

Some Spelling Rules

At its best, English spelling can be perplexing, especially for non-native speakers and writers. The following rules and suggestions are offered as aids. You will always be able to find exceptions to these rules, but most writers find them helpful.

Some Spelling Rules

i before *e*, except after *c*

achieve, believe, bier, brief, hygiene, grief, thief, friend, grieve, chief,
fiend, patience, pierce, priest
ceiling, conceive, deceive, perceive, receipt,
receive, deceit, conceit

. . . and in words that rhyme with hay. . .

neighbor, freight, beige, sleigh, weight, vein, and weigh

. . . and some other exceptions. . . .

either, neither, feint, foreign, forfeit, height, leisure,
weird, seize

Some Spelling Rules

*A final **y** changes to **i** when an ending is added.*

supply becomes supplies

worry becomes worried

merry becomes merrier

... except when that ending is -ing...

crying, studying

*... And when the **y** is preceded by a vowel...*

obeyed, saying

Some Spelling Rules

*A silent **e** is dropped when adding an ending that begins with a vowel ...*

advance + *-ing* = advancing
surprise + *-ing* = surprising

... but kept when the ending begins with a consonant ...

advancement, likeness

*... unless the **e** is preceded by a vowel. ...*

argue + *-ment* = argument
true + *-ly* = truly

Some Spelling Rules

Adding a prefix seldom changes the spelling of a word.

misspelled

unnecessary

dissatisfied

disinterested

misinform

Some Spelling Rules

We form plurals in English by adding

-s or -es.

shoes

porches

boxes

bushes

blitzes

For words ending in a consonant plus **-y**, change the **-y** to **-i** and add **-es**. For proper nouns, keep the **-y**.

toys

companies

Kennedys

Some Spelling Rules

When adding an ending to a word that ends in a consonant, we double that consonant when the ending begins with a vowel and the last syllable of the word is accented and that syllable ends in a single vowel followed by a single consonant.

Now that's a mouthful! Let's look at some examples. . . .

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ADMIT + *-ed* = ADMITTED

ADMIT is accented on the last syllable and the final consonant is preceded by a vowel, so we double the *t* before adding, for instance, an *-ing* or *-ed*: admitting, admitted.

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FLAP + *-ed* = FLAPPED

FLAP contains only one syllable, which means that syllable has to be accented. The final consonant is preceded by a vowel, so we double that final consonant: flapped, flapping.

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COUNSEL + *-ing* = COUNSELING

COUNSEL contains two syllables and the final consonant is preceded by a vowel, but the word is accented on the first syllable, so we don't double the consonant before adding an ending.

Some Spelling Rules

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BEGIN + *-ing* = BEGINNING

BEGIN contains two syllables and the final consonant is preceded by a vowel, and the word is accented on the last syllable, so we double the consonant before adding an ending: beginner, beginning

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DESPAIR + *-ed* = DESPAIRED

DESPAIR contains two syllables, and the final syllable is accented, but the final consonant is preceded by two vowels, not a single vowel, so we don't double that final consonant when we add an ending.

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Becoming a better speller is a matter of personal commitment and finding your own method to add this important skill to your writing arsenal. Refer to the Guide to Grammar and Writing for recommendations on working on spelling. Also, take the spelling quizzes on the List of Interactive Quizzes.

GOOD LUCK!

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