



Figure 1 Logos for the Academic Resource Center and The Writing Center

## Spelling


People say that English spelling is difficult to learn. One of the main reasons for this is that many words in the English language are not spelled the way they are spoken. The difference between the **spelling** and **pronunciation** of a word can be very confusing. However, there are many tools that can make learning proper spelling much easier.

## Syllables

FIRST, to be able to spell words correctly, it helps if you know how to pronounce them correctly. Say a word slowly. How many syllables does it have?

<u>Word Example</u>	<u>Number of Syllables</u>	<u>Pronunciation</u>
Cat	One	<b>CAT</b>
Mother	Two	<b>MO</b> – ther
Wonderful	Three	<b>WON</b> – der – ful
American	Four	A – <b>MER</b> – I – can
Educational	Five or More	Ed – u – <b>CA</b> – tion – al
Understandability		<b>Un</b> – der – <b>stand</b> – a <b>BIL</b> – i – ty

Knowing how to break a word into syllables and knowing which syllables are **stressed** (loud) and which syllables are **NOT stressed** (soft) can be very helpful for learning how to spell. A good dictionary will break down each word into syllables, tell you which syllables are emphasized, and provide a guide for the pronunciation of each word. You can check out a hard copy dictionary or go to Dictionary.com and click on the speaker symbol to hear the word pronounced for you. It will look like this:

moth·er<sup>1</sup>  [ɪ]  
**noun**  
 (Pronounced “mah-ther”)

### Note:

Each vowel can be pronounced more than one way. For example, the *A*s in **ate**, **at**, **awe**, **air**, **about** are all pronounced differently.

Remember: Every **WORD** has at least one vowel.

Every **SYLLABLE** has at least one vowel.

Example: mu-sic, te-le-vi-sion

One thing you can do to help with your spelling is break the word that you are trying to spell down into syllables and make sure each one has at least one vowel.

## **Basic Spelling Rules**

### 1. I Before E

This rule is probably familiar to you as a rhyme. “**I** before **E**, except after **C**, or when it sounds like **A**, as in *neighbor* or *weigh*.” This rule is helpful for all of those words in which the vowels **E** and **I** are adjacent, such as *receive*, *liege*, and *niece* (and the words in the rhyme).

### 2. The Letter X

The letter **X** is never followed by the letter **S**. Even when forming the plural of a word ending in **X**, you must place an **e** in between the **X** and the **S**, as in *foxes* or *boxes*.

### 3. Word Endings

English words will almost never end in **I**, **U**, or **V** even when pronunciation seems to call for one of these letters, like in *have*, *give*, *dry*, or *true*. However, there are some **exceptions** to this rule, most of which, like *fungi* and *impromptu*, are taken from other languages.

### 4. The SH Sound

The ‘sh’ (like when telling someone to be quiet) sound is almost never made by the letters **S** and **H** except at the very beginning of a word, as in *shoe* or *shore*. In any other place in the word, you will use other letter combinations, like the “*ss*” in *mission* (pronounced mi-shun) and the “*ʃ*” in *motion* (pronounced mo-shun).

### 5. The Soft C

The letter **C** before **E**, **I** or **Y** makes an ‘s’ sound, as in *cent*, *city*, and *cycle*. The letter **C** followed by any other letter --- makes a strong ‘k’ sound, as in *cat*, *clock*, *cot*, *crate*, *cut*.

## 6. The Letter G

The letter **G** before **E**, **I**, or **Y** sometimes makes a 'j' sound, as in *page*, *giant*, *gym*, but also sometimes makes a strong 'g' sound, as in *get*, *girl*, *give*.

## 7. Plurals

To make a plural form of most nouns, just add an -S, or an -ES. *Chair* becomes *chairs* and *box* becomes *boxes*.

### **Additional Spelling Rules**

1. The letter **Q** is always followed by **u**; together they make the /kw/ sound as in *queen*, *quick*, and *quiet*. (Note: **U** does not make its own sound here, it's attached to the **Q**)
2. When a short syllable ends with a vowel (**A**, **E**, **I**, **O**, **U**) that vowel usually says its name—in other words, it says its long sound, like the "e" in *me*.
3. If the letter **A** comes at the end of a word, it says 'ah': ze-bra, tu-ba, in-flu-en-za.
4. The letters **I** and **Y** usually make a short **I** sound (*big*, *gym*), but can also make a long **I** sound (*silent*, *my*, *type*).
4. In soft **C** and **G** words that end in **E** and are paired with a suffix beginning with **A** or **O**, the **E** is kept in, as in *noticeable* or *changeable*.

**Don't forget:** Each vowel can be pronounced more than one way.

For example: The *A*'s in *ate*, *at*, *awe*, *air*, *about* are all pronounced differently.

### **Visual Memory**

Studying spelling rules can help you, but good spelling really comes from extensive reading. One of the best things you can do to improve your spelling is to read every day. The more you see the correct spelling of a word, the more you build up your visual memory and the less you will have to worry about spelling rules because you will have already absorbed them.

### **Most Common Spelling Mistakes**

Spelling errors are among the most common errors as well as the most easily corrected in papers. To correct spelling errors, use a spell-checker, regardless of your spelling skills, along with a dictionary to make sure you are using the right word. Remember that the spell-checker will not help with **homophones**, words that sound alike but have different spellings and meanings. Some words that can cause trouble are listed below.

- \* their (possessive form of they)
- \* there (in that place)
- \* they're (contraction of they are)
- \* accept (a verb, meaning to receive or to admit to a group)
- \* except (usually a preposition, meaning but or only)
- \* who's (contraction of who is or who has)
- \* whose (possessive form of who)
- \* its (possessive form of it)
- \* it's (contraction of it is or it has)
- \* your (possessive form of you)
- \* you're (contraction of you are)
- \* affect (usually a verb, meaning to influence)
- \* effect (usually a noun, meaning result)
- \* than (used in comparison)
- \* then (refers to a time in the past)
- \* were (form of the verb to be)
- \* we're (contraction of we are)
- \* where (related to location or place)
- \*insure (provide insurance coverage)
- \*ensure (make certain something will happen)
- \*breath (exhalation or inhalation of air into lungs- noun)
- \*breathe (to take air into or push air out of lungs- verb)
- \*weather (the state of the atmosphere with regard to wind, temperature, cloudiness, moisture, pressure, etc.)

\*whether (used to introduce the first of two or more alternatives)

### Other Commonly Misspelled Words

Absence	accommodate	achieve
Acquire	across	address
Advertise	balance	basically
Becoming	before	beginning
Believe	breathe	brilliant
business	calendar	careful
ceiling	citizen	coming
competition	convenience	criticize
definite	deposit	desperate
disappoint	does	during
embarrass	environment	equipped
exaggerate	except	exercise
existence	familiar	fascinating
foreign	forty	forward
friend	generally	government
heroes	humorous	identity
imaginary	imitation	immediately
incidentally	independent	intelligent
interesting	interfere	interpretation
interruption	judgment	knowledge
laboratory	length	library
license	loneliness	losing
lying	marriage	miniature
minute	mysterious	naturally
necessary	neighbor	neither
noticeable	occasion	occurred
official	often	omission
operate	optimism	original
ought	paid	parallel
particularly	peculiar	perceive
perform	permanent	persevere
personally	persuade	picture
piece	planning	pleasant
political	possess	possible
practical	prefer	prejudice
presence	privilege	probably
professional	promise	proof
physician	psychology	quantity
quarter	quiet	quit
quite	realize	receive
recognize	recommend	reference
religious	repetition	restaurant

rhythm	ridiculous	sacrifice
safety	scissors	secretary
separate	shining	similar
sincerely	soldier	speech
stopping	strength	studying
succeed	successful	surely
surprise	temperature	temporary
through	thorough	toward
tries	truly	twelfth
unusual	usually	village
weird	welcome	writing

**Remember: The more you read, the more you will see the words the way they are supposed to be spelled, and you will be more likely to remember the correct spelling.**

#### **Exercises:**

**Read the following paragraph and circle all of the spelling errors. Then write the correct spelling of each word.**

Today, I was on a mision to complete everything on my to-do list. I vowed not to decieve myself anymore by procrastinating and lying to myself that I would “get to it eventually.” First, I had breakfast with my old high school buddy, Michael Schinkley, a prominent physcian at the Cleveland Clinic, who was in town to catch a Lakers’ game. Than I drove over to the local gim were I worked out my pecs for a few hours. They’re equipment is in excellent condition, witch I feel really helps a workout move along. It was quiet a workout, and afterward I was hardley be able to take a breathe, but, on the bright side, I felt better about myself. Later on, I went to the zoo to see the newest monkey exhibet that I’d meant to go to for a long time. I am a big animal enthusiest, and monkees are by far my favorite createre. Not only do they swing from trees and gobble up bananas, but they (specificky, the males) also have an ear-splitting, yet affective, mating call. I actualley tried it on a woman that I dated once; needless to say, we both agreed that I should recieve some professionel help and it insured that I never went on

a date with her again. I also reflected back to a few years ago to the time I engaged in an absurdly long and pointless staring match with a prime ape. I don't know how long it lasted, but I know that it was longer than my first marriage. Anyway, getting back to my list, the last two things I was supposed to finish today were getting my scattered brain organized and, most importantly, working on my embarrassingly inept spelling.

**For answers to these exercises, please consult with a Writing Center tutor.**

**This handout is based on the following websites:**

"Noun Plural Formation." *Guide to English Spelling Rules*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Feb. 2013.  
<<http://www.davidappleyard.com/english/spelling.htm>>.

"Riggs News." *The Riggs Institute*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Feb. 2013.  
<<http://www.riggsinst.org/28rules.aspx>>.

"Spelling Rules." *Spelling Rules*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Feb. 2013.  
<<http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/spelling-and-word-lists/spelling-rules.html>>.

**Please visit our website at [www.lavc.edu/WCweb/index/html](http://www.lavc.edu/WCweb/index/html) for additional resources and services.**

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