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 which 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: f<u>a</u>mous, f<u>o</u>cus, oc<u>cur</u>, in<u>fer</u>)

2. Ten common spelling rules

Rule	Examples	Memorise
1. '*ie*' or '*ei*' ❶ Write *i* before *e*, except after c ❷ Write *ie* after *c* for words with a *shen* sound. ❸ Write *ei* when the vowels sounds like an *a* as in '<u>weigh</u>'	❶ ach<u>ie</u>ve, bel<u>ie</u>ve, fr<u>ie</u>nd rec<u>ei</u>ve, rec<u>ei</u>pt, per<u>cei</u>ve ❷ an<u>cie</u>nt, effi<u>cie</u>nt, suffi<u>cie</u>nt, cons<u>cie</u>nce ❸ n<u>ei</u>ghbour, v<u>ei</u>n, r<u>ei</u>gn, rein, deign	Exceptions: Words like counterfeit, either, neither, height, leisure, forfeit , foreign, science, species, seize, weird
2. '*s*' or '*es*' ❶ Add *es* if a word ends in *ch, sh, ss, x* or *z* ❷ Add *es* for most words ending in *o*	❶ arch > arch<u>es</u>, clash > clash<u>es</u>, class > class<u>es</u>, box > box<u>es</u>, quiz > quizz<u>es</u> ❷ tomato > tomat<u>oes</u>, hero > her<u>oes</u>, go > g<u>oes</u>, do > d<u>oes</u>, echo > ech<u>oes</u>	Exceptions: Words like altos, duos, pianos, radios, solos sopranos, studios, videos, typos
3. '*y*' to '*i*' or not ❶ For words ending in *y* preceded by a vowel, **retain** the *y* when adding *s* or a suffix. ❷ For words ending in *y*, **retain** the *y* when adding *ing*. ❸ For words ending in *y*, preceded by a consonant, **change** the *y* to *i* before any other suffix	❶ convey > conv<u>eys</u>, employ > empl<u>oyer</u> ❷ try > tr<u>ying</u>, justify > justif<u>ying</u>, certify > certif<u>ying</u>, study > stud<u>ying</u> ❸ try > tr<u>ied</u>, justify > justif<u>ies</u>, certify > certif<u>iable</u>, mystify > mystif<u>ied</u>, laboratory > laborator<u>ies</u>	Exceptions: Words like dryness, shyness
4. drop the final '*e*' ❶ DROP the *e* when the suffix starts with a vowel. ❷ DROP the *e* when the word ends in *dge.* ❸ DROP the final *e* when adding *-ing*	❶ sav<u>e</u> > savable, us<u>e</u> > usable ❷ judg<u>e</u> > judgment ❸ sav<u>e</u> >saving, manag<u>e</u> > managing, trac<u>e</u> > tracing, emerg<u>e</u> > emerging	Exceptions: **DO NOT DROP** the *e* if the word ends in *ce* or *ge* (*e.g. manage > manageable, trace > traceable)*

Rule	Examples	Memorise
5. *'t ' or 'tt'* when adding *-ing, -ed and some suffixes* to verbs ❶ DOUBLE the *t* for verbs of one syllable with *a* single vowel, or a short vowel sound. ❷ DOUBLE the *t* for verbs of more than one syllable when the stress is on the last syllable.	❶ r<u>ot</u> > rotting, rotted, rotten f<u>it</u> > fitting, fitted kn<u>ot</u> > knotting, knotted ❷ ab<u>et</u> > abetting, abetting all<u>ot</u> > allotting, allotted comm<u>it</u> > committing, committed em<u>it</u> > emitting, emitted forg<u>et</u> > forgetting, forgotten (but forgetful)	Exceptions: DO NOT DOUBLE the *t* for verbs of one syllable with a double vowel or a long vowel sound *(e.g. treat > treating, treated; greet > greeting, greeted)*
6. *'r' or 'rr'* when adding *-ing, -ed and some suffixes* to verbs ❶ DOUBLE the *r* for verbs of one syllable when the final *r* is preceded by a single vowel. ❷ DOUBLE the *r* for words of more than one syllable when the stress does not fall on the first syllable.	❶ star > starring, starred, starry tar > tarring, tarred war > warring, warred (but warfare) scar > scarring, scarred stir > stirring, stirred ❷ concur > concurring, concurred, concurrence occur > occurring, occurred, occurrence defer > deferring, deferred, (but deference) deter > deterring, deterring, deterrent infer > inferring, inferred, (but inference) prefer > preferred, preferring, (but preference) refer > referred, referring, referral	Exceptions: 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	Exceptions: DO NOT DOUBLE the *l* when it is preceded by a double vowel *(e.g. conceal > concealing, concealed)*
8. Dropping letters Many words drop a letter when adding a suffix, but it is not always the final letter	arg<u>ue</u> > argument; proce<u>ed</u> > procedure; hum<u>ou</u>r > humorous; disast<u>er</u> > disastrous; repe<u>at</u> > repetition; administ<u>er</u> > administration	There is no reliable rule covering these words, so they simply have to be memorised.
9. Word endings such as able/ible, ant/ance; ent/ence	neglig<u>ible</u>, incred<u>ible</u>, invis<u>ible</u>, sens<u>ible</u>, admir<u>able</u>, prevent<u>able</u>, suit<u>able</u>, depend<u>able</u> attend<u>ance</u>, ignor<u>ance</u>, nuis<u>ance</u>, import<u>ance</u> sent<u>ence</u>, differ<u>ence</u> ,independ<u>ence</u>, intellig<u>ence</u>	There is no reliable rule covering these words, so they simply have to be memorised.
10. Silent letters Some words include letters which are not pronounced when the word is spoken.	advertis<u>e</u>ment, campai<u>g</u>n, colum<u>n</u>, de<u>b</u>t, desi<u>g</u>n, dou<u>b</u>t, <u>g</u>auge, <u>g</u>hetto, <u>h</u>eir, <u>k</u>nife, <u>k</u>nowledge, i<u>s</u>land, mor<u>t</u>gage, of<u>t</u>en, <u>p</u>neumatic, <u>r</u>hythm, solem<u>n</u>, su<u>b</u>tle	There is no reliable rule covering these words, so they simply have to be memorised.

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 *acceptable*, then make sure you use it CONSISTENTLY in your essay.

Examples

- **-re/-er** (use -re for spelling words e.g. *theatre, litre, centre, calibre, sombre, fibre*—NOT theater, liter, center)

- **-our/-or** (use -our for spelling words e.g. *colour, honour, neighbour*—NOT color, honor, neighbor)

- **-ise/-ize** (both are acceptable; but the 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** (e.g. *aeroplane*—NOT airplane; *traveller*—NOT traveler; *defence*—NOT defense)