

Princess Frederica CE VA Primary School



Helpful rules and conventions in English spelling

*Based on the National Literacy Strategy Spelling Bank,
1999*

Spelling Rules, Tips and Conventions

Adding ing

- Most words just add **ing**
- Words ending in **e** drop the **e** to add **ing**.
- Words with a short vowel before the final letter double the final letter

Trying, hoping
shopping

Words ending le

- **le** is much more common than **el** or **al**
- It is easy to distinguish between **cel** and **cle** because the **c** is always soft in the former and hard in the latter
- The vast majority of **le** endings are preceded by letters which feature an ascender or descender.
- **al** words include **pedal, metal, cannibal, medal, petal**, and the **al** suffix appears in words like **medical** and **magical**.
- **el** was originally a suffix *meaning small*. Examples include **satchel, label, model, angel, parcel, quarrel, cancel, excel, channel, funnel and tunnel**.
- There are a huge number of other **le** words which are part of a split digraph, e.g. **sale, tale, whole, mile**, etc. These have been excluded from the list. This particular **le** ending does not produce an extra syllable in the way it does in the list above.

Parcel, particle

Prefix un, de, dis, re, pre

- The word prefix has the prefix **pre**, and can help in your definition.
- **un** means 'not'; **de** means 'making the opposite of'; **dis** means 'not', 'the opposite of'; **re** means 'again'; **pre** means 'before'.
- A hyphen sometimes appears between the prefix and the word, e.g. **de-ice**

Dishonest, rework,
undo

How words change when er and est are added

- Most words just add **er** and **est**.
- Words ending in **e** drop the **e** and take the suffix.
- Words containing a short vowel before the final consonant double the consonant.
- Words ending in **y** change **y** to **i** to add the suffix.

Happier, happiest,
cleaner, shopper

Adding y

Most words just add **y**.

Double the final consonant if it is preceded by a short (rap) vowel.

Words ending in digraph **e** drop the **e** to add the **y**.

Sunny, rainy, flaky

Adding s to words

Most words add **s**.

Add **es** if the word ends in a hissing/buzzing/shushing sound. Another way to remember this is to add **es** if you can hear an extra syllable when you make it plural. (The **e** is added to make the plural easier on the tongue, putting a buffer between too many **s** sounds.)

Words ending in **e** – just add **s**.

Words ending in **y** – add **s** if the final letter is preceded by a vowel. If not, change the **y** to **i** and add **es**.

Busses, ponies, hopes

Silent letters

- Silent **b** occurs after **m**, before **t**; silent **k** and silent **g** are found before **n**; silent **l** follows vowels **a**, **o** and **ou** – it produces a flat-sounding vowel; silent **w** often precedes **r**.
- The term 'silent letter' is perhaps misleading because **kn** is a digraph representing one phoneme in the same way that **th** or **es** do. Interestingly, however, most of the examples above have at some time in history been pronounced out loud, and have been silenced by fashion and language evolution. Changing pronunciation accounts for many unexpected aspects of the English spelling system.

Knuckle, gnomes,
write, rhyme, plumb
calf

Ly, ful and less at the end of words

- **ly**, **ful** and **less** are consonant suffixes. In most cases, the suffix is added without adaptation to the root word, except for words ending in **y**, which change to an **i**.
- **er** and **able** are vowel suffixes. If the root word ends in an **e** then it must be dropped before the suffix is added, e.g. describe + able = describable. If it ends in **y**, change the **y** to an **i**.
- **ly** means 'in this manner'.
- **ful** means 'full of'.
- **less** means 'without'.
- **er** means 'for' or 'belonging to'.
- **able** means 'able to'

Kindly, wishful, careless, teacher,
reliable

To recognise and spell the prefixes mis, non, ex, co, anti

- **mis** means 'wrong', 'false'; **non** means 'not', 'opposite of'; **ex** means 'out' or 'outside of'; **co** means 'joint', 'together'; **anti** means 'against'

Double letters

- Double the letter after a short (rap) vowel in the middle of words.
- No words use **hh**, **jj**, **kk**, **qq**, **vv**, **ww**, **xx**.
- Some imported words use **cc** (**broccoli**, **cappuccino**).

Writing, written, hoping,
hopping, coma, comma

Adding s, ed or ing

- Most verbs simply add **s**, **ed** and **ing** to indicate tenses.
- When a single-syllable verb ends with a consonant preceded by a short vowel you double the final consonant when adding **ed** or **ing**.
- If a word ends in **e**, avoid the double **e** by dropping one as necessary.
- If a word ends in a consonant plus **y**, change **y** to **i** before adding **es** or **ed**, but to avoid creating a double **i**, keep the **y** in place for the adding of **ing**.
- If a word ends in a hissing or buzzing sound, add an **e** before the **s**. This makes it sayable, and helpfully creates an extra syllable

Explores, cooks,
dragged, touches,
washing, buzzing, fried

al ary and ic at the end of words

- **al**, **ary** and **ic** are vowel suffixes. Root words drop a final **e** or change **y** to **i** before taking the suffix. **al** often follows **on** and **ic**.
- **ary** – in some cases the root is not always obvious, e.g. temporary = **tempor**(al) + **ary**. Unstressed, it is often confused with **ery**. One approach is to seek out base words ending in **e** to indicate **ery**, e.g. stationer or saddle.
- Roots are often hard to detect in this group of words.

Adding ship, hood, ness and ment

- **ship, hood, ness and ment** are simply added unless a final **y** needs to be changed to **i**.
- Roots are often hard to detect in this group of words.
- The language is full of suffixes which suggest a state of being.

Membership,
childhood, fairness,
document

Adding ate and ify

- One of the functions of a suffix is to change a part of speech; in this case a noun or an adjective into a verb and a verb or adjective into a noun.
- The main suffixes are listed above; others are: **efy** (liquefy) and **esce** (effervesce).
- Most words just add the suffix.
- When the root word already has a suffix, or it ends in **e** or **y**, it has to be removed before the new suffix can be added. Watch out, however, for words ending in **y** if you are adding **ness** – the **y** changes to **i**. Fortunately, the **i** is clearly pronounced.

Pollen, pollenate,
educate, education,
apology, apologise,
simple, simplicity

Adding a suffix to a word ending with f

Most words ending in **f** change to **ves** in the plural.

Words ending in **ff** add **s**.

Words ending in **fe** use **ves**.

Sometimes a **ves** ending indicates a change of word class from noun to verb, e.g.

belief – believes; grief – grieves; proof – proves.

Calf, calves, thief, thieves,
cliff, cliffs, knife, knives

Words with common endings

- **ight** – most words ending in the '**ight**' sound use **ight**. A handful of words use the split digraph **i-e** (but they include common words like **white, kite**).
- A number of scientific terms end in **ite**, (e.g. bauxite) or **yte** (e.g. byte). **Ight** words are generally nouns.
- **tion** – words ending in **tion** are almost exclusively nouns. The **tion** ending is generally predictable from its sound. Exceptions can generally be sorted out: adjectives (chiefly to do with nationality) often end in **ian** (e.g. Russian); nouns of occupation often end in **cian** (e.g. optician) and there is a tiny handful of isolates (e.g. **ocean**).
- **ious** – the **ious** ending is generally predictable from its sound, and there are relatively few exceptions (**hideous, beauteous, plenteous**). **ious** words are generally adjectives.
- **ial** – the **ial** ending is almost entirely stable, and preceded by either **t** or **c**.
- There are relatively few exceptions. **ial** words are generally adjectives.
- **ough** – an example of extreme variation. Best learnt by exception: **bough, plough** (and perhaps **Slough**, the town) are effectively the only occasions when the final '**ow**' sound is made by **ough** rather than by **ow**. Through is an isolate – the only case of an '**oo**' sound. Though, **dough, thought** and **thorough** are also isolates. That leaves words like **tough** and **enough**, which are also isolates (other words use **uff**).

Right, reaction,
devotion,
infectious,
partial, cough,
enough

Common prefixes

- **ad** means '**towards**' – just add; **af** means '**tending towards**' – double the **f**; **al** means '**all**' + base word – drop one of the **ls**; **a** means '**in a state of**' (words in the a list above have a sense of '**on**' or '**in**') – just add.
- Teach words within words, e.g. **an + other = another**.

Adjective, affix,
almighty, aloft,
abloom

Conventions for words within words

- **v** – no words end in v, except **colloquials**, e.g. **gov**, **spiv**.
- **k** – often preceded by **l, r, n and c** at the ends of words – **wok** and **yak** are exceptional because the **k** is preceded by a vowel.

Can, river,
vegetable,
given, kick,
keep, broken,
choking,
back,

Common letter string, wa, wo, ss

- **wa** – often makes a long flat 'a' sound. Short **a** is uncommon. **swa** is a common string. No examples at the ends of words.
- **wo** – vast majority of examples with **wo** at the beginning; two is the only example with **wo** ending. **swo** is about the only string which places it in the middle of words unless you count compound words such as waxworks or roadworthy.
- **ss** – common at the end of words because of the **ness** and **less** suffixes, but note it changes to a 'sh' sound when you add an **ion** or **ian** ending, e.g. **discuss/discussion**. No words begin with **ss**.

Meaning of suffixes

from dec – ten
from annus – year
from manus – hand
from graphein – write
from aqua – water
from mort – dead
from mikros – small
from unus – one
from roi – king
from octo – eight
from insula – island
from presse – press
from skopein – to see
from nun – name
from voix – voice
from ge – earth
from specere – to look
from bloc – block
from naus – ship
from dictare – to say
from copie – plenty

Decimal, anniversary, manuscript,
graph, aquarium, mortgage,
photograph, aqueduct, mortuary,
microscope, unit, royal,
microlight, union, royalty, octagon
,insulation, express,
octopus, peninsula, pressure,
telescope, noun, voice,
microscope, announce, vocal,
geology, spectator, blockage,
geography, spectrum, blockade,
nausea, dictator, copy, nautical,
dictionary, photocopy,

To recognise and spell the suffixes: ible, able, ive, tion, sion

- Final e deletion is common in the root word, e.g. **reversible**, **valuable**, **creation**.
- able endings are far more common than **ible** ones. A key to distinguishing between these endings is that dropping **able** leaves a generally recognisable word, e.g. **agreeable**; **dropping ible** usually leaves a stem, e.g. **legible**. If one can say 'I am able to...', then the word is usually **able**. **Ible** usually follows words ending **in s**.
- **tion** words are far more common than **sion**, and are often preceded by an **a**.

Horrible,
miserable,
forgive =,
competitive,
inflation,
temptation,
decision,
corrosion

- Many **sion** words are can be grouped together, e.g. **inclusion/conclusion/exclusion; infusion/transfusion/effusion/diffusion; illusion/delusion**. They are often formed from verbs ending in **d** or **de**, e.g. **decide, explode**.

Compound words

- A compound word is a word made up from two or more other words. A characteristic of compounds is that they are almost always pronounced with the stress on the first word element. Solid compounds are written as a single word, hyphenated compounds are linked with a hyphen, e.g. **leg-iron**.
- Over time, the meaning of compound words has drifted, adding an historical interest, e.g. **cloakroom** has survived the arrival of coats instead of cloaks. The days of the week and words like blackguard often yield to historical research. Biscuit means '**twice-baked**' in French. Thus, some apparently unreasonable spellings can be explained.
- Most compounds work by simply adding the two base words together without modification. If the first word ends in **y**, that will often change to **i**, e.g. **handicraft**

Suffix ette and mini

- ette is from French, and can have the secondary connotation of being a female version, e.g. usher, usherette.
- mini comes from the Latin minimus, meaning 'small'.
- micro – Latin, meaning 'tiny'.
- Be careful with ling. It's from old English and can mean 'having a certain quality' as in weakling, as well as meaning 'little'.

Miniskirt,
brunette,
duckling,
microscope,
teeny-weenie

Properties of words ending in vowels other than e

- Most nouns ending in **o** form their plural by adding **s**, especially musical terms, words recently introduced from other languages, abbreviations, and words ending in two vowels.
- A few words keep the plural spelling of the original language . Some pasta terms are already plurals in Italian!

Matzos,
pagodas,
haloes,
macaroni

Pluralisation

- Most nouns add **s** in the plural.
- Nouns ending in **hissing, buzzing or shushing** sounds (**s/x/ch/sh**) add **es** in the plural. This adds a syllable and makes it easier to say.
- Nouns ending in consonant + **y** change **y** to **i** and add **es**. Compare nouns ending in vowel + **y** which simply **add s**.
- Several nouns ending in **o** add **es** in the plural. These tend to be older words, e.g. **potatoes**. Newer words like patio and radio add **s** in the plural
- Many nouns ending in **f** drop the **f** and add **ves** in the plural. There are exceptions. **ff** words just add **s**, for example.
- A number of nouns have unusual plurals. Some change the medial vowel (**goose/geese**); some have retained the plural form of the original language (a singular, **ae** plural is Latin).
- Several nouns ending in **o** add **es** in the plural. These tend to be older words, e.g. **potatoes**. Newer words like patio and radio add **s** in the plural.

Dogs, schools,
hiss, hisses, box,
boxes, city,
cities, lolly,
lollies

Prefixes

- **auto** means 'self'; **circum** means 'round', 'about'; **bi** means 'two' or 'twice'; **tele** means 'distant'; **trans** means 'across'.
- Use multicultural opportunities, drawing on other languages in the classroom.

Hopeful

- Drop the **l** when adding **full**.
- Change **y** to **i** when adding **full**.
- Distinguish between '**a hand full of**' and '**a handful of**'. The first refers to the hand, the second refers to the quantity.
- **all** and **till** also drop the second **l** when they are affixed to other words, e.g. always, until.

Hopeful, fearful,
wakeful,
scornful,
beauty, plenty,
fanciful

Adding ing

- Ensure that children understand the difference between short- and long vowel sounds.
- When you are providing examples of words with short- and long-vowel sounds, emphasise or exaggerate the sounding out and have the children join in.
- Short (rap) vowel = double consonant.
- Long vowel = single consonant.

Humming, bigger, stopped,
blasted, writer, written

C is soft when followed by i

- **ci**, **ce** and **cy** usually soften the **c**.
- Exception for **ce** – Celt, Celtic – pronounced as **Kelt, Keltic**.

Cinema, cinnamon, ceiling,
celebrate, cyanide, cynical

Spelling 'shun'

- **cian** – where words end in **c**; common in occupations.
- **tion** – the most common ending.
- **sion** – where the base word ends in **d/de** or **s/se** (e.g. **explode, confuse**).
- **ssion** – clear soft '**sh**' sound.
- **ation** – long **a** is always followed by **tion**.
- **otion/ution/etion** – the base word usually contains the vowel, clearly pronounced.
- **ution** words are usually longer than three syllables; **usion** tends to be shorter.

Physician,
extension,
profession,
percussion, fiction,
nation, completion,
repetition, motion,
distribution,
Russian


I before e except after c

- Most words use **ie**.
- **ie** is the only word-ending.
- **ei** is the only word-beginning.
- **c** is usually followed by **ei** (**science, glacier and ancient are troublesome exceptions**).
- The long **a** sound generally indicates **ei**. Note that the long **a** pronunciation has drifted a little over time, and is also influenced by accent.
- Other common **ei** words (see **chart, final column**) are best memorised by exception.

Living, caring,
careful, shameless,
tuned, lively

Prefixes

- **in** means 'not'.
- **ir** means 'not' – add to the beginning of words beginning with **r**, thus producing double **r**. Note several exceptions, however, e.g. **unreasonable**.
- **il** means 'not' – add to beginning of words beginning with **l**, thus producing double **l**. Note several exceptions, however, e.g. **dislike, unload**.
- **im** means 'not' – add to the beginning of words beginning with **m** and **p**.
- Note several exceptions, however, e.g. **unmade, displease**.
- **sus** – a version of **sub** meaning 'under', but the meaning has drifted from **being** 'under the spotlight' in suspect to being 'held up' in suspend.
- **pro** means 'ahead'.
- Note the double letters created when the prefix is added to words beginning with the same letter.
- Words containing the letter string conform to the rules even though they lack the root meaning, e.g. **illuminate, illustrate, irritate, irrigate**.



Inactive,
impossible,
irregular, proactive,
suspect

Notes and other conventions