

Usage Basic Spelling Rules

Correct spelling promotes a writer's credibility and increases his/ her ability to express ideas clearly. Although there are always exceptions to the following rules, they serve as general guidelines for improvement in spelling.

ADDING A SUFFIX

When a **suffix** (an ending) is added to a word, the word's spelling usually changes in the following ways:

WORDS OF ONE SYLLABLE

If a suffix that begins with a vowel (*-ed, -ing, -er, -est*) is added to a word of one syllable, and if the last three letters of the word follow the pattern of consonant-vowel-consonant, then the final consonant of the word is doubled.

EXAMPLE: plan + ed = **planned**
 swim + ing = **swimming**
 run + er = **runner**
 thin + est = **thinnest**

WORDS OF MORE THAN ONE SYLLABLE

When a suffix that begins with a vowel is added to a word of more than one syllable, the final consonant is only doubled if (1) the last three letters of the word follow the pattern of consonant-vowel-consonant and (2) the accent or stress is on the last syllable.

EXAMPLE: begin + ing = **beginning**
 control + ed = **controlled**

WORDS ENDING IN -E

When a suffix that begins with a vowel (*-ing, -ence, -able*) is added to a word, the final *-e* is usually dropped. However, if the suffix begins with a consonant (*-ment, -less, -ly*), the final *-e* usually remains.

EXAMPLE: move + ing = moving
 note + able = notable
 advertise + ment = advertisement
 home + less = **homeless**

Some exceptions to this rule include the words *argument, awful, courageous, judgment, manageable, noticeable, truly, and simply*.

WORDS ENDING IN -Y

With the addition of most suffixes to a word that ends in *-y*, and if the letter before the *-y* is a consonant, then the *-y* becomes an *-i*. However, if the letter before the *-y* is a vowel, the *-y* remains unchanged.

EXAMPLE: happy + ness = **happiness**
 portray + ed = **portrayed**

Some notable exceptions are the words *daily, laid, paid, and said*. Also, any time that *-ing* is added to a word ending in *-y*, the *-y* is not dropped.

EXAMPLE: copy + ing = **copying**
 delay + ing = **delaying**

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CHOOSING BETWEEN *-S* OR *-ES*

If a word ends in a consonant, the suffix *-s*, rather than *-es*, is usually added. However, *-es* is used instead of *-s* if the word ends in *-ch*, *-sh*, *-ss*, *-x*, or *-z*.

EXAMPLE: relax + es = relaxes
crutch + es = crutches

If a final *-y* is changed to an *-i* (See “Words Ending in *-y*” on page 1), *-es* is used, rather *than -s*.

EXAMPLE: fry + es = fries
marry + es = marries

When the word ends in *-o*, *-es* is used, rather than *-s*.

EXAMPLE: do + es = does
echo + es = echoes
tomato + es = tomatoes

Some exceptions to this rule are the words *pianos*, *radios*, *sopranos*, and *solos*.

CHOOSING *-IE* OR *-EI*

The letter *-e* precedes the letter *-i* when the two letters create an “*ay*” sound, as in the words *neighbor* and *weigh*. In other cases, however, *-i* is always placed before *-e* unless the letter *-c* precedes them both.

EXAMPLE: vein, niece
friend, receipt

Furthermore, even when the letter *-c* precedes the *-i* and *-e*, the word should be spelled with an *-ie* if the letters combine with the *-c* to create a “*shen*” sound.

EXAMPLE: ancient, conscience
efficient, sufficient

HINTS FOR IMPROVING YOUR SPELLING

1. Use creative strategies to remember the correct spelling of words. For example, remember that the *-a*'s in *separate* are separated by an *-r*, and *dessert* has two *-s*'s because you want two desserts.
2. Refer to a dictionary, and always check essays with the computer's spellchecker.
3. Watch out for homonyms (words that have the same sound but different spellings and different meanings). These are often missed by the computer's spellchecker. Some common homonyms are *their/ there/ they're*, *it's/ its*, and *hear/ here*.
4. Keep a list of words you commonly misspell nearby when you write. Look over returned essays for misspelled words, and add them to your list.
5. Test yourself on spelling using flashcards or other memorization techniques.
6. Put the correctly spelled words that you have problems with somewhere you will see them every day: on a desk, on your mirror, in your car, etc. Hopefully, in time, you will remember the correct spelling instead of the incorrect one.