

SPELLING RULES AND PATTERNS

How to memorize spelling rules and exceptions

I BEFORE E, EXCEPT AFTER C: THE RULE WITH MANY EXCEPTIONS

- This general rule applies in most cases:
believe field brief niece piece / receipt ceiling conceited receive
- Exceptions include words in which **IE** sounds like an **A**, not like an **E**:
neighbour weigh eight freight vein reins sleigh
- There are many other exceptions, including:
weird counterfeit height seize protein leisure their either ancient

DOUBLE OR SINGLE CONSONANT: IT ALL DEPENDS ON THE VOWEL SOUND

- All vowels have a short and a long sound.
- The long sound is like the name of the letter: the **A** in **tape** is long, while the **A** in **tap** is short; the **O** in **hope** is long, while the **O** in **hop** is short; the **U** in **cute** is long, while the **U** in **cut** is short.
- Short vowels are usually followed by double consonants.
- Think of a familiar word such as **apple** and remember that this same short **A** sound in another word will normally be followed by a double consonant. Meanwhile, a long vowel like the **A** in **taken**, **skating**, or **debating** is always followed by a single consonant.

little, sitting, thinnest, beginning	but	shining, minor, dined, outlining
butter, cutting, flutter, rebuttal	but	ruby, tubing, cubed, included
bottle, topping, flopped, recommend	but	noted, opinion, zoning, condoning
better, setting, forgetting, professor	but	preceded, completed, impeded

- There are exceptions to this rule including:
copy proper pity literature apartment
- Note that when adding suffixes (word endings), in most cases, the usual rule applies. In words of more than one syllable, when the stress falls on the last syllable, the final consonant is doubled:
beginning controlled recurrence regrettable forgotten
- However, when the stress is on any other syllable (not the last one), the consonant is not doubled:
opening shortened alteration determination developing
- An exception (in Canadian spelling): **travelling**



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continued

ADDING SUFFIXES: SPECIAL CASES

- In most cases, a final **Y** is changed to **I** when adding a suffix:
candy → candies easy → easiest ugly → ugliest tyranny → tyrannical
- However, the **Y** remains when an **ING** ending is added:
cry → crying hurry → hurrying carry → carrying identify → identifying
- Generally, the silent **E** is dropped when the suffix begins with a vowel:
care → caring desire → desirous move → movable
- However, when the word has a soft **C** (making the **S** sound) or a soft **G** (the **J** sound) just before the silent **E**, the **E** is kept when adding the suffixes **ABLE** or **OUS**:
notice → noticeable replace → replaceable courage → courageous
advantage → advantageous
- Other exceptions in which the **E** is not dropped:
acre → acreage mile → mileage
- Meanwhile, the final **E** normally remains when the suffix begins with a consonant:
care → careful retire → retirement move → movement
- As an exception, for words ending in **UE**, the final **E** is dropped when adding any suffix.
argue → arguing, argument true → truest, truly
- Further exceptions:
judge → judgment nine → ninth (although the word ninety follows the usual rule)

OTHER PROBLEM AREAS: CONSULT YOUR DICTIONARY

- **ANCE** vs. **ENCE** endings (reliance, assistance vs. independence, persistence)
- **ABLE** vs. **IBLE** endings (reliable, available vs. irresistible, permissible)
- Spelling of the final syllable in words (concede, proceed, supersede)
- Words containing silent letters (column, mortgage, sword, pneumatic)
- Words in which sounds are not pronounced clearly (February, withdrawal, temperament)
- Words of Greek origin that end with a pronounced **E** (catastrophe, epitome, psyche)
- Words with double letters (accommodation, possess, vacuum, committee, assassination)

For more help with language skills, contact the Academic Skills Centre.