

Better spelling

Spelling can be tricky but with a little care, you can get better at it.

Here are six ways to improve your spelling:

Way to spell	Explanation	Example
Sound it out.	Carefully say the word out loud and make sure you write down the word sound-by-sound.	<i>dog</i> has three sounds: <i>d - o - g</i> <i>thank</i> has four sounds: <i>th - a - n - k</i>
Break it down and sound it out.	Break the word into syllables. Say each syllable, and write down each one.	<i>Target</i> has two syllables: <i>tar - get</i> <i>Understand</i> has three syllables: <i>un - der - stand</i>
Find the root word.	Some long words are just short words with bits stuck on the front or the end.	The root of <i>undo</i> is <i>do</i> : <i>un</i> has been stuck on the front. The root of <i>quickly</i> is <i>quick</i> - <i>ly</i> has been stuck on the end.
Memory tricks.	Invent memory games to help you remember hard words.	<i>Rhythm helps your two hips move (rhythm).</i>
Look, say, cover, write, check.	Look carefully at the word, say it, cover it up, write it down, check if you are right. Repeat this if you have got the word wrong.	Here are examples of words that you might have to learn in this way: <i>eight, soldier, yacht.</i>
Say it like it is.	Some words have silent letters. When you say these words, say their silent letters too.	For example, <i>Wed - nes - day, muscle, stomach.</i>

You can find out more about these six ways of spelling on the next pages.

Sound it out

- Think of a word you want to spell. Say the word out loud, and slowly. Make sure you say every bit of the word properly. For example, the word *blank* starts with a *b* sound and ends with a *k* sound.
- Now write down the word you want to spell. Make sure you write letters for every sound in the word. For example, you can hear that the word *blank* has five sounds:

b	l	a	n	k
---	---	---	---	---

TRY IT OUT

- ✓ Say these words out loud and slowly: *cat* [3], *tennis* [5], *remember* [7]. As you say each word, count its sounds on your fingers. The numbers in brackets show the number of sounds you should have found for each word.
- ✓ Look at the list of words on page 11. Choose six of the words. Say the first word out loud, and slowly. Count all the sounds on your fingers.
- ✓ Now try to write down the word without looking at it.
- ✓ Now do the same for the other five words.

WATCH OUT: There are different ways of saying some words and so you might disagree with others about how many sounds are in each word. How many sounds are there in these words? *car average category*



Spelling

Break it down and sound it out

This is like sounding it out, but easier.

How to do it:

1. Take a word and break it into its parts (or syllables).
2. Say each part out loud, clearly and slowly.
3. Now try to spell each part.

For example, say *understand* slowly. You will find it has three parts (syllables): *un - der - stand*. If you try spelling each part and put the parts together, then you will probably manage to spell the whole word.

TRY IT OUT

- ✓ Try breaking down and sounding out these words:

assembly suggest ordinary Saturday finally

- ✓ Look at the words on page 11. Choose three of them and try breaking them down and sounding them out.

Find the root (or 'stem') word

Some words that sound difficult are really just ordinary words with bits added on.

For example, *jumped* is just *jump* with an *-ed* on the end.

- *Jump* is the *root word* of *jumped*: *-ed* goes on the end of lots of words.
- *Sudden* is the *root word* of *suddenly*: *-ly* goes on the end of lots of words.
- *Do* is the *root word* of *undo*: *un-* goes on the front of lots of words.
- *Appear* is the *root* of *disappear*: *dis-* goes on the front of lots of words.

NOTE

A bit added onto a root word is called an **affix**. An affix on the front of a root word is called a **prefix**. An affix on the end of a root word is called a **suffix**. *Fix* is the root word inside affixes.

TRY IT OUT

1. Look at the six words below. Find and write out the stem word in each one. The first stem word is underlined for you.

slowly helped persuading foreigner unfamiliar disappear

2. Here are some common affixes:

Prefixes: un- dis- pre- under- super-

Suffixes: -able -ing -ed -ful -less

Write down one word for each of the ten affixes above.

Here are two examples:

- undo
- displeasure

Can you think of any other common affixes?



Spelling

Memory tricks ('Mnemonics')

You can remember some spellings by making up fun rules for them. These fun rules are called *mnemonics*. (The first letter *m* in that word is silent.)

For example, you can remember the word *because* by making each of its letters the start of words in a strange sentence: **B**ig **e**lephants **c**an't **a**lways **u**se **s**mall **e**xits. If you can remember the strange sentence you will also remember how to spell *because*. Of course, elephants never forget.

TRY IT OUT

Try to think of a fun way to remember each of the words below.

occur *weight* *definite* *business* *government*



Look, say, cover, write, check

When you try to spell a word can you see it in your head?

Do you know when a word looks right or wrong?

It is worth learning the look of words. Here is how to do it:

- Find a word you want to spell and copy it down carefully
- Look at it closely
- Say the word carefully out loud
- Cover the word up
- Write the word without looking at it. Just remember what the word looks like.
- Check that you have spelled the word right
- If it is wrong, then do it all again. Start by looking closely at the word.

**TIP**

Use this *Look, say, cover, write, check* method to firm up your spelling of all words – even ones you have learned to spell using other methods.

TRY IT OUT

Draw a table like the one below, but big enough to give you plenty of room.

Copy the word you want to work on in the first column. Cover the word and write again. Keep writing it until you get it right – at least once. See the example in the table.

identity	identity	identity	

**TIP**

1. Get someone else to check that you have got it right.
2. Cross out wrong spellings: crossing out tells your eyes that the spelling is wrong.

Say it like it is

Some words have silent letters. For example, there is a *c* in *science*, but we don't say it. *Know* has a silent *k* and *w*. Try saying *science* and *know*, saying their silent letters out loud: *sky-ence; k-no-w*.

Spelling

TIP

You might feel silly doing this, but if your friends join in, then you can share the fun.

TRY IT OUT

In the table below there are some words that are tricky to spell because of their silent letters. Their silent letters are underlined>.

- ✓ Say each word out loud.
- ✓ Make sure you say every part of the word.

The correct spelling	Say it like this ...
Wednesday	Wed- <u>nes</u> -day
average	av- <u>er</u> -age
parliament	par- <u>li</u> -a-ment
chocolate	choc- <u>o</u> -late
interesting	in- <u>ter</u> -est-ing
business	bus- <u>i</u> -ness
answer	an- <u>sw</u> er

LOOK OUT!

We don't all say every word the same way. People have different accents, and there are lots of different accents. For example, some of us do say the first 'e' in *average*. Some say *path* while others seem to say *pahth*. There are no right accents, just different ones.

A useful spelling list

Here are some of the tricky spellings you should try to learn before secondary school:

A	disappoint	ingredient	R
accommodate	E	interrupt	relevant
achieve	environment	K	rhyme
ancient	exaggerate	knowledge	rhythm
apparent	explanation	L	S
average	F	language	secretary
awkward	familiar	leisure	soldier
B	foreign	M	stomach
bruise	forty	muscle	T
business	frequently	N	temperature
C	G	necessary	thorough
category	government	O	U
character	guarantee	occupy	understand
committee	H	opportunity	V
conscience	height	P	vegetable
conscious	helpful	parliament	W
correspond	I	persuade	weight
D	identity	physical	Y
definite	immediately	prejudice	yacht
dictionary	independent		

Spelling

Final tips and advice on spelling

1. If you have trouble spelling a word ...
 - Try one of the six spelling strategies. Choose the best strategy for the word you need to spell.
 - Use the *Look, say, cover, write, check* method to 'firm up' your spelling of all words – even ones you have learned to spell with other methods.
2. Here are **two more things** you can do to find out how to spell a word:
 - Find the word in a dictionary and copy it down.
 - Ask a friend or someone in your family.
3. **Don't guess at spellings.** Use a good method, and you will spell better than by just guessing. If you spell a word sensibly, then anyone reading your work will know what you mean, even if you have got the spelling a bit wrong.
4. **Don't spend a long time worrying over a spelling.** It's better to spell the best you can (perhaps even just concentrating on the first and last letter), and then carry on with your writing. You can always come back to the word later on.
5. **The internet and dictionaries.** If you want to practise your spelling more, take a look online. There are lots of fun spelling games there, and you can also look up spellings in a dictionary – a 'real' one, or an online dictionary.



Plural

Plural means more than one. The *plural* of *cat* is *cats*.

Plurals are spelled in different ways. The six main ways are:

1. Add *s* to the end of the word. (This is the rule for most words.)
2. Add *es* to the end of the word, e.g. *churches*.
3. Take away the last *y* and add *ies*, e.g. *baby* becomes *babies*.
4. If a word ends in a vowel + *y*, then just add *s*, eg. *days*, *boys*, *guys*, *alleys*.
5. Change in surprising ways, e.g. *man/men*; *woman/women*.
6. Change nothing at all, e.g. *fish*, *sheep*.

NOTE

Consonant and vowel

Most letters are **consonants**. Five letters are vowels: *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*.

Y can be a consonant or a vowel. It is a consonant in *you*, but a vowel in *rhyme*. Can you hear the difference?



Spelling

Adding -s

Most words simply add *s* onto their end to make the plural.

Adding -es

If a word ends in a *sh*, *ss*, *ch* or *ks* sound, we have to add an *e* as well as an *s* to make the plural. Here are some examples:

singular	plural	singular	plural
marsh	marshes	bush	bushes
boss	bosses	kiss	kisses
church	churches	match	matches
fox	foxes	tax	taxes

Taking away -y and adding -ies

If a word ends in a *consonant + y* (see below) then to make the plural we usually take away the *y* and replace it with *ies*:

singular	plural	singular	plural
baby	babies	fly	flies
forty	forties	nappy	nappies

Change in surprising ways

Some plurals do not end in -s. Some plurals are quite odd! For example:

singular	plural	singular	plural
child	children	person	people
foot	feet	goose	geese

TRY IT OUT

Copy out the table below and write in the correct plurals.

If you are not sure, then look carefully again at the rules on pages 12-15.

singular	plural	singular	plural
hutch		ray	
car		torch	
box		cake	
family		brush	
sack		book	
bus		pulley	
tooth		mouse	

Spelling

Homophones

Some words make the same sound as each other, but are spelled differently. For example, the words, *to*, *too* and *two* all sound the same, but they mean very different things. Words that have the same sound but different meanings are called homophones.

Here are some common homophones:

to (as in 'towards')	two (the number 2)	too (as in 'too much')
there (as in 'over there')	they're (= they are)	their (= belonging to them)
write (for example, with a pen)	right (= correct)	
I (me)	eye (to see with)	
see (through your eye)	sea (next to the beach)	

TRY IT OUT

1. For each of the words below, write down a homophone.
For example, *bear/bare*.

new *here* *one* *four* *made* *band*

2. Now write a sentence for each of your homophones. For example:

I cannot bear cabbage.

The walls were bare.

Homonyms

Some words look and sound exactly the same, but mean different things. These words are called homonyms. Here are some examples:

rose (flower/past tense of *rise*)

fit (healthy/connect neatly)

NOTE

The words *homophone* and *homonym* are ancient Greek words. *Homophone* means 'same sound'. *Homonym* means 'same name'. The ancient Greek for 'same' is *homos*.

LOOK OUT!

People in different areas have different accents, and so some words will be homophones in one place, but not in another. For example, in some places, these word pairs are homophones: *sales/sells*; *our/are*.

Do YOU say these word pairs in the same way? *Homophones* are about sounds, and so are accents.



Spelling

Here are four more rules to help you spell better:

- ✓ The disappearing e. If a word ends in -e, then take away the e before adding -ing (e.g. making, typing).
- ✓ Short-long, long-short. If a vowel has a short sound, then it is followed by a double (long) consonant.
- ✓ -able/-ible. If the stem of a word makes sense on its own, add -able (e.g. washable). If it doesn't make sense on its own, then add -ible (e.g. possible, legible).
- ✓ -tion/-sion/-cian. Add -tion to most stems, especially if the stem ends in -t or -e. Add -sion after most stems that end in -d. Add -cian after stems that are to do with jobs.

Short-long, long-short

Remember: the vowels are a, e, i, o, u (and sometimes y). Each vowel has short and long sounds:

Vowel	Examples of short sound	Examples of long sound
a	cap, back, mad, an	cape, bake, ace, made
e	pet, send, red, neck	Peter, scene, female
i	pin, kit, him, give	pine, kite, kind, lined
o	hope, shock, block, con	hop, open, cone, only
u	up, trust, muck, butter	Luton, cute, duty, brute

Here are some words that follow the short/long, long/short patterns:

Vowel	Short-long	Long-short
a	happy, ca <u>nn</u> ed	la <u>te</u> r, ca <u>ne</u> d
e	bet <u>te</u> r	Pe <u>te</u> r, me <u>ie</u> r
i	wri <u>tt</u> en, ri <u>dd</u> en	wri <u>ti</u> ng, ri <u>di</u> ng
o	hop <u>pi</u> ng, <u>off</u>	hop <u>pi</u> ng, <u>ope</u> n
u	ru <u>nn</u> er, ta <u>pp</u> ed	tu <u>na</u> , ta <u>pe</u> d

Normally, when a vowel is followed by a single (short) consonant it makes a long sound: e.g. *taping*. When a vowel is followed by a double (long) consonant it makes a short sound: e.g. *tapping*.



Spelling

-able or -ible?

- If the stem of the word makes sense on its own, then it adds *-able*.
- If the stem of the word doesn't make sense on its own, then it adds *-ible*.

The *stem word* of *eatable* is *eat*. The stem word of *playable* is *play*. *Eat* and *play* are whole words on their own, so they add *-able*. *Sens* is the stem of *sensible*, but there is no such English word as *sens*, and that is why *sensible* is spelt with an *i*.

Here are some more *-ible* and *-able* words that stick to these rules:

eatable	edible	audible	playable
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TRY IT OUT

Look at the stems below. Which would you add: *-able* or *-ible*?

laugh- *do-* *terr-* *understand-* *horr-* *illeg-*

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

-tion, -sion, or -cian?

These three endings sound the same, so how can you know which one to put on the end of different stems? Here are some guidelines:

- Add *-tion* after most stems, especially if the stem ends in *-t* or *-e* (e.g. *distract/distraction, hesitate/hesitation*).
- Add *-sion* after stems that end in *-d* (e.g. *expand/expansion*), or where the word would only make sense with the ending (e.g. *passion*).
- Add *-cian* after stems that are to do with jobs (e.g. *musician*).

There are a few exceptions, but here are some more words that stick to the rules:

-tion	-sion	-cian
creation	ascension	magician
ignition	pension	beautician

