	dissent	dis # appear	disappear
dis # similar	dissimilar	mis # spell	misspell
mis # place	misplace	mis # understand	misunderstand
un # natural	unnatural	un # usual	unusual
un # necessary	unnecessary	un # even	uneven

Suffixes: *-ness*, *-ly* are added with no change to the root/base **but**, if the base word ends in "y," change the "y" to "i" before adding the suffix.

mean # ness	meanness	happy	happ # i ness	happiness
fruitful # ly	fruitfully	silly	silli # i ness	silliness
hungry # ly	hungrily	guilty	guilty # ly	guiltily

When the suffix **-ing** is added to a word ending in "y," keep the "y":

study + ing	studying	marry + ing	marrying	play + ing	playing
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§ **Rules about Doubling Final Consonants:**

When the **word has one syllable** and ends in a vowel plus consonant, double the consonant before adding a suffix that begins with a vowel:

big # est	biggest	rob # er	robber
drop # ing	dropping	shop # ed	shopped

When the word has **two or more syllables**, double the final consonant only if the word is accented (pronunciation is stressed) on the last syllable.

re fer' ed	referred	re pel' ed	repelled
con trol' able	controllable	ad mit' ance	admittance
be gin' er	beginner	oc cur' ing	occurring

§ **Rules about Final Silent "E":**

Drop the final "e" in words taking a **suffix beginning with a vowel**: *

hope # ed	hoped	like # ed	liked	create # or	creator
value # able	valuable	love # able	lovable	write # ing	writing

* This rule has exceptions based on pronunciation or meaning. Consider why:

knowledge # able	knowledgeable	courage # ous	courageous
dye # ing	dyeing	singe #ing	singeing

Keep the final "e" in words taking a **suffix beginning with a consonant**:

hope # ful	hopeful	like # ness	likeness
shape # less	shapeless	terse # ness	terseness
nine # ty	ninety		

Some common exceptions are: truly, ninth, argument.

§ **Rules about "I" Before "E":**

We've all heard the ditty:

"I" before "E", except after "C",
or when sounded like "A",
as in "neighbor" or "weigh"

CONSIDER: believe, field, priest, chief, thief, niece
BUT: receive, deceive, conceit, receipt, perceived
weight, freight, sleigh, Raleigh, reign

§ **Rules about Proofreading:**

Many spelling errors are due to carelessness. Always proof your work at least twice before handing in written assignments. If you create a noun form from a verb, or a verb form by changing a noun, make sure that the created word is a correct form by checking a dictionary. **Beware of relying on spell-checkers in word processing programs.**

§ **USE THE DICTIONARY:**

Good spelling comes about through practice and reinforcement. If you know you frequently misspell the same words, make a list of their correct spellings and use the correct form in several papers. Good spelling will become a habit.