

The Top Ten Spelling Rules

Knowing spelling rules, and the exceptions to the rule, is a great strategy to help you understand why spelling is the way it is and helps you spell.

1. the "i before e except after c" rule

believe - receive

As a basic rule this is great

but what about ancient, leisure, neighbour/neighbor

We have a longer version of the rule:

" i before e except after a long c but not when c is a "sh" sound and not when sounded like 'a' as in neighbour or weigh."

(i before e rule) believe, achieve, (except after c),receive, ceiling (but not when c is sounded like sh) ancient, proficient

not when sounded like 'a') eight, beige

But there are exceptions always exceptions so watch out for them.

2. Changing "y" to "ies"

You might not know the spelling rule but you might know the spelling pattern - most people do.

When the word ends in a vowel + y just add 's'

key → keys

delay → delays

trolley → trolleys

(because we can't have three vowels in a row delaies x)

If the word has a consonant before the 'y':

take off the 'y' and add 'ies'

baby → babies

company → companies

difficulty → difficulties

3. Adding -es to words ending in -s, -ss, -z -ch -sh -x

This was added centuries ago to stop the plural 's' clashing with these letters and it softens the 's' sound to a 'z' sound

bus→ buses

business → businesses

watch → watches

box → boxes

quiz → quizzes

4. 1:1:1 doubling up rule

put - putting, big-bigger, quiz - quizzes, swim - swimming...

When a word has one syllable + 1 vowel next to 1 consonant we double up the final consonant with a vowel suffix:

sit - sitter, big - biggest, tap - tapping, shop - shopper/shopping, fat - fatten, fattening, fatter, fattest...

This happens in longer words when the stress is on the final syllable:

begin (beGIN) - beginner, beginning

refer (reFER) - referring, referred

occur (ocCUR) - occurring, occurred, occurrence

5. Drop the 'e' rule

We usually drop the final silent "e" when we add vowel suffix endings, for example:

write + ing → writing

hope + ed = hoped

excite + able = excitable

joke - joker

large - largish

close - closing

sense + ible = sensible

opposite + ion = opposition

imagine + ation = imagination

We keep the 'e' if the word ends in -CE or -GE to keep a soft sound, with able/ous

courage + ous = courageous

outrage + ous = outrageous

notice + able = noticeable

manage + able = manageable

6. Changing the "y" to "i" when adding suffix endings.

If a word ends in a consonant + Y, the Y changes to i (unless adding endings with "i" -ing -ish, which already begins with an i)

beauty+ful > beauti+ful =beautiful, beautify, beautician

happy + ness = - happiness, happily, happier, happiest

angry + er = angrier, angriest, angrily,

pretty: prettier, prettiest but prettyish

ready: readily readiness

dry: dried, BUT drying, dryish

defy: defies, defied, but defying

apply: applies, applied but applying

7. "-f" to "-ves" or "-s"

Most words ending in "-f" or "-fe" change their plurals to "-ves"

calf - calves

half - halves

knife - knives

leaf - leaves

loaf - loaves

life - lives

wife - wives

shelf - shelves

thief - thieves

yourself - yourselves

Some words can have both endings -ves or -s:

scarf - scarfs/scarves

dwarf - dwarfs/dwarves

wharf - wharfs/wharves

handkerchief - handkerchiefs/handkerchieves

Words ending in -ff you just add -s to make the plural.

cliff - cliffs

toff - toffs

scuff - scuffs

sniff - sniffs

Some words ending in -f add -s:

Nouns which end in two vowels plus -f usually form plurals in the normal way, with just an -s

chief - chiefs

spooF - spoofs

roof - roofs

chief - chiefs

oaf - oafs

EXCEPTIONS: thief - thieves, leaf - leaves

8. Words ending in -ful

The suffix -FUL is always spelt with one L, for example:

grate + ful = grateful

faith + ful = faithful

hope + ful = hopeful

careful

helpful

useful

grateful

beautiful (notice the "y" becomes "i")

9. Adding -ly

When we add -ly to words ending in -ful then we have double letters

gratefully

faithfully

hopefully

We also add -ly to words ending in 'e'

love + ly = lovely

like + ly = likely

live + ly = lively

complete + ly = completely

definite + ly = definitely

BUT not truly (true + ly) This is a common misspelled word.

We change the end 'e' to 'y' in these -le words

gentle > gently

idle > idly

subtle > subtly

10. When we add "all" to the beginning of words we drop the l

all + so = also

all + most = almost

although

always

almighty

already

alright (all right as two words is used in more formal English)

altogether (Note that altogether and all together do not mean the same thing. Altogether means 'in total', as in there are six bedrooms altogether, whereas all together means 'all in one place' or 'all at once', as in it was good to have a group of friends all together; they came in all together.)