

UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA WRITING LAB
SPELLING IMPROVEMENT
(By Jean Laird)

Suggestions for improving your spelling:

Memorize a list comprising the little words that cause the most difficulty.

Learn or recall the basic rules of English phonetic spelling.

Master the three basic spelling rules:

Vowels--a, e, i, o, u--are sounded as short vowels when followed by just one consonant (as in rat, get, it, pot, nut) but sound "like their names" when followed by one consonant plus a vowel (as in rate, Pete, site, vote).

Therefore, if you want the short sound preserved in an action word or adjective, you must double the final consonant (as in flabby, getting, sitting, popping, nutty).

In reverse, you drop the silent e when the word is changed so that you get another vowel after the consonant (as in rating, likable, voting, salable, depleting).

There is only one spelling for almost all consonant sounds. The great exceptions are e and g when sounded hard (as in call and gall), or when sounded soft before i and e (as in cent and gentle).

Remember the old jingle: i before e except after c or when sounded like a as in neighbor and weigh.

Find ways to remember the exceptions to the rules. Mnemonic devices (gimmicks to help you remember by association) are often helpful.

The two following sentences contain most of the exceptions:

"Neither financier seized either form of weird leisure."

The foreign sheik made a science of counterfeiting weirs, seismographs and kaleidoscopes, which was the height of sleight."

Get a notebook and divide it into three sections. Set aside the first section for words you misspell almost all the time. Use the second section of words you would like to know. Save the final section for words you have mastered, and review this section often.

The secret of success is this: Don't rush. Work at it slowly and steadily. Make spelling review a part of every day.

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SPELLING STUDY AID

According to Normal Lewis's "Be A Perfect Speller in 30 Minutes," 95% of our spelling mistakes occur in just 100 words. Start with the 20 troublesome words listed below. In addition to the correct spelling of each of the words, you will find the simple mnemonic (pronounced nemonic) which should help set that correct spelling indelibly in your memory.

All right

Two words, no matter what it means. Keep in mind that it is the opposite of all wrong.

Repetition

The first four letters are the same as those in repeat.

Irritable, inimitable

Think of allied forms, irritate and (in)imitate.

Recommend

Commend, which is easy to spell, plus the prefix re-

Ridiculous

Think of the allied form, ridicule, which is usually spelled correctly, thus avoiding the misspelling rediculous.

Despair

Again think of another form--desperate--and so avoid the misspelling dispair.

Stationery

This means standing still, so notice the a in stand, corresponding to the er in stationery.

Stationary

This means standing still, so notice the a in stand, corresponding to the a in stationary.

Superintendent

The superintendent in an apartment house collects the rent--thus you avoid the misspelling -ant.

Coolly

You can spell cool--simply add the adverbial ending -ly.

Separate, comparative

Look for "a rat" in both words

Supersede

The only word in the language ending in -sede.

Succeed, proceed, exceed

The only three words in the language ending in ceed. In the order given here, the first letters of the three words from the first 3 letters in spell.

Cede, recede, precede, etc.

All other words (except those listed in #12 and #14) with a final syllable sounding similar and in -cede.

Procedure

One of the double e's in proceed moves to the end in procedure.

Absence

Think of the allied form absent, and you will not be tempted to misspell it absence.

Conscience

Science, plus the prefix con-.

Anoint

Think of an ointment, hence on double n.

Ecstasy

To sy (sigh) with ecstasy.

Analyze, paralyze

The only two non-technical words in the language ending in -yze.

The only way to learn to spell the words that now plague you is to devise a mnemonic for each one.

EXAMPLE: indispensable

Say to yourself: "Able men are generally indispensable."

The sillier the mnemonic, the easier it will be to recall in an emergency.

EXAMPLE: Tranquility

Say to yourself: "In the old days, life was more tranquil, and people wrote with quills instead of fountain pens.

Other words in the troublesome 100 are:

surprise	balloon	vacillate	rhythmical
inoculate	noticeable	cancellate	vacuum
definitely	truly	forty	benefitted
privilege	vicious	dilettante	committee
incidentally	misspelling	changeable	grievous

predictable
embarrassment
discriminate
description
pronunciation
occurrence
development
argument
assistant
grammar
parallel
drunkenness
suddenness
dissipate
weird

conscious
disappear
disappoint
corroborate
sacrilegious
persistent
exhilaration
newsstand
desirable
irresistible
dilemma
perseverance
until
tyrannize
insistent

accessible
accommodate
license
panicky
seize
leisure
receive
achieve
holiday
aristence
pursue
pastime
possesses
professor
category

judgment
plebeian
tariff
sheriff
connoisseur
necessary
sergeant
irrelevant

More than half of all misspellings on college papers occur in the list of 25 words and word groups below. Keep this list beside you and refer to it frequently when writing.

Their, they're, there

Their: possessive case of the pronoun they.

They're: contraction for they are.

There: an adverb meaning in or at that place. Used also in sentences in which the verb comes before the subject: There is hope of a quick solution.

Too, to, two

Too: an adverb meaning in addition or to an excessive extent or degree.

To: a preposition expressing motion or direction toward something.

Two: a number.

Receive, receiving

Remember the rule: i before e except after c. Not all English words with ei or ie follow the rule, but receive and receiving do.

Exist, existence, existent

Memorize the exact sequence of letters in exist and remember that the other two forms are spelled with e: existence and existent.

Occur, occurred, occurring, occurrence

Remember the basic form occur and remember that any suffix added required that the final r be double.

Definite, definitely, definition, define

There is no a in any of these words and only one f in each of them. Pronounce each word carefully and use the i before the t in the first three forms.

Separate, separation

Remember the a (not e) which always follows p in these words.

Believe, belief

These words also follow the i before e rule.

Occasion

Two c's and one s.

Lose, losing

Memorize lose and remember that the e drops out to form losing. These words should not be confused with loose, losing, whose general meaning is to free from bonds or not firm.

Write, writing, writer

The long i sound requires just one t; note the difference in pronunciation of writer and

written. The short i sound in written requires a double t.

Description, describe

Always an e in the first syllable.

Benefit, benefitted, beneficial

Bene is Latin for well; English has kept the Latin spelling. The short i sound in benefitted does not require a double t because the primary accent is not on that syllable.

14. Precede

Misspelling of this word results from confusion with proceed, meaning to move forward or to carry on an action. Precede means to go before in time or rank or importance. You'll simply have to learn these spellings and meanings and then commit to memory the fact that procedure, a word used frequently in business writing, is a maverick in its spelling.

Referring

Refer ends with one r, but the participle doubles the r. Since referring occurs frequently in business reports, letters and memos, you should learn its spelling.

Success, succeed, succession

Keep your attention on the two c's, which cause most of the trouble in spelling these words.

Its, it's

Its: the possessive case of the pronoun it.

It's: a contraction of it is.

Privilege

The i before the l and the e after the l are the trouble spots in this word.

Environment

Careless pronunciation causes most misspellings of this word. Sound the word carefully, syllable by syllable--en-vi-ron-ment.

Personal, personnel

Your personal hopes for attaining a career in business will probably start on the road to reality in a personnel office. Note that these two words are pronounced and spelled differently.

Than, then

Than: a conjunction used after an adjective or adverb in the comparative degree. (This report is better than last year's.)

Occasionally than is a preposition followed by a noun or pronoun. (I like this one better than that one.)

As either part of speech, than always indicates some kind of comparison.

Then: An adverb indicating at that time or soon afterward.

Principle, Principal

These two words are really three in their functions, and to use them correctly you must know their functions and meanings.

Principle: can be used only as a noun meaning an accepted or professional rule of action or conduct. (He is a man of principles.)

Principal: can be used as an adjective or as a noun. As a noun, principal means a governing official such as the principal of a school or a capital sum of money. (He drew 4% interest on the principal.)

Choose, chose, choice

Choose is the present tense; chose is the past tense; choice is a noun or an adjective, depending upon its use.

Perform, performance

Careful pronunciation will eliminate much of the possibility of error here. The word is not preform but perform.

Similar

Here, too, exact pronunciation will help; the most frequent misspelling is a similar, which would have to be pronounced sim-il-yar. The word is properly pronounced sim-i-lar. Remember that the last vowel is an a even though it does not sound like one.