Spelling Rules

Some spelling rules are worth learning; others are too complicated or have too many exceptions. Instead of learning ALL the rules, focus on learning rules that address your particular spelling problems. Following is some helpful information on the rules for building new words:

1. Words for discussing spelling
2. Ten common spelling rules
3. Rules for Australian and American spelling

SPELLING CHECKERS will be quite helpful when you need to apply rules to word building. However, the rules for American spelling differ from Australian spelling. You can set your computer to English (Australia) OR be prepared to use a good Australian dictionary to check for words that use American spelling. Try to choose Australian standards and be consistent.

1. Words for discussing spelling
   • VOWELS—a, e, i, o and u are vowels. CONSONANTS—the other 21 letters of the alphabet.
   • PREFIX—element added to the front of a word (e.g., un/in=not, pre=before, anti=against)
   • SUFFIX—element added to the end of a word (e.g., -ing, -able, -ed, -ly, -ful, -ment, -tion)
   • SYLLABLE—a word or section of a word with a single sound (e.g., read, fa_mous, dif_fi_cult)
   • STRESS—the emphasis given to a syllable (see underlined syllables: famous, focus, occur, infer)

2. Ten common spelling rules

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<td>1. ‘ie’ or ‘ei’</td>
<td>achieve, believe, friend receive, receipt, perceive</td>
<td>Words like counterfeit, either, neither, height, leisure, forfeit, foreign, science, species, seize, weird</td>
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<td>2. ‘s’ or ‘es’</td>
<td>arch &gt; arches, clash &gt; clashes, class &gt; classes, box &gt; boxes, quiz &gt; quizzes</td>
<td>Words like altos, duos, pianos, radios, solos, sopranos, studios, videos, typos</td>
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<td>3. ‘y’ to ‘i’ or not</td>
<td>convey &gt; conveys, employ &gt; employer</td>
<td>Words like dryness, shyness</td>
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<td>4. drop the final ‘e’</td>
<td>save &gt; savable, use &gt; usable</td>
<td>DO NOT DROP the e if the word ends in ce or ge (e.g., manage &gt; manageable, trace &gt; traceable)</td>
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<td>judge &gt; judgment</td>
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<td>save &gt; saving, manage &gt; managing, trace &gt; tracing, emerge &gt; emerging</td>
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3. Rules for Australian and American spelling

There are often considerable differences between Australian and American spelling. You should use Australian spelling in preference to American spelling, but if American spelling is acceptable, make sure you use it consistently in your essay.

**Examples**

- **-rel-er** (use -re for words like theatre, litre, centre, calibre, sombre, fibre—NOT theater, liter, center)
- **-oul-or** (use -our for words like colour, honour, neighbour—NOT color, honor, neighbor)
- **-ise/-ize** (both are acceptable; Australian preference is for -ise e.g., criticise rather than criticize)
- **practice/practise** (American spelling is practice, but Australian spelling requires practice [noun] practise [verb])
- **other common words** (aeroplane—NOT airplane; traveller—NOT traveler; defence—NOT defense)

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**Rule**

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| 5. ‘t’ or ‘tt’ when adding -ing, -ed, and some suffixes to verbs  
- DOUBLE the t for verbs of one syllable with a single vowel or a short vowel sound.  
- DOUBLE the t for verbs of more than one syllable when the stress is on the last syllable. | rot > rotting, rotten  
fit > fitting, fitted  
knot > knotting, knotted  
abet > abetting, abetted  
ail > allotting, allotted  
commit > committing, committed  
emit > emitting, emitted  
forget > forgetting, forgotten (but forgetful) | DO NOT DOUBLE the t for verbs of one syllable with a double vowel or a long vowel sound (e.g., treat > treated; greet > greeting)  
DO NOT DOUBLE the t for words of more than one syllable when the stress falls on the first syllable (e.g., benefit > benefited) |
| 6. ‘r’ or ‘rr’ when adding -ing, -ed, and some suffixes to verbs  
- DOUBLE the r for verbs of one syllable when the final r is preceded by a single vowel.  
- DOUBLE the r for words of more than one syllable when the stress does not fall on the first syllable. | star > starring, starred, starry  
tar > tarring, tarred  
war > warring, warred (but warfare)  
scar > scarring, scarred  
stir > stirring, stirred  
concour > concouring, concurred, concurrence  
occur > occurring, occurred, occurrence  
defer > deferring, deferred, (but deference)  
deter > deterring, deterring, deterrent  
prefer > preferred, preferring, (but preference)  
refer > referred, referring, referral | DO NOT DOUBLE the r for verbs of one syllable when the final r is preceded by a double vowel (e.g., fear > fearing, feared)  
DO NOT DOUBLE the r for words of more than one syllable when the stress falls on the first syllable (e.g., prosper > prospered, prospering) |
| 7. ‘l’ or ‘ll’ when adding -ing, -ed, and some suffixes to verbs  
DOUBLE the l when it is preceded by a single vowel. | cancel > cancelling, cancelled, cancellation  
enrol > enrolling, enrolled (but enrolment)  
fulfil > fulfilling, fulfilled, fulfillment  
level > levelling, levelled  
travel > travelling, travelled, traveller | There is no reliable rule covering these words so they simply have to be memorised. |
| 8. Dropping letters  
Many words drop a letter when adding a suffix, but it is not always the final letter. | argue > argument; proceed > procedure; humour > humorous; disaster > disastrous; repeat > repetition; administer > administration | There is no reliable rule covering these words so they simply have to be memorised. |
| 9. Word endings  
able/ible, ant/ance; ent/ence | negligible, incredible, invisible, sensible, admirable, preventable, suitable, dependable  
attendance, ignorance, nuisance, importance, sentence, difference, independence, intelligence | There is no reliable rule covering these words so they simply have to be memorised. |
| 10. Silent letters  
Some words include letters that are not pronounced when the word is spoken. | advertisement, campaign, column, debt, design, doubt, gauge, ghetto, heir, knife, knowledge, island, mortgage, often, pneumatic, rhythm, solemn, subtle | There is no reliable rule covering these words so they simply have to be memorised. |