

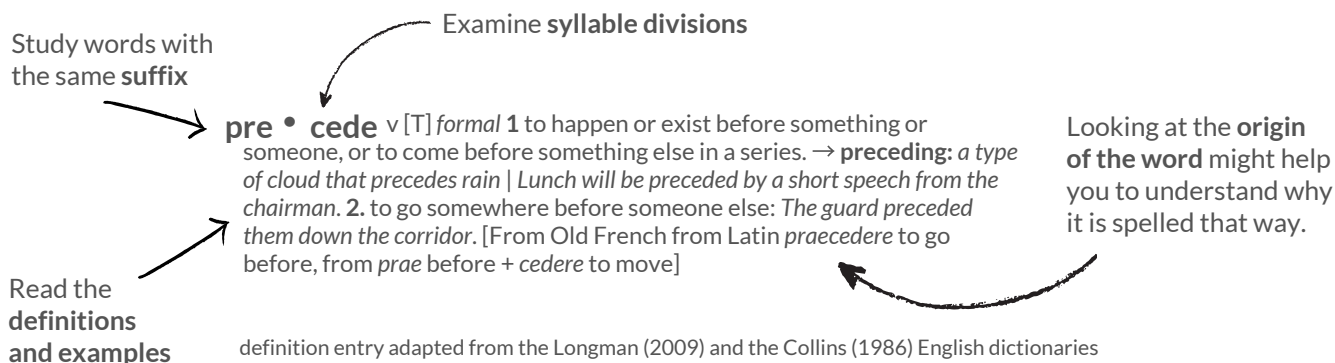
STRATEGIES FOR BETTER SPELLING

A basic guide

Because of the complex history of English, spelling can be very confusing. Irregular spelling is common.

THE MAIN SOLUTION: USE A DICTIONARY

- Online dictionaries and apps are useful, but a **simple paperback dictionary** will serve you well.
- Keep a dictionary on your desk, within easy reach.
- When looking up a word, take a moment to examine the whole entry:



- After correcting a spelling error, take a moment to look at the word, memorizing its appearance.
- Examine the words in the dictionary closest to your entry. Studying these words can expand your knowledge of words with a certain **prefix** or **suffix**.
- Remember that time spent using your dictionary—even just to verify spelling—is an excellent investment in improving your command of English.

EDIT YOUR WORK CAREFULLY:

Spellchecks will tell you that a certain word exists, but you must be sure that it is the *right* word.

For example, if you write **principal** instead of **principle**, or **loose** instead of **lose**, the computer will accept it as a correct spelling, but you will be left with errors in word usage—more serious than simple spelling mistakes.

Some spellcheck errors can be difficult to notice, such as **stationery** for **stationary**; **envelop** for **envelope**; and **posses** for **possess**.

If you are not certain that you have the correct word, look it up.

- See handout: **Confusing Word Pairs**.



STRATEGIES FOR BETTER SPELLING

continued

MAKE UP A PHRASE BASED ON THE LETTERS:

When you have difficulty remembering the spelling of a frequently used word, come up with a quick phrase to help you remember the letters.

- In the word *necessary*, the difficult part to remember is **n-e-c-e-s-s**—Nice Elephants Can Even Sit Silently. Remembering this odd line about polite elephants will allow you to spell this word correctly until it becomes automatic. The sillier the phrase, the easier it is to remember.

OTHER MEMORY AIDS:

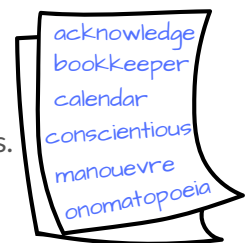
Using simple memory aids for troublesome words can be much easier than struggling to memorize spellings. It's easy to think up your own quick reminders like the examples below:

- Remember that—ironically—the word *believe* contains the word *lie*.
- Remember that an army doctor is called a *medic*. That makes it easy to spell *medicine* correctly.
- Casually, we might say “Congrats!” which helps us to remember how to spell *congratulate*.
- Committees often have too many members, reminding us that all possible letters in the word *committee* are duplicated.
- When *too* refers to an excessive number—*too* many or *too* much—the word has too many Os.

KEEPING A SPELLING LIST:

Keep a list of words that you have misspelled and have looked up in the dictionary. Consult the list when editing your work to refresh your memory about their spelling.

Look over your list from time to time to memorize the look of the correctly spelled words.



WHERE SPECIAL CARE IS NEEDED:

- ABLE vs. IBLE endings (*allowable* vs. *permissible*)
- ANT vs. ENT endings (*variant* vs. *lenient*; *dependent* vs. *dependant*)
- ANCE vs. ENCE endings (*reliance* vs. *independence*)
- Dropping or retaining a silent E when adding a suffix (*movable* vs. *noticeable*; *truly* vs. *surely*)
- Words in which a vowel sound is unclear (*hypocrisy*, *separate*, *calendar*)
- Words that contain confusing pairs of double letters (*tobacco*, *accommodate*, *vacuum*)

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