

Rules of Spelling

Do you find yourself misspelling words often? Are you handicapped without the 'spell check' function on your computer? Are you fed up and irritated at losing marks for silly spelling errors? Don't be! Improving your spelling is really quite simple, and all you have to do is keep a few simple rules in mind. Use this spelling guide to make sure you don't lose marks for pointlessly silly mistakes!

SPELLING PLURAL NOUNS

1. Most words add **s** to the root forms without any change (barn - barns).
2. Words ending in sh, ch, ss, x, and z, usually add **es** to form the PLURAL (bush - bushes).
3. Words ending in a consonant and y change the y to i, and add **es** (party - parties).
4. Some words ending in f change the f to v and add **es** (calf - calves).
5. Some singular words have different words for their plural form (man - men; mouse - mice; goose-geese).

SUFFIXES

1. A letter or a syllable placed after a word to form a new word is called a 'suffix'. Some suffixes are: 's', 'es', 'ed', 'ing', 'er', 'est', 'ly', 'ful', 'able', 'ible', 'ment', 'ive', 'ance', 'ence', 'ion', 'tion', 'ition', 'ation', 'sion', 'ous', 'ious', 'less', and 'al'. Most often, these suffixes are used to derive the adjectival form of a noun. Sometimes a word may even have two suffixes. For example, 'respectfully' has the two suffixes 'ful' and 'ly' added to the root word 'respect'.
2. Many words are formed by adding 'ed' and 'ing' without any change (furnish - furnished - furnishing).
3. Words ending in a silent 'e' drop the 'e' before adding 'ed' and 'ing' (move - moved - moving).
4. Words ending in a consonant and 'y' change the 'y' to 'i' before adding 'ed', but do not make any change before adding 'ing' (deny - denied - denying).
5. Words ending in a vowel and 'y' add 'ed' and 'ing' without making any other change (delay - delayed - delaying).

PREFIXES

1. A syllable placed before a word to change its meaning is called a 'prefix'. Some prefixes are 'im', 'un', 'in', 'co', 'dis', 'inter'. Very often, you will find that a prefix has the effect of deriving the opposite of the word it is added on to.

DOUBLING THE FINAL CONSONANT

1. Words of one syllable ending in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel double the final consonant before adding 'ed' and 'ing' (trim - trimmed - trimming).
2. Words of two or more syllables double the final consonant before adding 'ed' and 'ing' when these conditions are met: the last syllable ends in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel, and the accent is on the last syllable (refer - referred - referring).

POSSESSIVE FORMS

1. Singular nouns form the possessive by adding an apostrophe and 's' (pilot - pilot's).
2. Plural nouns that end in 's' add only an apostrophe to form the possessive (aviators - aviators').
3. Plural nouns that do not end in s add the apostrophe and s to form the possessive (men - men's).

CONTRACTIONS

1. A word or phrase that has been shortened by leaving out some of the letters is called a 'contraction'.
2. An apostrophe is used to show that the letters have been omitted (won't - will not), (o'clock - of the clock).

CAPITALS

1. The beginning of a sentence is always capitalised (The day was bright and sunny.).
2. The names of holidays are capitalised (Christmas, Valentine's Day).
3. The names of the months of the year and the days of the week are capitalised (January, Monday).
4. The names of countries are capitalised (India, Great Britain).
5. When you write the name of a particular avenue or street, capitalise the words avenue and street (Fifth Avenue, Oak Street).

11.2

6. The abbreviations Mr., Mrs. and Ms. are always capitalised and followed by a period (Mr. Callahan, Mrs. Perry, Ms. Smith).
7. The names of deities are capitalised (God, Allah, Buddha, Saviour).
8. The word 'republican' is capitalised when it refers to the Republican party (The Republicans won the election.). That is, when a word that can be used as both a common noun and a proper noun is used in the latter sense, make sure you capitalise it.
9. When words like senator and general are used as titles with a person's name, they are capitalised (General Herkes distinguished herself in battle.).
10. We capitalise the words capitol, senate, building, supreme and court when referring to the Capitol Building, the Senate, the Supreme Court of Canada.

LETTERS AND SYLLABLES

1. The vowels are a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y and w. The other letters are consonants.
2. Two vowels written together often have the sound of a single vowel. (In brain, the 'ai' has the sound of 'a'. In 'eagle' the 'ea' has the sound of a long 'e', but in 'bread' it has the sound of a short 'e'. This rule will help you with the 'ei' and 'ie' words: 'i' comes before 'e' except after 'c' or when sounded like 'a', as in 'neighbour' and 'weigh'.
3. A syllable is a word or part of a word, which has one vowel sound and is spoken as a unit. (boy is a one-syllable word; chil-dren is a two-syllable word; or-na-ment is a three syllable word. In every word of two or more syllables one syllable is given more emphasis than the other. This extra emphasis is called accent, and is shown in the dictionary by an accent mark (')
4. (In meet' ing the first syllable is accented.) Most words have only one accented syllable, but some have more than one (in' for ma' tion). The accent that is the heavier is called the primary accent. The other accent is called the secondary accent.

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5. In your dictionary each word is re-spelled according to its pronunciation. The vowels are marked according to their sounds, and the accented syllables are shown. The marks for the vowel sounds are called diacritical marks. These marks vary from dictionary to dictionary. Please consult the beginning of your own dictionary for the explanation of diacritical marks used in that particular publication.
6. The two words at the top of each dictionary page are called guidewords. The guidewords are the first and last words on that particular page.

SPECIAL WORDS

1. Compound Words are made by writing two small words together to make one larger word. (newspaper, somebody)
2. A root word is the root, or beginning word, from which another word is made. 'Play' is the root word of 'plays', 'played' and 'playing'.
3. Derived words are words that come from other words. 'Suitable' is derived from 'suit'; 'advertisement' from 'advertise'. Sometimes the spelling of the root word is slightly changed in the derived word.
4. A synonym is a word having almost the same meaning as another word. (replied - answered; accurate - exact)
5. An antonym is a word that is opposite in meaning to another word. (private -public; good - bad)
6. Homonyms are words that are pronounced alike but which are spelled in different ways and have different meanings (knew - new; steel - steal; deer - dear)

Looks a little complicated, doesn't it? But don't worry— remember that you don't have to go about learning these rules— you must acquire the habit of following these rules over time. The more you read and write, the easier it will be for you to avoid spelling mistakes! Most important of all— use your dictionary well! It has a wealth of information on how to use words, in speech as well as in writing, and you would be giving up a wonderful opportunity to improve your English if you don't make full use of the lexicon!