The A-Z of Correct English

Common errors in English – quick solutions to everyday spelling, punctuation and grammar problems

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Evening Standard

Angela Burt
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The A to Z of Correct English

ANGELA BURT
2nd edition
The A–Z of Correct English is a reference book which has been written for the student and the general reader. It aims to tackle the basic questions about spelling, punctuation, grammar and word usage that the student and the general reader are likely to ask.

Throughout the book there are clear explanations, and exemplar sentences where they are needed. When it’s helpful to draw attention to spelling rules and patterns, these are given so that the reader is further empowered to deal with hundreds of related words. The aim always has been to make the reader more confident and increasingly self-reliant.

This is a fast-track reference book. It is not a dictionary although, like a dictionary, it is arranged alphabetically. It concentrates on problem areas; it anticipates difficulties; it invites cross-references. By exploring punctuation, for example, and paragraphing, it goes far beyond a dictionary’s terms of reference. It is not intended to replace a dictionary; it rather supplements it.

Once, in an evening class, one of my adult students said, ‘If there’s a right way to spell a word, I want to know it.’ On another occasion, at the end of a punctuation session on possessive apostrophes, a college student said rather angrily, ‘Why wasn’t I told this years ago?’

This book has been written to answer all the questions that my students over the years have needed to ask. I hope all who now use it will have their questions answered also and enjoy the confidence and the mastery that this will bring.

Angela Burt
How to use this book

For ease of reference, all the entries in this book have been listed alphabetically rather than being divided into separate spelling, usage, punctuation and grammar sections.

You will therefore find hypocrisy following hyphens; paragraphing following paraffin; who or whom? following whiskey or whisky?; and so on.

WANT TO CHECK A SPELLING?

Cross-referencing will help you locate words with tricky initial letters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aquaint</th>
<th>Wrong spelling. See acquaint.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Plural words are given alongside singular nouns, with cross-referencing to relevant rules and patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>knife (singular)</th>
<th>knives (plural). See plurals (v).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

There is also a general section on plurals and another on foreign plurals.

If it's the complication of adding an ending that is causing you trouble, you will find some words listed with a useful cross-reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dining or dinning?</th>
<th>dine + ing = dining (as in dining room)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>din + ing = dinning (noise dinning in ears)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>See adding endings (i) and (ii).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are individual entries for confusing endings like -able/-ible; -ance,-ant/-ence,-ent; -cal/-cle; -ise or -ize? and for confusing beginnings like ante-/anti-; for-/fore-; hyper-/hypo-; inter-/intra- and many others.
| **abandon** | abandoned, abandoning, abandonment  
* (not -bb-) |
| **abattoir** | (not -bb-) |
| **abbreviate** | abbreviated, abbreviating, abbreviation  
* (not -b-) |
| **abbreviations** | See CONTRACTIONS. |

**-able/-ible**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjectives ending in -able or -ible can be difficult to spell because both endings sound identical. You’ll always need to be on guard with these words and check each word individually when you are in doubt, but here are some useful guidelines:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (i) Generally use -able when the companion word ends in -ation:  
abominable, abomination  
irritable, irritation |
| (ii) Generally use -ible when the companion word ends in -ion:  
comprehensible, comprehension  
digestible, digestion |
| (iii) Use -able after hard c and hard g:  
practicable (c sounds like k)  
navigable (hard g) |
| (iv) Use -ible after soft c and soft g:  
forcible (c sounds like s)  
legible (g sounds like j) |

See also ADDING ENDINGS (ii); SOFT C AND SOFT G.
abridgement/abridgment

Both spellings are correct. Use either but be consistent within one piece of writing.

abscess

This is a favourite word in spelling quizzes. (not absess or abcess)

absence

absent (not absc-)

absolute

absolutely (not absoloute, absoloutely)

absorb

absorption. Notice how b changes to p here.

abstract nouns

See nouns.

accept or except?

We ACCEPT your apology. Everybody was there EXCEPT Stephen.

accessary or accessory?

If you want to preserve the traditional distinction in meaning between these two words, use ACCESSARY to refer to someone associated with a crime and ACCESSORY to refer to something that is added (a fashion accessory or car accessories). However, the distinction has now become blurred and it is perfectly acceptable to use one spelling to cover both meanings. Of the two, accessory is the more widely used, but both are correct.

accessible

(not -able)

accidentally

The adverb is formed by adding -ly to accidental. (not accidently)

accommodation

This is a favourite word in spelling quizzes and is frequently seen misspelt on painted signs. (not accomodation or accommodadion)

accross

Wrong spelling. See ACROSS.

accumulate

(not -mm-)

ABRIDGEMENT/ABRIDGMENT

2
achieve

achieved, achieving, achievement (not -ei-)
See also ADDING ENDINGS (ii); EI/IE SPELLING RULE.

acknowledgement/acknowledgment
Both spellings are correct but be consistent within one piece of writing.

acquaint
acquainted (not aq-)

acquaintance (not -ence)

acquiesce
acquiesced, acquiescing (not aq-)

acquiescence (not -ance)

acquire
acquired, acquiring, acquisition (not aq-)

acreage
Note that there are three syllables here. (not acrage)

across (not accross)

adapter or adaptor?
Traditional usage would distinguish between these two words and reserve -er for the person (an adapter of novels, for instance) and -or for the piece of electrical equipment. However, the distinction has become very blurred and the two spellings are considered by many authorities to be interchangeable. Use either for both meanings but be consistent within a single piece of writing.

addendum (singular)
addenda (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

adding endings
Usually endings (suffixes) can be added to base words without any complications. You just add them and that is that!

e.g. iron + ing = ironing
       steam + er = steamer
       list + less = listless

However, there are four groups of words which need especial care. Fortunately, there are some straightforward rules...
which save your learning thousands of words individually.

(i) *The 1-1-1 rule*

This rule applies to:
- words of **ONE syllable**
- ending with **ONE consonant**
- preceded by **ONE vowel**

 e.g. drop, flat, sun, win.

When you add an ending beginning with a consonant to a l-l-l word, there is no change to the base word:
- drop + let = droplet
- flat + ly = flatly
- win + some = winsome

When you add an ending beginning with a vowel to a l-l-l word, you double the final letter of the base word:
- drop + ed = dropped
- flat + est = flattest
- win + ing = winning
- sun + *y = sunny

*y* counts as a vowel when it sounds like i or e.
See **vowels**.

Treat qu as one letter:
- quit + ing = quitting
- quip + ed = quipped

Don’t double final w and x. They would look very odd and so we have correctly:
- tax + ing = taxing
- paw + ed = pawed

(ii) *The magic -e rule*

This rule applies to all words ending
with a silent -e.
e.g. hope, care, achieve, sincere, separate.

When you add an ending beginning with a consonant, keep the -e:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>New Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hope + ful</td>
<td>hopeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care + less</td>
<td>careless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sincere + ly</td>
<td>sincerely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>separate + ly</td>
<td>separately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achieve + ment</td>
<td>achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When you add an ending beginning with a vowel, drop the -e:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>New Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hope + ing</td>
<td>hoping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care + er</td>
<td>carer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sincere + ity</td>
<td>sincerity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>separate + ion</td>
<td>separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achieve + ed</td>
<td>achieved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do, however, keep the -e in words like singeing (different from singing) and dyeing (different from dying) and whenever you need to keep the identity of the base word clear (e.g. shoeing, canoeing).

Do remember to keep the -e with soft c and soft g words. It’s the e that keeps them soft (courageous, traceable). (See SOFT C AND SOFT G.)

Don’t keep the -e with these eight exceptions to the rule: truly, duly, ninth, argument, wholly, awful, whilst, wisdom.

(iii) -y rule
This rule applies to all words ending in -y. Look at the letter before the -y in the base word.

It doesn’t matter at all what kind of ending you are adding. When you add an ending to a word ending in a
vowel + y, keep the y:
portray + ed = portrayed
employ + ment = employment

When you add an ending to a word ending in a consonant + y, change the y to i:
try + al = trial
empty + er = emptier
pity + less = pitiless
lazy + ness = laziness

Do keep the y when adding -ing. Two i’s together would look very odd, despite our two words ski-ing and taxi-ing.

try + ing = trying
empty + ing = emptying

Don’t apply the rule in these fourteen cases: daily, gaily, gaiety, laid, paid, said, slain, babyhood, shyly, shyness, dryness, slyness, wryly, wryness.

(iv) The 2-1-1 rule
This rule applies to:
words of TWO syllables
ending with ONE consonant
preceded by ONE vowel.

With this rule, it all depends on which syllable of the word is stressed. The 2-1-1 words below are stressed on the first syllable, and both vowel and consonant endings are added without any complications:
gossip gossiping
target targeted
limit limitless
eager eagerness

But note that kidnap, outfit, worship, always double their final letter:
kidnapped, outfighter, worshipping

Take care with 2-1-1 words which are stressed on the second syllable. There is no change when you add a consonant ending:

forget + ful = forgetful
equip + ment = equipment

Double the final consonant of the base word when you add a vowel ending:

forget + ing = forgetting
equip + ed = equipped
forbid + en = forbidden
begin + er = beginner

This rule is really valuable but you must be aware of some exceptions:

► 2-1-1 words ending in -l seem to have a rule all of their own. Whether the stress is on the first or the second syllable, there is no change when a consonant ending is added:

quarrel + some = quarrelsome
instal + ment = instalment

Double the -l when adding a vowel ending:

quarrel + ing = quarrelling
instal + ed = installed
excel + ent = excellent

► Notice how the change of stress in these words affects the spelling:

confer conferred conferring conference
derfer deferred deferring deference
infer inferred inferring inference
prefer preferred preferring preference
refer referred referring reference
transfer transferred transferring transference

See also -ABLE/-IBLE; -ANCE,-ANT/-ENCE,-ENT;
-CAL/-CLE; -FUL/-LY.
address  
(not adr-)

dieu (singular)  
adieus or adieux (plural)  
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

adrenalin/adrenaline  
Both spellings are correct.

adress  
Wrong spelling. See ADDRESS.

advantageous  
advantage + ous  
Keep the -e in this instance.  
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

adverse or averse?  
These two words have different meanings.

The ferries were cancelled owing to ADVERSE weather conditions.  
(= unfavourable)  
She is not AVERSE to publicity.  
(= opposed)

advertisement  
advertise + ment  
See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

advice or advise?  
My ADVICE is to forget all about it.  
(noun = recommendation)  
What would you ADVISE me to do?  
(verb = recommend)

adviser or advisor?  
Adviser is the traditionally correct British spelling. Advisor is more common in American English.

advisory  
(not -ery)

aerial  
Use the same spelling for the noun (a television AERIAL) and the adjective (an AERIAL photograph).

affect or effect?  
Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Heavy drinking will AFFECT your liver.  
(verb)  
The EFFECT on her health was immediate. (noun)  
The new manager plans to EFFECT sweeping changes. (verb = to bring about)
afraid

(ageing or aging?) Both spellings are correct but many would prefer ageing as it keeps the identity of the base word (age) more easily recognised.

See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

aggravate

Strictly speaking, aggravate means to make worse.

His rudeness AGGRAVATED an already explosive situation.

It is, however, widely used in the sense of to irritate or to annoy. Be aware that some authorities would regard this second usage as incorrect.

aggressive

(agree to/agree with)

The choice of preposition alters the meaning of the verb:

I AGREED TO do what he advised.
I AGREED TO all the conditions.
I AGREED WITH all they said.

See PREPOSITIONS.

agreeable

(alga (singular))

alga (singular), algae (plural)

See FOREIGN PLURALS.

alley or ally?

An ALLEY is a little lane.
An ALLY is a friend.

See PLURALS (iii).
all most or almost? There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

They were ALL (= everyone) MOST kind. The child was ALMOST (= nearly) asleep.

allowed or aloud? There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Are we ALLOWED (= permitted) to smoke in here? I was just thinking ALOUD (= out loud).

all ready or already? There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

We are ALL (= everyone) READY. It is ALL (= everything) READY. She was ALREADY dead (= by then).

all right or alright? Traditional usage would consider ALL RIGHT to be correct and ALRIGHT to be incorrect. However, the use of ‘alright’ is so widespread that some would see it as acceptable although the majority of educated users would take care to avoid it.

all so or also? There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

You are ALL (= everyone) SO kind. You are ALSO (= in addition) generous.

all together or altogether? There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

They were ALL (= everybody) huddled TOGETHER for warmth. His situation is ALTOGETHER (= totally) different from yours.

allude or elude? There is a difference in meaning.

ALLUDE means to refer to indirectly. ELUDE means to evade capture or recall.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>allusion, delusion</th>
<th>There is a difference in meaning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>or illusion?</td>
<td>An <strong>ALLUSION</strong> is an indirect reference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A <strong>DELUSION</strong> is a false belief (often associated with a mental disorder).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An <strong>ILLUSION</strong> is a deceptive appearance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>all ways or always?</th>
<th>There is a difference in meaning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>These three routes are <strong>ALL</strong> (= each of them) <strong>WAYS</strong> into town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She <strong>ALWAYS</strong> (= at all times) tells the truth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>almost</th>
<th>See <strong>ALL MOST OR ALMOST?</strong>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a lot</td>
<td>Write as two words, not as one. Bear in mind that this construction is slang and not to be used in a formal context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aloud</th>
<th>See <strong>ALLOWED OR ALOUD?</strong>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>already</th>
<th>See <strong>ALL READY OR ALREADY?</strong>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>altar or alter?</th>
<th>There is a difference in meaning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The bride and groom stood solemnly before the <strong>ALTAR</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you wish to <strong>ALTER</strong> (= change) the arrangements?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| alternate or            | We visit our grandparents on **ALTERNATE** Saturdays. (= every other Saturday) |
| alternative?           | I **ALTERNATE** between hope and despair. (= have each mood in turn) |
|                        | An **ALTERNATIVE** plan would be to go by boat. (= another possibility) |
|                        | The **ALTERNATIVES** are simple: work or go hungry. (= two choices) |

| alternatives           | Strictly speaking, the choice can be between only two alternatives (one choice or the other). |
|                        | However, the word is frequently used more loosely and this precise definition is becoming lost. |
altogether

See all together or altogether?.

Alzheimer’s disease  (not Alze-)

amateur  (not -mm-)

ambiguity

Always try to anticipate any possible confusion on the part of your reader. Check that you have made your meaning absolutely clear.

(i) Bear in mind that pronouns can be very vague. Consider this sentence:

My brother told his friend that HE had won first prize in the local photographic exhibition.

Who is ‘he’, my brother or his friend?

Rewrite more clearly:

(a) My brother congratulated his friend on winning first prize in the local photographic exhibition.

(b) My brother, delighted to have won first prize in the local photographic exhibition, told his friend.

The other possibility is rather clumsy but is otherwise clear:

(c) My brother told his friend that he (his friend) had won first prize.

(d) My brother told his friend that he (my brother) had won first prize.

(ii) Position the adverb ONLY with great care. It will refer to the word nearest to it, usually the word following. This may not be the meaning you intended. See how crucial to the meaning the position of ‘only’ can be:

ONLY Sean eats fish on Fridays.

(= No one else but Sean eats fish on Fridays.)
Sean **ONLY** eats fish on Fridays.
(= Sean does nothing else to the fish on Fridays but eat it. He doesn’t buy it, cook it, look at it, smell it . . . .)

Sean eats **ONLY** fish on Fridays.
(= Sean eats nothing but fish on Fridays.)

Sean eats fish **ONLY** on Fridays.
Sean eats fish on Fridays **ONLY**.
(= Sean eats fish on this one day in the week and never on any other.)

(iii) Take care with the positioning of **BADLY**.

This room needs cleaning **BADLY**.

Does it? Or does it not need cleaning well? Rewrite like this:

This room **BADLY** needs cleaning.

(iv) Beware of causing initial bewilderment by not introducing a comma to indicate a pause.

The shabby little riverside café was empty and full of wasps and flies.

Empty and full?

The shabby little riverside café was empty, and full of wasps and flies.

See **COMMAS** (ix).

(v) Avoid the danger of writing nonsense!

**DRIVING** slowly along the road, **THE CASTLE** dominated the landscape.

The castle is driving?

Rewrite:

As we drove slowly along the road, we saw how the castle dominated the landscape.

ë
COOKED slowly, the FAMILY will enjoy the cheaper cuts of meat.

Rewrite:
If the cheaper cuts of meat are cooked slowly, the family will enjoy them.

See participles.

(vi) Make sure the descriptive details describe the right noun!
For sale: 1995 Peugeot 205 – one owner with power-assisted steering.
Rewrite:
For sale: 1995 Peugeot 205 with power-assisted steering – one owner.

amend or emend?
Both words mean ‘to make changes in order to improve’. Use AMEND or EMEND when referring to the correction of written or printed text.
Use AMEND in a wider context such as AMENDING the law or AMENDING behaviour.

ammount
Wrong spelling. See AMOUNT.

among
(not amoung)

among/amongst
Either form can be used.

among or between?
Use BETWEEN when something is shared by two people. Use AMONG when it is shared by three or more.

Share the sweets BETWEEN the two of you.
Share the sweets AMONG yourselves.

However, BETWEEN is used with numbers larger than two when it means an exact geographical location or when it refers to relationships.
Sardinia lies BETWEEN Spain, Algeria, Corsica and Italy. It will take a long time before the rift BETWEEN the five main parties heals.

**amoral or immoral?**

There is a difference in meaning.

**AMORAL** means not being governed by moral laws, acting outside them. (note -m-)

**IMMORAL** means breaking the moral laws. (note -mm-)

**amoung**

Wrong spelling. See *among*.

**amount**

(not ammount)

**amount or number?**

**AMOUNT** is used with non-count nouns: 
a small **AMOUNT** of sugar; a surprising **AMOUNT** of gossip.

**NUMBER** is used with plural nouns: a **NUMBER** of mistakes; a **NUMBER** of reasons.

**analyse**

(not -ize as in American English)

**analysis** (singular)

analyses (plural)

See *foreign plurals*.

**-ance,-ant/-ence,-ent**

Words with these endings are difficult to spell and you’ll always need to be on your guard with them. Check each word individually when in doubt, but here are some useful guidelines:

(i) People are generally -ant: attendant, lieutenant, occupant, sergeant, tenant (but there are exceptions like superintendent, president, resident . . . .).

(ii) Use -ance, -ant, where the companion words ends in -ation: dominance, dominant, domination, variance, variant, variation.
(iii) Use -ence, -ent after qu:
    consequence, consequent,
    eloquence, eloquent.

(iv) Use -ance, -ant after hard c or hard g:
    significance, significant (c sounds like k)
    elegance, elegant (hard g)

(v) Use -ence, -ent after soft c or soft g:
    innocence, innocent (c sounds like s)
    intelligent, intelligence (g sounds like j)

See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

and/but

Many of us have been taught never to begin a sentence with AND or BUT. Generally speaking this is good advice. Both words are conjunctions and will therefore be busy joining words within the sentence:

I should love to come AND I look forward to the party very much.
They wanted to come BUT sadly they had to visit a friend in hospital some miles away.

However, there are some occasions when you may need the extra emphasis that starting a new sentence with AND or BUT would give. If you have a good reason to break the rules, do so!

angsiety

Wrong spelling. See ANXIETY.

angsious

Wrong spelling. See ANXIOUS.

annex or annexe?

To ANNEX is to take possession of a country or part of a country.
An ANNEX is another word for an appendix in an official document.
An ANNEXE is a building added to the main building.

annoint

Wrong spelling. See ANOINT.

announce

announced, announcing, announcer, announcement
(not -n-)

16
annoy

annoyed, annoying, annoyance
(not anoy or annoied)

annul

annulled, annulling, annulment
See adding endings (iv).

anoint

(not -nn-)

announce

Wrong spelling. See ANNOUNCE.

anoy

Wrong spelling. See ANNOY.

ante-/anti-

ANTE- means before.
antenatal = before birth
ANTI- means against.
antifreeze = against freezing

antecedent

This means earlier in time or an ancestor.
(not anti-)
See ANTE-/ANTI-.

antediluvian

This means very old-fashioned and primitive, literally ‘before the flood of Noah’. (not anti-)
See ANTE-/ANTI-.

antenna

This word has two plurals, each used in a different sense:
Use ANTENNAE to refer to insects.
Use ANTENNAS to refer to television aerials.
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

anticlimax

(not ante-)
See ANTE-/ANTI-.

antirrhinum

(not -rh-)

antisocial

(not ante-)
See ANTE-/ANTI-.

anxiety

(not angs-)

anxious

(not angs-)

apologise/apologize

Both spellings are correct. (not -pp)

apology

apologies (plural)
See PLURALS (iii).
Wrong spelling. See upon.

(i) Apostrophes can be used to show that letters have been omitted:

- in contractions
  - didn’t
  - o’clock
  - you’ve
  - won’t

- in poetry
  - o’er vales and hills
  - where’er you walk

- in dialect
  - ’Ere’s, ’Arry

- in retail
  - pick ‘n’ mix
  - salt ‘n’ vinegar

(ii) Apostrophes can be used to show ownership. Follow these simple guidelines and you’ll never put the apostrophe in the wrong place.

**Singular nouns or ‘owners’**

The tail of the dog  
The dog’s tail

Who ‘owns’ the tail?  
Put the apostrophe  
after the owner.  
Add -s.  
Add what is ‘owned’.  

The smile of the princess  
The princess’s smile

Who ‘owns’ the smile?  
Put the apostrophe  
after the owner.  
Add -s.  
Add what is ‘owned’.  

With proper names ending in -s, you have a choice, depending upon how the name is pronounced.

Keats’ poetry or Keats’s poetry

*But* St James’s Square, London, SW1
St James’ (two syllables)
St James’s (three syllables)

*Plural nouns or ‘owners’*

Don’t worry about whether you use ‘s or s’ in the plural. It will sort itself out.

The tails of the dogs
The dogs’ tails

Who ‘owns’ the tails? the dogs
Put the apostrophe after the owners. the dogs’
Add -s if there isn’t one. (no need here)
Add what is ‘owned’ the dogs’ tails

The laughter of the women
The women’s laughter

Who ‘owns’ the laughter? the women
Put the apostrophe after the owners. the women’
Add -s if there isn’t one. the women’s
Add what is ‘owned’. the women’s laughter

And so, when reading, you will be able to distinguish singular and plural ‘owners’.

The princess’s suitors.
The princesses’ suitors.

The ‘owner’ is the word before the apostrophe.

(iii) Apostrophes are also used in condensed expressions of time.

The work of a moment.
A moment’s work.
The work of three years.
Three years’ work.

If you follow the guidelines in (ii) above, you will never make a mistake.

**appal**

appalled, appalling (*not* -aul-)
See also **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

**appearance**

(*not* -ence)

**appendix**

This word has two plurals, each used in a different sense.
Use **APPENDIXES** in an anatomical sense.
Use **APPENDICES** when referring to supplementary sections in books or formal documents.
See also **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

**appologise/-ize**

Wrong spelling. See **APOLOGISE/APOLOGIZE**.

**appology**

Wrong spelling. See **APOLOGY**.

**appreciate**

There are three distinct meanings of this word.

I **APPRECIATE** your kindness
(= recognise gratefully).

I **APPRECIATE** that you have had a difficult time lately (= understand).

My cottage **HAS APPRECIATED** in value already (= increased).

Some people would choose to avoid the second use above (understand, realise) but the verb is now widely used in this sense and this has become acceptable.

**approach**

approached, approaching (*not* apr-)

**aquaint**

Wrong spelling. See **ACQUAINT**.

**aquaintance**

Wrong spelling. See **ACQUAINTANCE**.

**aquarium** (singular)

aquaria or aquariums (plural)
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.
aquiesce  Wrong spelling. See ACQUIESCE.

aquiescence  Wrong spelling. See ACQUIESCENCE.

aquire  Wrong spelling. See ACQUIRE.

arrange  Wrong spelling. See ARRANGE.

arbiter or arbitrator?  An ARBITER is a judge or someone with decisive influence (an arbiter of fashion). In addition, an ARBITER may intervene to settle a dispute (-er). An ARBITRATOR is someone who is officially appointed to judge the rights and wrongs of a dispute (-or).

arbiter or mediator?  An ARBITRATOR reaches a judgement but is not necessarily obeyed. A MEDIATOR attempts to bring two opposing sides together and to settle a dispute.

archipelago  There are two interchangeable plural forms: archipelagoes, archipelagos.

arctic  (not artic, although frequently mispronounced as such)

argument  (not argument)

arrange  arranged, arranging, arrangement (not -r-) See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

artic  Wrong spelling. See ARCTIC.

article  (not -cal) See -CAL/-CLE.

artist or artiste?  Traditionally, an ARTIST is skilled in one or more of the fine arts (painting, for example, or sculpture). Traditionally, the term ARTISTE is reserved for a performer or entertainer (a music-hall ARTISTE). However, ARTIST is now being used to cover both meanings in the sense of ‘skilled practitioner’, and ARTISTE is becoming redundant.
as or like? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

You look AS if you have seen a ghost.
You look AS though you have seen a ghost.
AS I expected, he's missed the train.
You look LIKE your mother.

asma Wrong spelling. See ASTHMA.

asphalt (*not* ashphalt, as it is frequently mispronounced)

aspirin (*not* asprin, as it is frequently mispronounced)

assassin (*not* assasin or assasin)

assma Wrong spelling. See ASTHMA.

assume or presume? To ASSUME something to be the case is to take it for granted without any proof.
To PRESUME something to be the case is to base it on the evidence available.

assurance or insurance? Insurance companies distinguish between these two terms.
ASSURANCE is the technical term given for insurance against a certainty (e.g. death) where payment is guaranteed.
INSURANCE is the technical term given for insurance against a risk (such as fire, burglary, illness) where payment is made only if the risk materialises.

asthma (*not* asma or assma)

astrology or astronomy? ASTROLOGY is the study of the influence of the stars and planets on human life and fortune.
ASTRONOMY is the scientific study of the stars and planets.

athlete (*not* athelete)

athletics (*not* atheletics)
attach
attached, attaching, attachment (*not* -tch)

audible
(*not* -able)

audience
(*not* -ance)

aural or oral?
**AURAL** refers to the ears and hearing.
**ORAL** refers to the mouth and speaking.
In speech these words can be very confusing as they are pronounced identically.

authoritative
(*not* authoritative)

autobiography or biography?
An **AUTOBIOGRAPHY** is an account of his or her life by the author.
A **BIOGRAPHY** is an account of a life written by someone else.

automaton (singular)
automata, automatons (plural)
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

avenge or revenge?
The words are very close in meaning but **AVENGE** is often used in the sense of just retribution, punishing a wrong done to another.

Hamlet felt bound to **AVENGE** his father’s death.

**REVENGE** is often used in the sense of ‘getting one’s own back’ for a petty offence.

averse
See **ADVERSE** or **AVERSE**?

awkward
*Notice* -wkw-. The spelling itself looks awkward!

axis (singular)
axes (plural)
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.
babyhood

*(not -i-)*

This word is an exception to the -y rule. See **ADDITION ENDINGS** (iii).

bachelor

*(not -tch-)*

**bacillus** (singular)  
bacilli (plural)  
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

**bacterium** (singular)  
bacteria (plural)  
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

badly

This word is often carelessly positioned with disastrous effects on meaning.  
See **AMBIGUITY** (iii).

**banister/bannister**  
banisters, bannisters (plural)  
Although the first spelling is more widely used, both spellings are correct.

bargain

*(not -ian)*

**basically**  
basic + ally *(not basically)*

batchelor

Wrong spelling. See **BACHELOR**.

bath or bathe?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

I have a **BATH** every morning (= I have a wash in the bath).

I **BATH** the baby every day (= wash in a bath).

I have had a new **BATH** fitted.

We **BATHE** every day (= swim).

**BATHE** the wound with disinfectant (= cleanse).

We have a **BATHE** whenever we can (= a swim).

beach or beech?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Budleigh Salterton has a stony **BEACH**.

**BEECH** trees shed their leaves in autumn.
beautiful Use your knowledge of French beau to help you.
before (not befor)
begin Note these forms and spellings:
I begin, I am beginning.
I began, I have begun.
beginner (not -n-)
beige (not -ie-)
See ei/ie spelling rule.
belief (not -ei)
See ei/ie spelling rule.
believe believed, believing, believer
See ei/ie spelling rule.
See adding endings (ii).
benefit benefited, benefiting
It is a common mistake to use -tt-.
berth or birth? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:
We have a spare BERTH on our boat.
We are proud to announce the BIRTH of a daughter.
beside or besides? Use BESIDE in the sense of next to, by the side of:
Your glasses are BESIDE your bed.
May I sit BESIDE you?
Use BESIDES in the sense of also, as well as:
BESIDES, I can’t afford it.
BESIDES being very clever, Ann also works hard.
between See among or between?.
between you and I Incorrect. Write: between you and me.
See prepositions.
bi- This prefix means ‘two’.
Hence bicycle
bifocals
bigamy, and so on.
Note, however, that some words beginning with ‘bi’ can be ambiguous.
See BIMONTHLY and BIWEEKLY.
See also BIANNUAL OR BIENNIAL?

biannual or biennial? BIANNUAL means twice a year (not -n-).
BIENNIAL means every two years (a biennial festival) or lasting for two years (horticultural, etc). (not -ual)
bicycle bi + cycle
(not bycycle or bycicle)
bidding or biding? bid + ing = bidding
The BIDDING at the auction was fast and furious.
BIDDING farewell, the knight cantered away.
bide + ing = biding.
Her critics were just BIDING their time.
See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).
biege Wrong spelling. See BEIGE.
biennial See BIANNUAL OR BIENNIAL?.
bimonthly Avoid using BIMONTHLY as it has two conflicting meanings. It can mean both every two months and also twice a month. (Compare BIWEEKLY.)
binoculars (not -nn-)
biography See AUTOBIOGRAPHY OR BIOGRAPHY?
biscuit (not -iu-)
building Wrong spelling. See BUILDING.
bivouac bivouacked, bivouacking
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.
biweekly This word has two conflicting meanings and is perhaps best avoided. It can mean both every two weeks (i.e. fortnightly) and also twice a week. (Compare BIMONTHLY.)

bizarre (not -zz-)

blond or blonde? BLOND is used to describe men’s hair. BLOND is used to describe women’s hair. A BLONDE is a woman.

board or bored? A BOARD is a piece of wood, also a committee or similar group of people. To BOARD means to get on (train, etc.) and also to pay for living in someone’s house and having food provided. BORED means uninterested.

boisterous (not boistrous, although often mispronounced as two syllables)

boney/bony Both spellings are correct, although the second spelling is more commonly used.

border See BOARDER OR BORDER?.

bored See BOARD OR BORED?.

bored by, bored with (not bored of)

born or borne? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Dickens was BORN in Portsmouth. She has BORNE five children. He has BORNE a heavy burden of guilt all his life.

borrow or lend? May I BORROW your pen? (= use your pen temporarily) Please LEND me your pen. (= pass it to me and allow me to use it)
both... and

Take care with the positioning of each half of this paired construction. Each must introduce grammatically similar things:

He is **BOTH** clever **AND** hardworking. *(not: He both is clever and hardworking!)*

He **BOTH** paints **AND** sculpts.
He bought **BOTH** the gardening tools **AND** the DIY kit.

Notice, however, the ambiguity in the last example. It could mean that there were just two gardening tools and he bought both of them. In the case of possible confusion, always replace:

He bought the gardening tools and also the DIY kit.
He bought the two gardening tools and also the DIY kit.
He bought both of the gardening tools and also the DIY kit.

bought or brought?

**BOUGHT** is the past tense of to buy.

She **BOUGHT** eggs, bacon and bread.

**BROUGHT** is the past tense of to bring.

They **BROUGHT** their books home.

bouncy

*(not -ey)*

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

brackets

Round brackets enclose additional information which the writer wants to keep separate from the main body of the sentence.

Jane Austen (born in 1775) died in Winchester.
My neighbour (have you met her?) has won £250,000.

Notice how sentences in brackets are not fully punctuated.
They don’t begin with a capital letter or have a full stop at the end if they occur within another sentence as in the example above. They do, however, have a question mark or an exclamation mark, if appropriate.

Square brackets indicate the material has been added to the original by another writer:

When I [Hilaire Belloc] am dead, I hope it may be said: 'His sins were scarlet, but his books were read.'

**breath or breathe?**

BREATH is the noun, and rhymes with ‘death’.

He called for help with his dying BREATH.

BREATHE is the verb and rhymes with ‘seethe’.

BREATHE deeply and fill those lungs!

**brief, briefly**

(not -ci-)

**Britain**

(not -ian)

**Brittany**

(not Britain)

**broach or brooch?**

You BROACH a difficult topic or BROACH a bottle.

You wear a BROOCH.

**broccoli**

(not brocoli)

**broken**

(not brocken)

**brought**

See BOUGHT OR BROUGHT?.

**buffalo** (singular)

buffaloes (plural)

See PLURALS (iv).

**building**

(not -iu-)

**buisness**

Wrong spelling. See BUSINESS.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Correct Form</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bureau</td>
<td>bureaux, bureaus (plural)</td>
<td>Both forms are correct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>See FOREIGN PLURALS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bureaucracy</td>
<td>(not -sy)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burglar</td>
<td>(not burgular, as often mispronounced)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burned/burnt</td>
<td></td>
<td>Both forms are correct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>business</td>
<td>(not buisness)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but</td>
<td></td>
<td>See AND/BUT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buy/by</td>
<td></td>
<td>Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I need to <strong>BUY</strong> some new jeans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The book is <strong>BY</strong> Charlotte Brontë.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wait <strong>BY</strong> the gate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The children rushed <strong>BY</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cactus (singular)  cactuses or cacti (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

caffeine  (not -ie-)

-cal/cle  Adjectives end in -cal.
Nouns end in -cle.

  e.g. critical article
       logical bicycle
       magical circle
       musical cubicle
       nautical cuticle
       physical miracle
       practical particle
       theatrical spectacle
       tropical uncle
       whimsical vehicle

calculator  (not -er)

calendar

calf (singular)  calves (plural)
See PLURALS (v).

callous or callus?  CALLOUS means cruel, insensitive, not caring about how others feel.
CALLUS means a hard patch of skin or tissue.
Interestingly, skin may be CALLOUSED (made hard) or CALLUSED (having calluses).

can or may?  Strictly speaking, CAN means ‘being able’ and MAY means ‘having permission’. It is best to preserve this distinction in formal contexts. However, informally, CAN is used to cover both meanings:
You **CAN** go now (= are permitted).

**caning or canning?**

Cane + ing = caning

**CANING** is now banned in all schools.

Can + ing = canning

The **CANNING** factory is closing down.

(See **ADDING ENDINGS** (i) and (ii).)

**canister**

*(not -nn-)*

**cannon or canon?**

A **CANON** is a cleric.

A **CANNON** is a large gun.

**cannot or can not?**

Both forms are acceptable but the second is rarely seen.

**canoe**

canoed, canoeing, canoeist

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

**canon**

See **CANNON OR CANON?**.

**can’t**

Contraction of **CANNOT**.

**canvas or canvass?**

**CANVAS** is a rough cloth.

To **CANVASS** is to ask for votes.

**capital letters**

Use a capital letter in these circumstances:

- to begin a sentence:
  
  My father will be fifty tomorrow.

- to begin sentences of direct speech:
  
  ‘You will be sorry for this in the morning,’ she said.
  
  She said, ‘You will be sorry for this in the morning. You never learn.’

- for the pronoun ‘I’ wherever it comes in the sentence:
  
  You know that I have no money.

- for all proper nouns – names of:
  
  people (Mary Browne)
  
  countries (Malta)
languages (French)
religious festivals (Easter, Diwali)
firms (Express Cleaners)
organisations (the British Broadcasting Corporation)
historical periods (the Renaissance)
      (the Neolithic Period)
days of the week (Monday)
months of the year (September)
      but not usually the
      seasons.

*Note* these adjectives derived from proper nouns also have a capital letter:

a Jewish festival; a German poet

However, the capital is dropped when the connection with the proper noun becomes lost:

venetian blinds, french windows

*Note* also that titles are capitalised only when part of a proper noun:

Bishop Christopher Budd, otherwise the bishop
Aunt Gladys, otherwise my aunt
Captain Llewellyn, otherwise the captain

- to begin lines of poetry (although some poets like e.e. cummings dispense with this convention)
- to mark the first word and the subsequent key words in titles:
  The Taming of the Shrew
  An Old Wives’ Tale
- for emphasis:
  And then – BANG!
- for some acronyms and initialisms:
Note that some acronyms have now become words in their own right and are no longer written in capitals: laser, sauna, radar.

Note also that some initialisms are usually written in lower case: i.e., e.g., c/o, wpm.

▶ for the Deity as a mark of respect and for sacred books:

God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Almighty, Allah, Jehovah, Yahweh the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas

▶ for each word of an address:

Mrs Anna Sendall
10 Furze Crescent
ALPHINGTON
Hants PD6 9EF

▶ for the salutation in a letter (first word and key words only) and for the first letter of the complimentary close:

Dear Sir
Dear Mrs Hughes
My dear niece
Yours faithfully
Yours sincerely
With much love
With best wishes

capital punishment or corporal punishment?  
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT = death  
CORPORAL PUNISHMENT = beating

cappuccino  
(not -p-)

capsize This is the only verb in the English language of more than one syllable that must end in -ize.
captain (not -ian)
capuccino Wrong spelling. See CAPPuccino.
career (not -rr-)
cargo (singular) cargoes (plural)
See plUralS (iv).
Caribbean (not -rr-, not -b-)
carreer Wrong spelling. See CAREER.
carrying carry + ing
See adding endings (iii).
cast or caste? Use CAST for a group of actors in a play and for a plaster CAST and a CAST in an eye.
Use CASTe when referring to a social group in Hindu society.
caster or castor? Both caster sugar and castor sugar are correct.
Both sugar caster and sugar castor are correct.
Both casters and castors can be used when referring to the little wheels fixed to the legs of furniture.
But castor oil, not caster oil.
catagorical Wrong spelling. See categorical.
catagory Wrong spelling. See category.
catarrh (not -rh)
catastrophe (not -y)
categorical categorically (not cata-)
category (singular) categories (plural) (not cata-)
cauliflower (not -flour)
ceiling  
(not -ie-)  
See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.

Cellophane  
(not Sello-)

censer, censor  
or censure?

A CENSER is a container in which incense is burnt during a religious ceremony.  
A CENSOR is a person who examines plays, books, films, etc. before deciding if they are suitable for public performance or publication.  
To CENSOR is to do the work of a CENSOR.

CENSURE is official and formal disapproval or condemnation of an action.  
To CENSURE is to express this condemnation in a formal written or spoken statement.

centenarian  
or centurion?

A CENTENARIAN is someone who is at least 100 years old.  
A CENTURION is the commander of a company of 100 men in the ancient Roman army.

century (singular)  
centuries (plural) (not centua-)  
See PLURALS (iii).

cereal or serial?  
CEREAL is food processed from grain.  
A SERIAL is a book or radio or television performance delivered in instalments.

ceremonial or  
ceremonious?  
Both adjectives come from the noun CEREMONY.  
CEREMONIAL describes the ritual used for a formal religious or public event (a CEREMONIAL occasion).  
CEREMONIOUS describes the type of person who likes to behave over-formally on social occasions. It is not altogether complimentary (a CEREMONIOUS wave of the hand).
ceremony (singular) ceremonies (plural) See PLURALS (iii).
certain or curtain CERTAIN means sure.
Are you CERTAIN that he apologised?
CURTAINS are window drapes.
Do draw the CURTAINS.
Note that the c sounds like s in certain and like k in curtain. See SOFT C AND SOFT G.
changeable (not -gable) See SOFT C AND SOFT G.
chaos chaotic
character (not charachter)
chateau/château chateaux or châteaux (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS.
check or cheque? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:
Always CHECK your work.
May I pay by CHEQUE? (not ‘check’ as in the United States)
cherub (singular) This word has two plurals.
Cherubim is reserved exclusively for the angels often portrayed as little children with wings.
Cherubs can be used either for angels or for enchanting small children.
chestnut (not chesnut, as it is often mispronounced)
chief (singular) chiefs (plural) See PLURALS (v).
childish or childlike? The teenager was rebuked by the magistrate for his CHILDISH behaviour. (i.e. which he should have outgrown)
The grandfather has retained his sense of CHILDLIKE wonder at the beauty of the
natural world. (i.e. marvellously direct, innocent and enthusiastic)

**chimney** (singular) chimneys (plural)
See PLURALS (iii).

**chior** Wrong spelling. See **choir**.

**chocolate** *(not* choclat although often mispronounced as such)*

**choice** *(not -se)*

**choir** *(not -io-)*

**choose** I **CHOOSE** my words carefully.
I am **CHOOSING** my words carefully.
I **CHOSE** my words carefully yesterday.
I have **CHosen** them carefully.

**chord or cord?** **CHORD** is used in a mathematical or musical context. **CORD** refers to string and is generally used when referring to anatomical parts like the umbilical cord, spinal cord and vocal cords.
*Note:* you will occasionally see **CHORD** used instead of **CORD** in a medical context but it seems very old-fashioned now.

**Christianity** *(not Cr-)*

**Christmas** *(not Cristmas or Christmas)*

**chronic** *(not cr-)*
This word is often misused. It doesn’t mean terrible or serious. It means long-lasting, persistent, when applied to an illness.

**chrysanthemum** *(not cry-)*

**chrystal** Wrong spelling. See **CRYSTAL**.

**cieling** Wrong spelling. See **CEILING**.

**cigarette** *(not -rr)*
cite, sight or site? To CITE means to refer to. 
SIGHT is vision or something seen. 
A SITE is land, usually set aside for a particular purpose.

clarity See AMBIGUITY.

clothes or cloths? CLOTHES are garments. 
CLOTHS are dusters or scraps of material.

coarse or course? COARSE means vulgar, rough: 
COARSE language, COARSE cloth. 
COURSE means certainly: 
OF COURSE

COURSE also means a series of lectures, a direction, a sports area, and part of a meal:
an advanced COURSE 
to change COURSE 
a golf COURSE 
the main COURSE

codeine (not -ie-)
colander (not -ar)
collaborate collaborated, collaborating

collaborator collaboration

collapse collapsed, collapsing

collapsible (not -able)
colleagues

collective nouns See NOUNS.
college (not colledge)
colloquial

colossal Wrong spelling. See COLOSSAL.
colonel or kernel? A COLONEL is a senior officer. 
A KERNEL is the inner part of a nut.
colons

(i) Colons can introduce a list:

Get your ingredients together: flour, sugar, dried fruit, butter and milk.

Note that a summing-up word should always precede the colon (here 'ingredients').

(ii) Colons can precede an explanation or amplification of what has gone before:

The teacher was elated: at last the pupils were gaining in confidence.

Note that what precedes the colon must always be able to stand on its own grammatically. It must be a sentence in its own right.

(iii) Colons can introduce dialogue in a play:

Henry (with some embarrassment): It's all my own fault.

(iv) Colons can be used instead of a comma to introduce direct speech:

Henry said, with some embarrassment: 'It's all my own fault.'

(v) Colons can introduce quotations:

Donne closes the poem with the moving tribute:

'Thy firmness makes my circle just And makes me end where I began.'

(vi) Colons can introduce examples as in this reference book.

Compare semicolons.

colossal

(not -ll-)

colour

(not color, as in American English)
colourful
comemorate  Wrong spelling. See COMMEMORATE.
comfortable  (four syllables, not three)
coming  come + ing = coming (not comming)
See ADDING ENDINGS (ii)
comission  Wrong spelling. See COMMISSION.
commands  (i) Direct commands, if expressed emphatically, require an exclamation mark:
Stop, thief!
Put your hands up!
Stop talking!
If expressed calmly and conversationally, however, a full stop is sufficient:
Just wait there a moment and I’ll be with you.
Tell me your story once again.
(ii) Reported commands (indirect commands) never need an exclamation mark because, when they are reported, they become statements.
He ordered the thief to stop.
She told him to put his hands up.
The teacher yelled at the class to stop talking.

commas  Commas are so widely misused that it is worth discussing their function in some detail. First, let us make it very clear when commas cannot be used.
(a) A comma should never divide a subject from its verb. The two go together:
My parents, had very strict views.
My parents had very strict views.
Take extra care with compound subjects:

The grandparents, the parents, and the children, were in some ways to blame. 7
The grandparents, the parents, and the children were in some ways to blame. 3

(b) Commas should never be used in an attempt to string sentences together. Sentences must be either properly joined (and commas don't have this function) or clearly separated by full stops, question marks or exclamation marks.

Commas have certain very specific jobs to do within a sentence. Let us look at each in turn:

(i) Commas separate items in a list:

I bought apples, pears, and grapes.
She washed up, made the beds, and had breakfast.
The novel is funny, touching, and beautifully written.

The final comma before ‘and’ in a list is optional. However, use it to avoid any ambiguity. See (ix) below.

(ii) Commas are used to separate terms of address from the rest of the sentence:

Sheila, how nice to see you!
Can I help you, madam?
I apologise, ladies and gentlemen, for this delay.

*Note* that a pair of commas is needed in the last example above because the term of address occurs mid-sentence. It is a very common error to omit
one of the commas.

(iii) Commas are used to separate interjections, asides and sentence tags like isn’t it? don’t you? haven’t you?. You’ll notice in the examples below that all these additions could be removed and these sentences would still be grammatically sound:

My mother, despite her good intentions, soon stopped going to the gym.
Of course, I’ll help you when I can.
You’ve met Tom, haven’t you?

(iv) Commas are used to mark off phrases in apposition:

Prince Charles, the future king, has an older sister.

The phrase ‘the future king’ is another way of referring to ‘Prince Charles’ and is punctuated just like an aside.

(v) A comma separates any material that precedes it from the main part of the sentence:

Although she admired him, she would never go out with him.
If you want to read the full story, buy The Sunday Times.

Note that if the sentences are reversed so that the main part of the sentence comes first, the comma becomes optional.

(vi) Commas mark off participles and participial phrases, whenever they come in the sentence:

Laughing gaily, she ran out of the room.
He flung himself on the sofa,
overcome with remorse.
The children, whispering excitedly, crowded through the door.

For a definition of participles see PARTICIPLES.

(vii) Commas mark off some adjectival clauses. Don’t worry too much about the grammatical terminology here. You’ll be able to decide whether you need to mark them off in your own work by matching them against these examples.

Can you see the difference in meaning that a pair of commas makes here? Read the two sentences aloud, pausing where the commas indicate that you should pause in the first sentence, and the two different meanings should become clear:

The firemen, who wore protective clothing, were uninjured. (= nobody injured)

The firemen who wore protective clothing were uninjured. (but those who didn’t wear it . . .)

(viii) Commas are used to mark a pause at a suitable point in a long sentence. This will be very much a question of style. Read your own work carefully and decide exactly how you want it to be read.

(ix) Commas are sometimes needed to clarify meaning. In the examples below, be aware how the reader could make an inappropriate connection:

She reversed the car into the main road and my brother waved goodbye.
She reversed the car into the main road and my brother.
She reversed the car into the main road, and my brother waved goodbye.

In the skies above the stars glittered palely.
In the skies above the stars?
In the skies above, the stars glittered palely.

Notice how the comma can sometimes be essential with ‘and’ in a list:

We shopped at Moores, Browns, Supervalu, Marks and Spencer and Leonards.

Is the fourth shop called Marks, or Marks and Spencer?
Is the fifth shop called Leonards, or Spencer and Leonards?

A comma makes all clear:

We shopped at Moores, Browns, Supervalu, Marks and Spencer, and Leonards.

**commemorate**  
*(not -m-)*

**comming**  
Wrong spelling. See **coming**.

**commission**  
*(not -m-)*

**commit**  
committed, committing, commitment  
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

**committee**

**common nouns**  
See **nouns**.

**comparative**  
comparatively *(not compari-)*

**comparative and superlative**  
(i) Use the comparative form of adjectives and adverbs when comparing two:
John is TALLER than Tom.
John works MORE ENERGETICALLY than Tom.

Use the superlative form when comparing three or more:

John is the TALLEST of all the engineers.
John works THE MOST ENERGETICALLY of all the engineers.

(ii) There are two ways of forming the comparative and superlative of adjectives:

(a) Add -er and -est to short adjectives:

tall  taller  tallest
happy  happier  happiest

(b) Use more and most with longer adjectives:
dangerous  more dangerous  most dangerous
successful  more successful  most successful

The comparative and superlative forms of adverbs are formed in exactly the same way:

(c) Short adverbs add -er and -est.

You run FASTER than I do.
He runs the FASTEST of us all.

(d) Use more and most with longer adverbs.

Nikki works MORE CONSCIENTIOUSLY than Sarah.
Niamh works THE MOST CONSCIENTIOUSLY of them all.

(iii) There are three irregular adjectives:
good  better  best
bad  worse  worst
many   more   most
There are four irregular adverbs:
well   better   best
badly   worse   worst
much   more   most
little   less   least

(iv) A very common error is to mix the two methods of forming the comparative and the superlative:

more simpler 7   simpler 3
more easiest 7   easiest 3

(v) Another pitfall is to try to form the comparative and superlative of absolute words like perfect, unique, excellent, complete, ideal. Something is either perfect or it isn’t. It can’t be more perfect or less perfect, most perfect or least perfect.

compare to/
compare with
Both constructions are acceptable but many people still prefer to use ‘compare with’.

comparitive
Wrong spelling. See COMPARATIVE.

competition
competitive, competitively.

compleatly
Wrong spelling. See COMPLETELY.

complement or compliment?
COMPLEMENT = that which completes
Half the ship’s COMPLEMENT were recruited in Norway.
To COMPLEMENT = to go well with something
Her outfit was COMPLEMENTED by well-chosen accessories.

COMPLIMENT = praise, flattering remarks
To COMPLIMENT = to praise.

complementary or complimentary?
Use COMPLEMENTARY in the sense of completing a whole:
**COMPLEMENTARY** medicine
**COMPLEMENTARY** jobs

Use **COMPLIMENTARY** in two senses:

(a) flattering
(b) free of charge

**COMPLIMENTARY** remarks
**COMPLIMENTARY** tickets

completely

complete + ly (not completly, completley or compleatly)

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

complex

or complicated?

Both words mean ‘made up of many different intricate and confusing aspects’.

However, use **COMPLEX** when you mean ‘intricate’, and **COMPLICATED** when you mean ‘difficult to understand’.

compliment

See **COMPLEMENT OR COMPLIMENT?**.

compose/comprise

The report **IS COMPOSED OF** ten sections. (= is made up of)

The report **COMPRISES** ten sections. (= contains)

Never use the construction ‘is comprised of’. It is always incorrect grammatically.

comprise

(not -ize)

compromise

(not -ize)

computer

(not -or)

concede

conceive

conceived, conceiving, conceivable

See **EI/EIE SPELLING RULE**.

concise

confer

conferred, conferring, conference

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

confidant, confidante

or confident?

A **CONFIDANT** (male or female) or a **CONFIDANTE** (female only) is someone
to whom one tells one’s secrets ‘in confidence’.

**CONFIDENT** means assured.

**connection or connexion?**
Both spellings are correct, but the first one is more commonly used.

**connoisseur**
Used for both men and women.

**conscientious**

**consist in or consist of?**
For Belloc, happiness **CONSISTED IN** ‘laughter and the love of friends’. (consist in = have as its essence)

Lunch **CONSISTED OF** bread, cheese and fruit.

**consistent**
*(not -ant)*

**consonant**
There are 21 consonants in the alphabet, all the letters except for the vowels:

bcdghjklnmpqrstuvwxyz

Note, however, that **y** can be both a vowel and a consonant:

y is a consonant when it begins a word or a syllable (yolk, beyond);
y is a vowel when it sounds like i or e (sly, baby).

**contagious or infectious?**
Both refer to diseases passed to others.

Strictly speaking, **CONTAGIOUS** means passed by bodily contact, and **INFECTIOUS** means passed by means of air or water.

Used figuratively, the terms are interchangeable:

**INFECTIOUS** laughter, **CONTAGIOUS** enthusiasm.

**contemporary**
*(not contemporay, as often mispronounced)*
Nowadays, this word is used in two senses:
(a) happening or living at the same time
   (in the past)
(b) modern, current

Be aware of possible ambiguity if both these meanings are possible in a given context:

*Hamlet* is being performed in contemporary dress (sixteenth-century or modern?).

**contemptible or contemptuous**

A person or an action worthy of contempt is **CONTEMPTIBLE**.

A person who shows contempt is **CONTEMPTUOUS**.

**continual**

continually

**continual or continuous?**

**CONTINUAL** means frequently repeated, occurring with short breaks only. **CONTINUOUS** means uninterrupted.

**contractions**

Take care with placing the apostrophe in contractions. It is placed where the letter has been omitted and not where the two words are joined. These happen to coincide in some contractions:

I’d (I would)
they aren’t (they are not)
it isn’t (it is not)
you hadn’t (you had not)
you wouldn’t (you would not)
she won’t (she will not)
we haven’t (we have not)
I shan’t (I shall not)

It was common in Jane Austen’s time to use two apostrophes in shan’t (sha’n’t) to show that two sets of letters had been omitted but this is no longer correct today.

**control**

controlled, controlling

**controller**

*(not -or)*
convenience (not -ance)
convenient conveniently (not convien-)
cord See CHORD OR CORD?
corporal punishment See CAPITAL OR CORPORAL PUBLICATION?
correspond (not -r-)
correspondence (not -ance)
correspondent or co-respondent? A CORRESPONDENT is someone who writes letters.
A CO-RESPONDENT is cited in divorce proceedings.
could of This is incorrect and arises from an attempt to write down what is heard.
Write ‘could’ve’ in informal contexts and ‘could have’ in formal ones.
I COULD HAVE given you a lift.
I COULD’VE given you a lift.
Beware also: should of/would of/must of/might of. All are incorrect forms.
couldn’t See CONTRACTIONS.
council or counsel? A COUNCIL is a board of elected representatives.
COUNSEL is advice, also the term used for a barrister representing a client in court.
councillor or counsellor? A COUNCILLOR is an elected representative.
A COUNSELLOR is one who gives professional guidance, such as a study COUNSELLOR, a marriage COUNSELLOR, a debt COUNSELLOR.
counterfeit This is one of the few exceptions to the IE/EI spelling rule.
See IE/EI SPELLING RULE.
courageous (not -gous)
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>course</td>
<td>See COARSE OR COURSE?.</td>
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<tr>
<td>courteous</td>
<td>courteously, courtesy</td>
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<tr>
<td>credible or credulous?</td>
<td>If something is CREDIBLE, it is believable. If someone is CREDULOUS, they are gullible (i.e. too easily taken in).</td>
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<tr>
<td>crisis (singular)</td>
<td>crises (plural)</td>
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<tr>
<td>criterion (singular)</td>
<td>criteria (plural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criticise/criticize</td>
<td>Both spellings are correct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criticism</td>
<td>This word is frequently misspelt. Remember critic + ism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>cronic</td>
<td>Wrong spelling. See CHRONIC.</td>
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<td>crucial</td>
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<td>cry</td>
<td>cried, crying</td>
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<td>crysanthemum</td>
<td>Wrong spelling. See CHRYSANTHEMUM.</td>
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<tr>
<td>crystal (not chr-)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>cupboard (not cub-)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>curb or kerb</td>
<td>To CURB one’s temper means to control or restrain it. A CURB is a restraint (e.g. a curb bit for a horse). A KERB is the edging of a pavement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>curious</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>curiosity (not -ious-)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>curly (not -cy)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>currant or current?</td>
<td>A CURRANT is a small dried grape used in cooking. A CURRENT is a steady flow of water, air or electricity. CURRENT can also mean happening at</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the present time (as in CURRENT affairs, CURRENT practice).

curriculum (singular) curriculums/curricula (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

curriculum vitae (abbreviation: CV)

curtain See certain or curtain?.
daily  

(not dayly)  
This is an exception to the -y rule.  
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

dairy or diary?  
We buy our cream at a local DAIRY.  
Kate writes in her DIARY every day.

dangling participles  
See PARTICIPLES.

dashes  
Dashes are used widely in informal notes and letters.

(i) A dash can be used to attach an afterthought:  
I should love to come – that’s if I can get the time off.

(ii) A dash can replace a colon before a list in informal writing:  
The thieves took everything – video, television, cassettes, computer, camera, the lot.

(iii) A dash can precede a summary:  
Video, television, cassettes, computer, camera – the thieves took the lot.

(iv) A pair of dashes can be used like a pair of commas or a pair of brackets around a parenthesis:  
Geraldine is – as you know – very shy with strangers.

(v) A dash can mark a pause before the climax is reached:  
There he was at the foot of the stairs – dead.
(vi) Dashes can indicate hesitation in speech:


(vii) Dashes can indicate missing letters or even missing words where propriety or discretion require it:

c – – – l (ship of the desert)
Susan L— comes from Exeter.
He swore softly, ‘—— it’.

data (plural) datum (singular)
Strictly speaking, DATA should be used with a plural verb:

The DATA have been collected by research students.

You will, however, increasingly see DATA used with a singular verb and this use has now become acceptable.

The DATA has been collected by research students.

dates
See NUMBERS for a discussion of how to set out dates.

deceased or diseased? DECEASED means dead.
DISEASED means affected by illness or infection.

deceit (not -ie)
See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.

deceive
decent or descent? DECENT means fair, upright, reasonable.
DESCENT means act of coming down, ancestry.

decide
decided, deciding (not decayed-)

deciet
Wrong spelling. See DECEIT.
decieve  Wrong spelling. See deceive.

decision

décolletage  (not de-)

decrept  (not -id)

defective or deficient?  DEFECTIVE means not working properly (a DEFECTIVE machine).
DEFICIENT means lacking something vital (a diet DEFICIENT in vitamin C).

defeat  deferred, deferring, deference  See adding endings (iv).

definite  Wrong spelling. See definite.

deficient  See defective or deficient?.

definate  Wrong spelling. See definite.

definite  (not -ff, not -ate)

definitely

diesel  Wrong spelling. See diesel.

delapidated  Wrong spelling. See dilapidated.

delusion  See allusion, delusion or illusion?.

dénouement/dénouement  Both spellings are correct.

dependant or dependent?  The adjective (meaning reliant) is always -ent.

She is a widow with five DEPENDENT children.
I am absolutely DEPENDENT on a pension.

The noun (meaning someone who is dependent) has traditionally been spelt -ant. However, the American practice of writing either -ant or -ent for the noun has now spread here. Either spelling is now considered correct for the noun but
be aware that some conservative readers would consider this slipshod.

She has five DEPENDANTS/DEPENDENTS.

descent
See DECENT OR DESCENT?

describe
(not dis-)

description
(not -scrib-)

desease
Wrong spelling. See DISEASE.

desert or dessert?
A DESERT is sandy.
A DESSERT is a pudding.

desiccated
(not dess-)

desirable
(not desireable)
See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

desperate
(not desparate)
The word is derived from spes (Latin word for hope). This may help you to remember the e in the middle syllable.

dessert
See DESERT OR DESSERT?

dessicated
Wrong spelling. See DESICCATED.

destroy
destroyed, destroying (not dis-)
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

detached
(not detached)

deter
deterred, deterring
See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

deteriorate
(not deteriate, as it is often mispronounced)

deterrent
(not -ant)

develop
developed, developing (not -pp-)

development
(not development)

device/devise
DEVICE is the noun.
A padlock is an intriguing DEVICE.
DEVISE is the verb.
Try to DEVISE a simple burglar alarm.

**diagnosis** (singular) diagnoses (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

**diagnosis or prognosis?**
**DIAGNOSIS** is the identification of an illness or a difficulty.
**PROGNOSIS** is the forecast of its likely development and effects.

**diarrhoea**

**diary** (singular) diaries (plural)
See PLURALS (iii).
See DAIRY OR DIARY?.

**dictionary** (singular) dictionaries (plural) *(not -nn-)*
See PLURALS (iii).

**didn’t** *(not did’nt)*
See CONTRACTIONS.

**diesel** *(not deisel)*
See EI/E SPELLING RULE.

**dietician/dietitian** Both spellings are correct.

**difficult** Wrong spelling. See DIFFICULT.

**difference** *(not -ance)*

**different** *(not -ant)*

**different from/to/than** ‘Different from’ and ‘different to’ are now both considered acceptable forms.

My tastes are **DIFFERENT FROM** yours.
My tastes are **DIFFERENT TO** yours.

Conservative users would, however, much prefer the preposition ‘from’ and this is widely used in formal contexts.

‘Different than’ is acceptable in American English but is not yet fully acceptable in British English.

**difficult** *(not differcult, not difficlnt)*
dilapidated  (not delapidated)
dilemma  This word is often used loosely to mean ‘a problem’. Strictly speaking it means a difficult choice between two possibilities.
dinghy or dingy?  A DINGHY is a boat (plural – dinghies). DINGY means dull and drab.
dingo (singular)  dingoes or dingos (plural)
dining or dinning?  dine + ing = dining (as in dining room)  din + ing = dinning (noise dinning in ears)  See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).
diphtheria  (not diptheria as it is often mispronounced)
diphthong  (not dipthong as it is often mispronounced)
direct speech  See INVERTED COMMAS.
disagreeable  dis + agree + able
disappear  dis + appear
disappearance  (not -ence)
disappoint  dis + appoint
disapprove  dis + approve
disassociate or dissociate?  Both are correct, but the second is more widely used and approved.
disaster  disastrous  (not disastrous, as it is often mispronounced)
disc or disk?  Use ‘disc’ except when referring to computer disks.
disciple  (not disiple)
discipline
discover or invent?  You DISCOVER something that has been there all the time unknown to you (e.g. a star).
You **INVENT** something if you create it for the first time (e.g. a time machine).

**discreet or discrete?** You are **DISCREET** if you can keep secrets and behave diplomatically. Subject areas are **DISCRETE** if they are quite separate and unrelated.

**discrepancy** (singular) discrepancies (plural)

**describe** Wrong spelling. See **DESCRIBE**.

**discription** Wrong spelling. See **DESCRIPTION**.

**discription** Wrong spelling. See **DESCRIPTION**.

**discuss** discussed, discussing

**discussion**

**disease**

**diseased** See **DECEASED OR DISEASED?**.

**dishevelled**

**disintegrate** *(not disintergrate)*

**disinterested or uninterested?** Careful users would wish to preserve a distinction in meaning between these two words. Use the word **DISINTERESTED** to mean ‘impartial, unselfish, acting for the good of others and not for yourself’.

My motives are entirely **DISINTERESTED**; it is justice I am seeking.

Use **UNINTERESTED** to mean ‘bored’.

His teachers say he is reluctant to participate and is clearly **UNINTERESTED** in any activities the school has to offer.

Originally, **DISINTERESTED** was used in this sense (= having no interest in, apathetic), and it is interesting that this meaning is being revived in popular speech.
Avoid this use in formal contexts, however, for it is widely perceived as being incorrect.

disiple
Wrong spelling. See DISCIPLE.
disk
See DISC OR DISK?.
displace or misplace?
To displace is to move someone or something from its usual place:

A DISPLACED hip; a DISPLACED person.

To misplace something is to put it in the wrong place (and possibly forget where it is):

A MISPLACED apostrophe; MISPLACED kindness.
dissappear
Wrong spelling. See DISAPPEAR.
dissappoint
Wrong spelling. See DISAPPOINT.
dissapprove
Wrong spelling. See DISAPPROVE.
dissatisfied
(dis + satisfied)
dissociate
See DISASSOCIATE OR DISSOCIATE?.
distroy
Wrong spelling. See DESTROY.
divers or diverse
The first is rarely used nowadays except jokingly or in mistake for the second. DIVERS means ‘several’, ‘of varying types’: DIVERS reference books. DIVERSE means ‘very different’: DIVERSE opinions, DIVERSE interests.
does or dose?
DOES he take sugar? He DOES.
(pronounced ‘duz’).
Take a DOSE of cough mixture every three hours.
doesn’t
(not does’nt)
See CONTRACTIONS.
domino (singular)  dominoes (plural)
See PLURALS (iv).

don’t  (not do’nt)
See CONTRACTIONS.

dose
See DOES OR DOSE?

double meaning
See AMBIGUITY.

double negatives
The effect of two negatives is to cancel each other out. This is sometimes done deliberately and can be effective:

I am not ungenerous. (= I am very generous.)
He is not unintelligent. (= He is quite intelligent.)

Frequently, however, it is not intentional and the writer ends up saying the opposite of what is meant:

I haven’t had no tea. (= I have had tea.)
You don’t know nothing. (= You know something.)

Be particularly careful with ‘barely’, ‘scarcey’, ‘hardly’. These have a negative force.

I wasn’t SCARCELY awake when you rang. (= I was very awake.)

Be careful too with constructions like this:

I wouldn’t be surprised if he didn’t come.

Say either: I wouldn’t be surprised if he came.

or: I would be surprised if he didn’t come.

Sometimes writers put so many negatives in a sentence that the meaning becomes too complicated to unravel:

Mr Brown denied vehemently that it was
unlikely that no one would come to the concert.

Does Mr Brown think that the concert will be popular or not?

Rewrite as either:

Mr Brown was certain the concert would be well attended.
Or: Mr Brown feared that no one would come to the concert.

doubling rule
See adding endings (i) and (iv).

doubt
(not dout)
The word is derived from the Latin word dubitare, to doubt. It may help you to remember why the silent b is there.

Down's Syndrome
(not Downe's)

downstairs
(one word)

draft or draught?
A DRAFT is a first or subsequent attempt at a piece of written work before it is finished.

A DRAUGHT is a current of cool air in a room.

One also refers to a DRAUGHT of ale, a game of DRAUGHTS and a boat having a shallow DRAUGHT.

drawers or draws?
DRAWS is a verb.

She DRAWS very well for a young child.

DRAWERS is a noun.

The DRAWERS of the sideboard are very stiff.

dreamed/dreamt
Both spellings are correct.

drier or dryer?
DRIER is generally used for the comparative form (DRIER = more dry).

DRYER is generally used for a drying machine (hair DRYER, clothes DRYER).
However, both spellings are interchangeable.

drunkenness


dryness

( exception to the -y rule)

See adding endings (iii).

dual or duel?

DUAL means two (e.g. DUAL controls, DUAL carriageway).

DUEL means fight or contest.

duchess

(not duchess)

due to/owing to

Strictly speaking, ‘due to’ should refer to a noun:

His absence was DUE TO sickness. (noun)

The delay was DUE TO leaves on the line. (noun)

‘Owing to’, strictly speaking, should refer to a verb:

The march was cancelled OWING TO the storm. (verb)

OWING TO an earlier injury, he limped badly. (verb)

However, in recent years, the use of ‘due to’ where traditionally ‘owing to’ would be required has become widespread. Nevertheless, some careful writers continue to preserve the distinction and you may wish to do so too in a formal context.

duel

See dual or duel?

duly

(not duly)

This is an exception to the magic -e rule.

See adding endings (ii).

duchess

Wrong spelling. See duchess.

dwelled/dwelt

Both spellings are correct.
dyeing or dying? DYEING comes from the verb to dye. She was DYEING all her vests green. DYING comes from the verb to die. She cursed him with her DYING breath.
earnest or Ernest?  EARNEST = serious and sincere
ERNEST = masculine first name

echo (singular)  echoes (plural)
See PLURALS (iv).

economic or economical?  ECONOMIC = related to the economy of
the country, or industry or business
ECONOMICAL = thrifty, avoiding extravagance

estasy (singular)  ecstasies (plural)
See PLURALS (iv).

Ecstasy  illegal drug

eczema

-ed or -t?  These can be either:

burned  burnt
dreamed  dreamt
dwelled  dwelt
kneed  knelt
leand  leant
leaped  leapt
learned  learnt
smelled  smelt
spelled  spelt
spilled  spilt
spoiled  spoilt

eerie or eyrie?  EERIE = strange, weird, disturbing
EYRIE = an eagle’s nest

effect  See AFFECT OR EFFECT?

effective, effectual or efficient?  EFFECTIVE = able to produce a result
an EFFECTIVE cure
an EFFECTIVE speech
**EFFECTUAL** = likely to be completely successful:

**EFFECTUAL** prayer
**EFFECTUAL** legislation

**EFFICIENT** = working well without wasting time, money or effort:

an **EFFICIENT** secretary
an **EFFICIENT** engine

**ei/ie spelling rule**

Remember the jingle:

i before e
except after c
or when sounded like a
as in ‘neighbour’ and ‘weigh’.

Here are some examples which follow the rule. There are plenty of others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ie</th>
<th>ei after c</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>achieve</td>
<td>ceiling</td>
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<tr>
<td>believe</td>
<td>conceited</td>
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<td>chief</td>
<td>conceive</td>
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<td>field</td>
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<td>friend</td>
<td>receive</td>
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<td>hygiene</td>
<td>ei sounding like a</td>
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<td>relief</td>
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<td>sleigh</td>
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<td>vein</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**18 exceptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>caffeine</th>
<th>forfeit</th>
<th>seize</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>codeine</td>
<td>heifer</td>
<td>sheikh</td>
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<tr>
<td>counterfeit</td>
<td>height</td>
<td>sovereign</td>
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<tr>
<td>either</td>
<td>leisure</td>
<td>surfeit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fahrenheit</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td>weir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foreign</td>
<td>protein</td>
<td>weird</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proper names (e.g. of people or countries) don’t follow the rule: Deirdre, Keith, Neil, Sheila, Madeira, etc.

eighth

(notice -hth)
See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.

either

(not -ie-) An exception to the EI/IE SPELLING RULE.

either . . . or

(i) Take care with singular and plural verbs.
Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Either Jack or Tom was there.
(singular verb to match Jack (singular) and Tom (singular))

Either Jack or his brothers were there.
(plural verb to match ‘brothers’ (plural) which is closer to it than ‘Jack’ (singular))

Either his brothers or Jack was there.
(singular verb this time because ‘Jack’ (singular) is closer to the verb than ‘brothers’)

(ii) Be careful to place each part of the ‘either . . . or’ construction correctly.

7 I have decided either that I have to build an extension or I have to move.

3 I have decided that either I have to build an extension or I have to move.

In the example above, there are these two possibilities:

I have to build an extension.
I have to move.

‘Either’ precedes the first one and ‘or’ precedes the second.
The second one could be shortened:

I have decided that either I have to build an extension or (I have to) move.

3 I have decided that either I have to build an extension or move.

It is important that the two constructions following ‘either’ and ‘or’ should be parallel ones:

either meat or fish
either green or red
either to love or to hate
either with malice or with kindness.

If the second construction is shortened to avoid repetition, this is fine. The missing words are obvious and can be supplied readily.

def (singular) elves (plural)
See plural (v).

eligible or legible? ELIGIBLE = suitably qualified
LEGIBLE = able to be read

cloquent

elude See allude or elude?

embargo (singular) embargoes (plural)
See plural (iv).

embarrass embarrassed, embarrassing (not -r-)

embarrassment

emend See amend or emend?

emergency (singular) emergencies (plural)
See plural (iv).

emigrant or immigrant? An EMIGRANT leaves his or her country to live in another.
An IMMIGRANT moves into a country to live permanently.
EMINENT OR IMMINENT?

eminent or imminent?  EMINENT = famous
                      IMMINENT = about to happen

emperor

emphasise/emphasize  Both spellings are correct.

encyclopedia/encyclopedia  Both spellings are correct.

endeavour

end stops  There are three end stops: a full stop (.), an exclamation mark (!), and a question mark (?).

Use a full stop to end a statement.

There are five eggs in the fridge.

Use an exclamation mark with a command or an exclamation.

Get out!

Use a question mark to end a question.

Where do you live?

See EXCLAMATION MARKS.
    FULL STOPS.
    QUESTION MARKS.

endings  See ADDING ENDINGS.

enemy (singular)  enemies (plural)
                      See PLURALS (iv).

enormity  This means a grave sin or a crime, or describes something that is a grave sin or a crime or a disaster on a huge scale.

We gradually realised the full ENORMITY of the tragedy.

It is often used in popular speech to mean ‘enormousness’, ‘hugeness’, ‘immensity’.
This should be avoided in a formal context.
enquiry or inquiry? Both spellings are correct and there is no difference in meaning. British English favours the first and American English the second.

Some writers reserve the first for a general request for information and the second for a formal investigation, but this is by no means necessary.

enrol enrolled, enrolling
(British English – enrol; American English – enroll)

enrolment (British English – enrolment; American English – enrollment)

ensure or insure? to ENSURE = to make sure
to INSURE = to arrange for financial compensation in the case of loss, injury, damage or death

enthusiasm (not -ou-)

enthusiastic

envelop enveloped, enveloping, envelopment
(stress on second syllable)

envelope (singular) envelopes (plural) (stress on third syllable)

environment (not enviroment)

epigram or epitaph? EPIGRAM = a short witty saying
EPITAPH = an inscription on a tombstone

equip equipped, equipping, equipment
See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

Ernest See EARNEST OR ERNEST?.

erratum (singular) errata (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

erring err + ing (not -r-)

erupt (not -rr-)

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especially or specially? The two words are very close in meaning and sometimes overlap. However, use these exemplar sentences as a guide to exclusive uses:

I bought the car **ESPECIALLY** for you (= for you alone).

We are awaiting a **SPECIALLY** commissioned report (= for a special purpose).

**estuary** (singular) estuaries (plural)

See **PLURALS** (iv).

**etc.** *(not e.t.c. or ect.)*

(i) etc. is an abbreviation of the Latin *et cetera* which means ‘and other things’. It is therefore incorrect to write ‘and etc.’.

(ii) Avoid using ‘etc.’ in formal writing. Either list all the items indicated by the vague and lazy ‘etc.’, or introduce the given selection with a phrase like ‘including’, ‘such as’ or ‘for example’.

**eventually** eventual + ly *(not eventually)*

**exaggerate** *(not exagerate)*

**examination**

**exausted** Wrong spelling. See **EXHAUSTED**.

**excellent** *(not -ant)*

**except** See **ACCEPT OR EXCEPT?**.

**exceptionable or EXCEPTIONABLE** = open to objection

**exceptional?** **EXCEPTIONAL** = unusual

**excercise** Wrong spelling. See **EXERCISE**.

**excite** excited, exciting, excitement

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

**exclaim** exclaimed, exclaiming
exclamation  

(except -claim-)

exclamation mark  

Use an exclamation mark:

(i) with exclamations  
Ouch! Oh! Hey!

(ii) with vehement commands  
Stop thief! Help! Jump!

See COMMANDS.

exercise  

(not -cercise-)

exhausted  

(not -exausted-)

exhausting or exhaustive?  

EXHAUSTING = tiring  
EXHAUSTIVE = thorough, fully comprehensive

exhibition

exhilarated  

(not -er-)

expedition  

(not -expidition-)

The second syllable is derived from the Latin word pes, pedis (foot, of the foot). This may help you to remember -ped-.

The words pedal, pedestrian, pedometer all come from this same Latin root.

expendable  

(not -ible-)

expense

expensive

experience  

(not -expierience, not -ance-)

The second syllable is derived from the Latin word per, meaning through.

(Experience is what we gain from going ‘through’ something.)

explain  

explained, explaining

explanation  

(not -plain-)

explicit or implicit?  

EXPLICIT = stated clearly and openly  
IMPLICIT = implied but not actually stated
exspense  Wrong spelling. See expense.
exspensive  Wrong spelling. See expensive.
extemely  Wrong spelling. See extremely.
extraordinary  extra + ordinary
extravagance  (not -ence)
extravagant  (not -ent)
extremely  extreme + ly
extrordinary  Wrong spelling. See extraordinary.
exuberance  (not -ence)
exuberant  (not -ent)
eyrie  See eerie or eyrie?. 
facetious (All five vowels occur in this word once only and in alphabetical order.)

facilities or faculties?

FACILITIES = amenities
FACULTIES = mental or physical aptitudes

facinate Wrong spelling. See fascinate.

factory (singular) factories (plural)
See plurals (iv).

Fahrenheit (not -ie-)
See EI/IE spelling rule.

faithfully faithful + ly
See sincerely for guidelines when punctuating a complimentary close to a letter (fully blocked and also traditional layout).

familiar (not fammiliar)

family (singular) families (plural) (not -mm-)

farther or further? Both words can be used to refer to physical distance although some writers prefer to keep ‘farther’ for this purpose.

I can walk FARTHER than you.
I can walk FURTHER than you.

FURTHER is used in a figurative sense:
Nothing was FURTHER from my mind.

FURTHER is also used in certain expressions:
FURTHER education until FURTHER notice

fascinate (not facinate)
favourite  
(\textit{not} -ate)

feasible  
(\textit{not} -able)

\textbf{February}  
\textit{Notice} the word has four syllables and not three as it is often mispronounced.

\textbf{fewer or less?}  
\textbf{FEWER} is the comparative form of ‘few’. It is used with plural nouns:

\begin{itemize}
  \item FEWER vegetables
  \item FEWER responsibilities
  \item FEWER children
\end{itemize}

\textbf{LESS} is the comparative form of ‘little’. It is used in the sense of ‘a small amount’ rather than ‘a fewer number of’:

\begin{itemize}
  \item LESS enthusiasm
  \item LESS sugar
  \item LESS petrol
\end{itemize}

\textbf{LESS THAN} is used with number alone, and expressions of time and distance:

\begin{itemize}
  \item LESS THAN a thousand
  \item LESS THAN ten seconds
  \item LESS THAN four miles
\end{itemize}

It is considered incorrect to use ‘less’ instead of ‘fewer’ although such confusion is frequent in popular speech.

As a rule of thumb, remember:

\begin{itemize}
  \item FEWER = not so many
  \item LESS = not so much
\end{itemize}

\textbf{fiancé or fiancée?}  
FIANCÉ = masculine  
FIANCÉE = feminine  
\textit{Note} the accent in both words.

\textbf{fictional or fictitious?}  
FICTIONAL = invented for the purpose of fiction, related to fiction

\begin{itemize}
  \item FICTIONAL texts
  \item FICTIONAL writing
\end{itemize}
**FICTITIOUS** = false, not true

a **FICTITIOUS** report
a **FICTITIOUS** name and address

Either word can be used to describe a character in a work of fiction: a **FICTIONAL** or **FICTITIOUS** character.

**fiery** *(not firey)*

**fifteen**

**fifth**

**fifty**

**finally** final + ly *(not -aly)*

**finish** finished, finishing *(not -nn-)*

**firey** Wrong spelling. See **FIERY**.

**flamingo** (singular) flamingoes or flamingos (plural)

**flammable or inflammable** Both words mean ‘easily bursting into flame’. People often think that inflammable is the negative form but the prefix ‘in’ here means ‘into’.

The opposite of these two words is non-flammable or non-inflammable.

**flee**

they fled, have fled, are fleeing

**flexible** *(not -able)*

**flu or flue?**

**FLU** = influenza *(not ’flu although an abbreviation)*

**FLUE** = a pipe or duct for smoke and gases

**fluorescent** *(not florescent)*

**fly**

they flew, have flown, are flying

**focus**

focused or focussed (both correct)

focusing or focussing (both correct)

**for- or fore-?**

A useful rule of thumb is to remember the usual meaning of the prefixes:

ë
FORBEAR OR FOREBEAR?

FOR- = not, or something negative
(forbid, forfeit, forget, forsake)

FORE- = before
(foreboding, forecast, forefathers)
See individual entries for
FORBEAR OR FOREBEAR?
FOREWORD OR FORWARD?.

forbear or forebear? FORBEAR (stress on second syllable) = restrain oneself
FORBEAR or FOREBEAR (stress on first syllable) = ancestor

forbid forbad or forbade (both correct),
forbidden, forbidding

forcible (not -able)

forecast (not forcast)

forefend/forfend Either spelling can be used.

foregather/forgather Either spelling can be used.

forego/forgo Either spelling can be used.

foreign An exception to the rule.
See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.

foreign plurals Some foreign words in English have retained their foreign plurals. Some have both foreign and English plurals. Take care, however, with the words that are asterisked below because the foreign plural of these is used in a different sense from the English plural. Check these words under individual entries for the distinction in meaning.

<table>
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<th>foreign plural</th>
<th>English plural</th>
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<td>tumulus</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Hebrew plural -im is found in these three words:

cherub       cherubim     cherubs
kibbutz      kibbutzim   –
serah         seraphim    –

This list is by no means comprehensive but it does contain most of the words that are commonly used.

foresake        Wrong spelling. See FORSAKE.
forest          (not forest)
foreword or forward? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:
The Poet Laureate had written a FOREWORD for the new anthology.
I am looking FORWARD to the holiday.
Will you please FORWARD this letter?

forfeit          (not -ie-, exception to the rule)
See EI/EIE SPELLING RULE.

forfend         See FOREFEND/FOREFEND.

forgather       See FOREGATHER/FORGATHER.

forgo           See FOREGO/FOGGO.

formally or formerly? FORMALY = in a formal manner
FORMERLY = previously, at an earlier time
formula  (singular)
There are two plurals.
Use formulae in a scientific or mathematical context.
Use formulas in all other cases.

forrest  Wrong spelling. See FOREST.

forsake  (not fore-)
See FOR OR FORE?.

fortunately  fortunate + ly (not -atly)
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

forty  (not fourty)

forward  See FOREWORD OR FORWARD?.

frantic

frantically  frantic + ally (not franticly)

freind  Wrong spelling. See FRIEND.

frequent  (not -ant)
Use as an adjective (stress on first syllable):

There were FREQUENT interruptions.

Use as a verb (stress on second syllable):

They FREQUENT the most terrible pubs.

fresco (singular)  frescoes or frescos (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

friend  (not -ei-)

frieze  (not -ei-)
See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.

frighten  frightened, frightening
(not frightend, frightening)

frolic  frolicked, frolicking, frolicsome
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

fuchsia  (named after Leonhard Fuchs, German botanist)
When full is used as an ending to a word, it is always spelt -ful:

beautiful

careful

wonderful

hopeful, etc.

fulfil

fulfilled, fulfilling, fulfilment

See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

full stops

See END STOPS.

See COMMAS (b).

fungus (singular)

fungi or funguses (plural)

See FOREIGN PLURALS.

further

See FARTHER OR FURTHER?.

fuschia

Wrong spelling. See FUCHSIA.
gaiety gay + ety – an exception to the y rule
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

gaily gay + ly – an exception to the y rule
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

gallop galloped, galloping (not -pp-)
See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

ganglion (singular) ganglia or ganglions (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

gaol An alternative spelling is ‘jail’.

garage

gastly Wrong spelling. See GHASTLY.

gateau (singular) gateaus or gateaux (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

gauge (not guage)

genealogical (not geneo-)

generosity (not -ous-)
generous

get they get, have got, are getting

ghastly (not gastly)

gipsy/gypsy Both spellings are correct.
gipsies or gypsies (plural)
See PLURALS (iii).

glamorous (not -our-)
glamour

good will or goodwill? Always write as one word when referring to the prestige and trading value of a business.
He bought the GOODWILL for five thousand pounds.

Use either two words or one word when referring to general feelings of kindness and support.

As a gesture of GOOD WILL, she cancelled the fine.

gorgeous  

(\textit{not} -gous)  
See \textit{SOFT C AND SOFT G}.

gorilla or guerilla?  
A \textbf{GORILLA} is an animal.  
A \textbf{GUERILLA} is a revolutionary fighter.

gossip  
gossiped, gossiping (\textit{not} -pp)  
See \textit{ADDBING ENDINGS} (iv).

gourmand or gourmet?  
A \textbf{GOURMAND} is greedy and over-indulges where fine food is concerned.  
A \textbf{GOURMET} is a connoisseur of fine food.

government  
(\textit{not} governent as it is often mispronounced)

governor  
(\textit{not} -er)

gradual

gradually  
\textsl{gradual + ly (\textit{not} gradually)}

graffiti  
This is increasingly used in a general sense (like the word ‘writing’) and its plural force is forgotten when it comes to matching it with a verb:

There \textit{was} \textbf{GRAFFITI} all over the wall.

A few conservative writers would like a plural verb (There \textit{were} \textbf{GRAFFITI} all over the wall).

graffito (singular)  
graffiti (plural)  
See \textit{FOREIGN PLURALS}.  

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>grammar</td>
<td>(not -er)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gramophone</td>
<td>(not grama-)</td>
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<tr>
<td>grandad/granddad</td>
<td>Both spellings are correct.</td>
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<td>grandparent</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>grandson</td>
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<tr>
<td>grate or great?</td>
<td>Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The fire was burning brightly in the GRATE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GRATE the potato coarsely.</td>
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<td>Christopher Wren was a GREAT architect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>grateful</td>
<td>(not greatful)</td>
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<tr>
<td>grief</td>
<td>(not -ci-)</td>
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<tr>
<td>grievance</td>
<td>(not -ence)</td>
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<tr>
<td>grievous</td>
<td>(not -ious)</td>
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<tr>
<td>grotto (singular)</td>
<td>grottoes or grottos (plural)</td>
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<tr>
<td>guage</td>
<td>Wrong spelling. See GAUGE.</td>
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<td>guarantee</td>
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<td>guardian</td>
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<td>guess</td>
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<td>guest</td>
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<tr>
<td>guttural</td>
<td>(not -er-)</td>
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</table>
hadn’t  (not had’nt)
haemorrhage  (not -rh-)
half (singular)  halves (plural)  See PLURALS (v).
halo (singular)  haloes or halos (plural)  See PLURALS (iv).
handkerchief (singular)  handkerchiefs (plural)  (not -nk-)  See PLURALS (v).
hanged or hung?  People are HANGED.
    Things like clothes and pictures are HUNG.
happen  happened, happening  (not -nn-)
harass  (not -rr-)
hardly  See DOUBLE NEGATIVES.
hasn’t  (not has’nt)
haven’t  (not have’nt)
headquarters  (not headquarters)
hear or here?  You HEAR with your ear.
    Use HERE to indicate place:
    Come over HERE.
heard or herd?  We HEARD their voices outside.
    We photographed the HERD of deer.
heifer  See EI/EI SPELLING RULE.
height  See EI/EI SPELLING RULE.
heinous  See EI/EI SPELLING RULE.
herd  See HEARD OR HERD?.
here  See hear or here?.

hero  (singular)  heroes  (plural)
See plurals (iv).

heroin or heroine?  HEROIN is a drug.
A HEROINE is a female hero.

hers  No apostrophe is needed.
This is mine; this is HERS.
HERS has a yellow handle.

hiccough or hiccup?  Both words are pronounced ‘hiccup’ and either spelling can be used. The second spelling (hiccup) is more usual.

hiccup  hiccuped, hiccuping (not -pp-)

hieroglyphics

high-tech or hi-tec?  Both spellings are correct for the adjective derived from high technology:

A HI-TEC factory
A HIGH-TECH computer system

Without the hyphen, each word can be used as a noun replacing ‘high technology’:

A generation familiar with HIGH TECH
The latest development in HI TEC

hindrance  (not hinderance)

hippopotamus  (singular)  hippos (plural)  hippopotami or hippopotamuses (plural)
See foreign plurals.

historic or historical?  HISTORIC means famous in history, memorable, or likely to go down in recorded history:

a HISTORIC meeting

HISTORICAL means existing in the past or representing something that could have happened in the past:
a **HISTORICAL** novel
a **HISTORICAL** fact

*Note* It would not be wrong to say or write *an* historic meeting, *an* historical novel, *an* historical fact. However, this usage of *an* before words like hotel, historic and historical is becoming much less common, now that the *h* beginning these words is usually voiced.

**hoard or horde?**

To **HOARD** is to save something in a secret place.

A **HOARD** is a secret store.

A **HORDE** is a large group of people, insects or animals.

**hoarse or horse?**

**HOARSE** means croaky, sore or rough (a **HOARSE** whisper).

**HORSE** is an animal.

**hole or whole?**

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

She ate the **WHOLE** cake by herself.

You have a **HOLE** in your sock.

**homeoepathy/homeopathy**

Both spellings are correct.

**honest**

*(not* onnist or honist)*

**honorary**

*(Note: this word has four syllables not three.)*

An **HONORARY** secretary of an association is one who works voluntarily and receives no payment.

**honour**

honourable

**hoof** (singular)

hoofs or hooves (plural)

See **PLURALS** (v).

**hoping or hopping?**

hope + *ing* = hoping

hop + *ing* = hopping

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (i) and (ii).

**horde**

See **HOARD OR HORDE**.
horrible  (not -able)
horse  See  HOARSE  OR  HORSE?
human  or  humane?  HUMAN  beings  are  naturally  competitive.  There  must  be  a  more  HUMANE  way  of  slaughtering  animals.
humour  humorous  (not  humourous)  humourless
hundred  (not  hundered)
hung  See  HANGED  OR  HUNG?
hygiene  (not  -ei-)  See  EI/EI  SPELLING  RULE.

hyper-  or  hypo-?  The  prefix  ‘hyper’  comes  from  a  Greek  word  meaning  ‘over’,  ‘beyond’.  Hence  we  have  words  like  these:
hyperactive  (=  abnormally  active)
hypermarket  (=  a  very  large  self-service  store)
hypersensitive  (=  unusually  sensitive)
The  prefix  ‘hypo’  comes  from  a  Greek  word  meaning  ‘under’.  Hence  we  have  words  like  these:
hypochondria  (the  melancholy  associated  with  obsession  with  one’s  health  was  originally  believed  to  originate  in  the  organs  beneath  the  ribs)
hypodermic  (=  under  the  skin)

hypercritical  or  hypocritical?  HYPERCRITICAL  =  excessively  critical  HYPOCRITICAL  =  disguising  one’s  true  nature  under  a  pretence  of  being  better  than  you  really  are  See  HYPER-  OR  HYPO-?

hyperthermia  or  hypothermia?  HYPERTHERMIA  =  having  an  abnormally  high  body  temperature  HYPOTHERMIA  =  having  an  abnormally  low  body  temperature  See  HYPER-  OR  HYPO-?
HYPERVENTILATE OR HYPOVENTILATE

hyperventilate or hypoventilate

HYPERVENTILATE = to breathe at an abnormally rapid rate
HYPOVENTILATE = to breathe at an abnormally slow rate
See HYPER- OR HYPO-?

hyphens

(i) Hyphens are used to indicate word-breaks where there is not space to complete a word at the end of a line.

Take care to divide the word at an appropriate point between syllables so that your reader is not confused and can continue smoothly from the first part of the word to the second part.

There are dictionaries of hyphenation available that will indicate sensible places to break words. They don’t always agree with each other! You will also notice a difference in practice between British English and American English.

Increasingly, however, the trend is towards American English practice, i.e. being guided by the way the word is pronounced. Break the word in such a way as to preserve the overall pronunciation as far as possible. It is really a matter of common sense. For this reason you will avoid breaking:

father into fat-her
legend into leg-end
therapist into the-rapist
manslaughter into mans-laughter
notable into not-able

and so on!

Note: that the hyphen should be placed at the end of the first line (to indicate that the word is to be continued). It is not repeated at the beginning of the next.
The children shouted enthusiastically as they raced towards the sea.

If you are breaking a word that is already hyphenated, break it at the existing hyphen:

Both my parents are extremely absent-minded.

Breaking a word always makes it look temporarily unfamiliar. You will notice that in printed books for very young readers word-breaks are always carefully avoided. Ideally, you also will try to avoid them. Anticipate how much space a word requires at the end of a line and start a new line if necessary. Whatever happens, avoid breaking a word very close to its beginning or its end, and never break a one-syllabled word.

(ii) Hyphens are used to join compound numbers between 21 and 99:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>twenty-one</td>
<td>twenty-five</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fifty-five</td>
<td>fifty-fifth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ninety-nine</td>
<td>ninety-ninth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hyphens are also used to join fractions when they are written as words:

three-quarters
five-ninths

(iii) Hyphens are used to join compound words so that they become one word:

my son-in-law
a twenty-pound note
her happy-go-lucky smile

You will sometimes need to check in a dictionary whether a word is
hyphenated or not. Sometimes words written separately in a ten-year-old dictionary will be hyphenated in a more modern one; sometimes words hyphenated in an older dictionary will now be written as one word.

Is it washing machine or washing-machine, wash-basin or washbasin, print-out or printout?

Such words need to be checked individually.

(iv) Hyphens are used with some prefixes:

- co-author, ex-wife, anti-censorship

Check individual words in a dictionary if you are in doubt.

Always use a hyphen when you are using a prefix before a word that begins with a capital letter:

- pro-British, anti-Christian, un-American

Sometimes a hyphen is used for the sake of clarity. There is a difference in meaning between the words in these pairs:

- re-cover and recover
- re-form and reform
- co-respondent and correspondent

(v) Hyphens are also used to indicate a range of figures or dates:

- There were 12 - 20 people in the room.
- He was killed in the 1914 - 18 war.

**hypocrisy** (not -asy)

**hypocrite**

**hypocritical** See HYPERCRITICAL OR HYPOCRITICAL?

**hypothermia** See HYPERTHERMIA OR HYPOTHERMIA?
hypothesis (singular) hypotheses (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

hypoventilate 
See HYPERVENTILATE OR HYPOVENTILATE?
I/me/myself

These three words are pronouns and cause a great deal of confusion.

(i) Most people use the pronoun ‘I’ correctly when it is used on its own:

I love cats.
I like chocolate.
I mow the lawn every Sunday.
I am trying to lose weight.
I have two sisters.

Confusion generally arises with phrases like ‘my husband and I’ and ‘my husband and me’. Which should it be?

The simplest method is to break the sentence into two and see whether ‘I’ or ‘me’ sound right:

My husband likes chocolate.
I like chocolate.

MY HUSBAND AND I like chocolate.

(ii) Most people use the pronoun ‘me’ correctly when it is used on its own:

The burglar threatened ME.
It was given to ME.

Once again confusion arises when a pair is involved. The advice remains the same. Break the sentence into two and see whether ‘I’ or ‘me’ sounds right:

The burglar threatened my husband.
The burglar threatened ME.
The burglar threatened MY HUSBAND AND ME.
It was given to my husband.
It was given to ME.
It was given to MY HUSBAND AND ME.

(iii) The pronoun ‘myself’ has two distinct functions.

- It can be used in constructions like this where it is essential to the sense:
  I cut MYSELF yesterday.
  I did it by MYSELF.

- It can be used to help emphasise a point. In these cases, it can be omitted without changing the overall sense:
  I’ll wrap the parcel MYSELF. MYSELF, I would disagree.

‘Myself’ should never be used as a substitute for ‘I’ or ‘me’.

7 My friend and myself had a wonderful time in Austria.
3 My friend and I had a wonderful time.

7 They presented my brother and myself with a silver cup.
3 They presented my brother and me with a silver cup.

7 This is from Henry and myself.
3 This is from Henry and me.

**-ible**

See -ABLE/-IBLE.

**idea or ideal?**

Bristolians have particular difficulty distinguishing between these two because of the intrusive Bristol ‘t’. These exemplar sentences should help:

Your IDEA is brilliant.
This is an IDEAL spot for a picnic.
His IDEALS prevent him from eating meat.
idiosyncrasy \( (\text{not} \ -\text{cy}) \)

-ie-

See ei/ie spelling rule.

illegible or ineligible?

ILLEGIBLE = not able to be read
INELIGIBLE = not properly qualified

illusion

See allusion, delusion or illusion?.

imaginary or imaginative?

IMAGINARY = existing only in the imagination
IMAGINATIVE = showing or having a vivid imagination, being creative, original

information

Wrong spelling. See information.

immediately

(not immediately or immediatly)

immense

immensely (not immensly)

immigrant

See emigrant or immigrant?.

imminent

See eminent, or imminent?.

immoral

See amoral or immoral?.

implicit

See explicit or implicit?.

imply or infer?

To IMPLY something is to hint at it:

She IMPLIED that there were strong moral objections to his appointment but didn’t say so in so many words.

To INFERENCE is to draw a conclusion:

Am I to INFERENCE from what you say that he is unsuitable for the post?

impossible

(not -able)

imposter/impostor

Both spellings are correct. The second form (-or) is, however, more common.

impractical or impracticable?

IMPRactical = could be done but not worth doing
IMPRacticable = incapable of being done
incidentally     incidental + ly (not incidently)

incredible     (not -able)
indefensible     (not -able)
indelible     (not -able)

independence     (not -ance)
independent     (not -ant)

index     (singular)     indexes or indices (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.
See INDEXES OR INDICES?

indexes or indices?     Both are acceptable plural forms of ‘index’
but they are used differently.
Use INDEXES to refer to alphabetical lists
of references in books.
Use INDICES in mathematical, economic
and technical contexts.

indirect speech/
reported speech     Unlike direct speech where the words
actually spoken are enclosed within
inverted commas, indirect speech requires
no inverted commas.

Direct: ‘I am exhausted,’ said Sheila.
Indirect: Sheila said that she was
exhausted.

Note how direct questions and commands
become straightforward statements when
they are reported in indirect speech. A full
stop at the end is sufficient.

Direct: ‘What is your name?’ Mr Brown
asked the new boy.
Indirect: Mr Brown asked the new boy his
name.

Direct: ‘Fire!’ commanded the officer.
Indirect: The officer commanded his men
to fire.

indispensable     (not -ible)
individual

(five syllables)
This noun should correctly be used to distinguish one person from the rest of a group or community:

the rights of the INDIVIDUAL in society

Informally it is also used in the sense of ‘person’:

an untrustworthy INDIVIDUAL

Avoid this use in formal contexts.

industrial or INDUSTRIAL = associated with manufacturing
industrious? INDUSTRIOUS = hard-working

ineffective or ineffectual? INEFFECTIVE = not producing the desired effect

an INEFFECTIVE speech

INEFFECTUAL = not capable of producing the desired effect.

an INEFFECTUAL speaker

ineligible

See ILLEGIBLE OR INELIGIBLE?.

inexhaustible

in fact (two words)

infectious

See CONTAGIOUS OR INFECTIOUS?.

infer

See IMPLY OR INFER?. See also next entry.

infer inferred, inferring, inference

See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

inflammable

See FLAMMABLE OR INFLAMMABLE?.

See also next entry.

inflammable or inflammatory? INFLAMMABLE = easily bursting into flames

INFLAMMATORY = tending to arouse violent feelings.

information (not im-)

98
in front  

two words (not frount)

ingenious or 

INGENIOUS = skilful, inventive, original

ingenuous? 

INGENUOUS = innocent, unsophisticated

inhuman or inhumane? 

INHUMAN = lacking all human qualities

INHUMANE = lacking compassion and kindness

innocent 

innocence

innocuous

innuendo (singular)  

innuendoes or innuendos (plural)

See PLURALS (iv).

inoculate  

(not -nn-)

inquiry 

See ENQUIRY OR INQUIRY?.

install/install  

Both spellings are correct.

installed, installing, installment/instalment

insurance 

See ASSURANCE OR INSURANCE?.

intelligence  

(not -ance)

intelligent  

(not -ant)

intentions  

(not intensions)

inter-/intra-  

The prefix INTER- means between or among (e.g. international).

The prefix INTRA- means within, on the inside (e.g. intravenous).

interesting  

(four syllables, not intresting)

interrogate  

(not -r-)

interrupt  

(not -r-)

invent  

See DISCOVER OR INVENT?.

inverted commas  

Inverted commans can be double (‘ ’) or single (‘ ’). Use whichever you wish as long as you are consistent. In print, single inverted commas are generally used; in handwriting, double inverted commas are frequently used for enclosing direct speech.

é
and single inverted commas for enclosing titles and quotations. There are no hard-and-fast rules.

**Direct speech**

Inverted commas should enclose the actual words of speech that are being quoted.

‘You are very welcome,’ she said.
She said, ‘You are very welcome.’
‘You are,’ she said, ‘very welcome.’

*Note* the punctuation conventions in the sentences above. These will be examined more closely now.

- **Speech first and narrative second.**
  
  ‘You are very welcome,’ she said.
  ‘Are you tired?’ she asked.
  ‘Not at all!’ he exclaimed.

  *Notice* that the appropriate punctuation is enclosed with the words spoken.

  *Note* that the narrative continues with an initial small letter: she/he.

- **Narrative first and speech second.**
  
  Brian said, ‘You’re very late.’
  Brian asked, ‘What kept you?’
  Sarah snapped, ‘Don’t cross-question me!’

  *Notice* that a comma always divides the narrative from the direct speech.

  *Note* that the direct speech always begins with a capital letter.

  *Note* that the appropriate punctuation mark is enclosed within the inverted commas with the words spoken and no further end stop is required.
Speech interrupted by narrative.

‘We have all been hoping,’ said my mother, ‘that you will join us on Christmas Day.’

Note that the two parts of the interrupted spoken sentence are enclosed by inverted commas. Note that a comma (within the inverted commas) marks the break between speech and narrative, and that another comma (after the narrative and before the second set of inverted commas) marks the resumption of the direct speech. Note that the interrupted sentence of speech is resumed without the need for a capital letter.

Longer speeches and the layout of dialogue.

‘I should love to join you on Christmas Day,’ said Sean. The children were ecstatic. They cried together, ‘That’s wonderful!’ ‘Indeed it is,’ said my mother. ‘When will you be able to get to us?’ ‘By 10 o’clock.’ ‘Really? That’s splendid!’

The rule is ‘a new line for a new speaker’ even if the speech is only a word or two. In addition, each new speech should ideally be indented a little to make it easier for the reader to follow the cut and thrust of dialogue. Note how a speech of two or more sentences is punctuated.

‘Indeed it is,’ said my mother. ‘When will you be able to get to us?’
If this were lengthened further, the close of the second pair of inverted commas would be delayed accordingly:

‘Indeed it is,’ said my mother. ‘When will you be able to get to us? Need I say “the earlier the better”? You know that we’ll be up at the crack of dawn.’

Inverted commas are used to enclose titles.

Have you read ‘Angela’s Ashes’ by Frank McCourt?

Alternatively, the title can be underlined or, in print, italicised. Inverted commas will not then be needed.

Inverted commas are used to enclose quotations.

Like Coriolanus, I often feel that ‘there is a life elsewhere’.

*Note* that the final full stop comes outside the inverted commas enclosing the quotation. Incorporating a quotation in a sentence is different from punctuating direct speech.

See INDIRECT/REPORTED SPEECH.
See TITLES.

**invisible**

*(not -able)*

**irrational**

Wrong spelling. See IRRATIONAL.

**iridescent**

*(not -rr-)*

**irony or sarcasm?**

**IRONY** is subtle, amusing, often witty. **SARCASM** is deliberately hurtful and intentionally cruel.

Irony comes from a Greek word meaning ‘pretended ignorance’.
Sarcasm comes from a Greek word meaning ‘to tear the flesh with one’s teeth’.

Irony relies on those with insight realising that what is said is the opposite of what is meant.

Mr Bennet in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* frequently makes ironical remarks which only his more perceptive listeners will understand. When he tells one of his less musical daughters that she has delighted the company with her piano playing for long enough, she takes his remarks at face value. Jane and Elizabeth, two of her sisters, know exactly what he really meant.

Sarcasm sometimes uses this technique of irony and says in a very cutting way (which will be very clearly understood) the opposite of what is really meant.

When a teacher says, ‘Brilliant!’ to a pupil who fails yet again, he is being sarcastic and ironical at the same time. When a teacher says, ‘Have you lost your tongue?’ to a pupil, he is being sarcastic.

**irrational**

*not* -r-

**irrelevant**

*not* irrelevant: think of ‘does not relate’

**irreparable**

**irreplaceable**

See soft c and soft g.

**irrepressible**

**irresistible**

**irresponsible**

**irrelevant**

Wrong spelling. See IRRELEVANT.

**irreversible**

**iridescent**

Wrong spelling. See IRIDESCENT.
**-ise or -ize?**

Most words ending with this suffix can be spelt -ise or -ize in British English. American English is more prescriptive and insists on -ize whenever there is a choice.

House-styles in Britain vary from publisher to publisher and from newspaper to newspaper. (You may have noticed that in this book I favour -ise.)

When making your choice, bear these two points in mind:

- These nineteen words *have* to be -ise: advertise, advise, apprise, arise, chastise, circumcise, comprise, compromise, despise, devise, disguise, enfranchise, excise, exercise, improvise, revise, supervise, surprise, televise.

- Only one verb of more than one syllable has to be -ize: capsize.
  
  (One syllabled verbs like ‘seize’ still need care, of course.)

Whatever you decide, be consistent within one piece of writing and be consistent with derivatives. If you use ‘realize’ in one paragraph, you must use ‘realization’ and not ‘realisation’ at another point in the same piece. If you use ‘sympathize’, then you must refer to ‘sympathizers’ and not to ‘sympathisers’ elsewhere.

Many authorities prefer to use -ize when there is a choice. In practice, many writers prefer to use -ise because this choice is relatively trouble-free.

The decision is yours!

**isn’t**

Place the apostrophe carefully. *(not is’n’t)*

**itinerary**

(five syllables, not four as it is often mispronounced and misspelt)
its or it's?

ITS is a possessive adjective like 'her' and 'his':

The book has lost ITS cover.
ITS beauty has faded.

IT'S is a contraction of 'it is' or 'it has':

IT'S very cold today. (= it is)
IT'S been a long winter. (= it has)

If you are ever in doubt, see if you can expand 'its/it’s' to 'it is' or 'it has'. If you can, you need an apostrophe. If you can’t, you don’t.

Remember too that contractions like 'it’s' are fine in informal contexts but should be avoided in formal writing. When it's inappropriate to use slang, it is inappropriate to use these contractions. You have to write the forms in full.
jealous  
(not jelous)

jealousy

jeopardise/jeopardize  Both spellings are correct.

jeopardy

jewelry/jewellery  Both spellings are correct.  
(not jewlery as the word is often mispronounced)

jodhpurs

journey (singular)  journeys (plural)  
See PLURALS (iii).

judgement/judgment  Both spellings are correct.

judicial or judicious?  

**JUDICIAL** = pertaining to courts of law and judges  
**JUDICIOUS** = showing good judgment, wise, prudent  
The words are not interchangeable. There is a clear distinction in meaning, as you can see.  
A **JUDICIAL** decision is one reached in a law court.  
A **JUDICIOUS** decision is a wise and discerning one.
K

keenness  keen + ness
kerb       See curb or kerb?.
kernel     See colonel or kernel?.
kibbutz (singular)  kibbutzim (plural)
                 See foreign plurals.
kidnap      kidnapped, kidnapping, kidnapper
                 An exception to the 2-1-1 rule.
                 See adding endings (iv).
kneel       kneeled or knelt, kneeling
knew or new? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:
                 I KNEW the answer.
                 Nanette has NEW shoes.
knife (singular)  knives (plural)
                 See plurals (v).
know or no?   Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:
                 I KNOW the answer.
                 NO, they cannot come.
                 We have NO milk left.
knowledge
knowledgeable/knowledgable Both spellings are correct.
laboratory (singular) laboratories (plural)
See PLURALS (iii).

labour laborious

laid See ADDING ENDINGS (iii) (exception to rule).
See LAY OR LIE?

lain See LAY OR LIE?

lama or llama? LAMA = a Buddhist priest
LLAMA = an animal of the camel family

landscape (not lanscape)

language (not langage)

larva (singular) larvae (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

later or latter? LATER is the comparative of ‘late’.
(late, later, latest)

I will see you LATER.
You are LATER than I expected.

LATTER is the opposite of ‘former’.
Cats and dogs are wonderful pets but the LATTER need regular exercise.

Note: use ‘latter’ to indicate the second of two references; use ‘last’ to indicate the final one of three or more.

lay or lie? The various tenses of these verbs cause a great deal of unnecessary confusion. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

to lay:
I LAY the table early every morning.
I AM LAYING the table now.
I HAVE LAID it already.
I WAS LAYING the table when you phoned.
I LAID the table before I went to bed.

My hen LAYS an egg every morning.
She IS LAYING an egg now.
She HAS LAID an egg already.
She WAS LAYING an egg when you phoned.
She LAID an egg every day last week.

to lie (down)
I LIE down every afternoon after lunch.
I AM LYING down now.
I HAVE LAIN down every afternoon this week.
I WAS LYING down when you phoned.
I LAY down yesterday afternoon.

to lie (= tell a lie)
I LIE regularly.
I AM LYING to you now.
I HAVE LIED all my life.
I WAS LYING to you last week.
I LIED to you yesterday as well.

laying
See LAY OR LIE?.

lead or led?
LEAD is the present tense.
LED is the past tense.

Go in front and LEAD us home.
He went in front and LED us home.

leaf (singular)
leaves (plural)
See PLURALS (v).

leaned/leant
Both spellings are correct.

leaped/leapt
Both spellings are correct.

learned/learnt
Both spellings are correct.

leftenant
Wrong spelling. See LIEUTENANT.

legend or myth?
Both are traditional tales but legends usually have some basis in fact (e.g.
Robert the Bruce and the spider, King Alfred and the cakes, Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest). Myths are supernatural tales, often involving gods or giants, which serve to explain natural events or phenomena (e.g. Pandora’s Box and the coming of evil into the world, The Seven Pomegranate Seeds and the seasons of the year and so on).

**legible**
See [ELIGIBLE OR LEGIBLE?](#).

**leisure**

*(not -ie-)*
See [EI/E SPELLING RULE](#).

**lend**
See [BORROW OR LEND?](#).

**less**
See [FEWER OR LESS?](#).

**liaise**
liason *(not liase/liason)*

**libel or slander?**
Both refer to statements damaging to a person’s character: LIBEL is written; SLANDER is spoken.

**library**
*(not library)*

**libretto** *(singular)*
libretti or librettos *(plural)*
See [FOREIGN PLURALS](#).

**licence or license?**

LICENCE is a noun. We can refer to a licence or the licence or your licence:

Do you have your driving LICENCE with you?

LICENSE is a verb:

The restaurant is LICENSED for the consumption of alcohol.

**licorice/liquorice**
Both spellings are correct.

**lie**
See [LAY OR LIE?](#).

**lied**
See [LAY OR LIE?](#).

**liesure**
Wrong spelling. See [LEISURE](#).
lieutenant

life (singular) lives (plural)
See PLURALS (v).

lighted/lit Both forms are correct.

lightening or lightning?
LIGHTENING comes from the verb ‘to lighten’ and so you can talk about:
LIGHTENING a heavy load or
LIGHTENING the colour of your hair.

LIGHTNING is the flash of light we get in the sky during a thunderstorm.

likable/likeable Both spellings are correct.

like See AS OR LIKE?

likelihood
See AS OR LIKE?

liqueur or liquor?
A LIQUEUR is a sweet, very strong, alcoholic drink usually taken in small glasses after a meal.
LIQUOR refers to any alcoholic drink.

liquorice See LICORICE/LIQUORICE.

literally Beware of using ‘literally’ to support a fanciful comparison:

7 My eyes LITERALLY popped out of my head when I saw her in a bikini.
(They didn’t!)
3 My eyes popped out of my head when I saw her in a bikini.

Everybody will understand that you are speaking figuratively (i.e. it was as if...). See METAPHOR.
See SIMILE.

literati (Not litterari)
This word is used to describe well-read and well-educated people who love literature.

literature (four syllables)
livelihood

loaf (singular) loaves (plural)
See PLURALS (v).

loath, loathe or loth? LOATH and LOTH are interchangeable spellings and mean unwilling or reluctant:
I was LOATH/LOTH to hurt his feelings.
LOATHE means to detest:
I LOATHE snobbery.

loathsome loathe + some = loathsome
This word means detestable.

loaves See LOAF.

lonely (not lonley)

loose or lose? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:
I have a LOOSE tooth. (rhymes with moose)
Don’t LOSE your temper. (rhymes with snooze)

loping or lopping? lope + ing = loping
He was LOPING along with long strides.
lop + ing = lopping
LOPPING the trees will just encourage them to grow taller.
See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).

a lot (never alot)
Remember that this is a slang expression and should never be used in a formal context. Substitute ‘many’ or recast the sentence altogether.

lovable/loveable Both spellings are correct.

luggage (not lugage)
luxuriant or luxurious?

**LUXURIANT** = growing abundantly

**LUXURIOUS** = rich and costly, sumptuous

a **LUXURIOUS** hotel

**luxury**

-ly

Take care when adding this suffix to a word already ending in -l. You will have double -l:

real + ly = really
ideal + ly = ideally
special + ly = specially
usual + ly = usually

**lying**

See **LAY OR LIE?**.
machinery  (not -ary)
madam or madame?  Use MADAM:

- as a polite term of respect:
  Can I help you, madam?

- in letter writing:
  Dear Madam (note capital letter)

- as a formal title of respect:
  Thank you, Madam Speaker (note capital letter)

Use MADAME as the French equivalent:

- We are going to Madame Tussaud’s.

- The famous French physicist, Madame Curie, was born in Poland.

magic -e  Also known as silent -e and mute -e.
See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

mahogany
maintain

maintenance  (not maintainance)
manageable  See SOFT C AND SOFT G.
manager  (not manger, as is so often written!)
mango (singular)  mangoes or mangos (plural)
See PLURALS (iv).

manoeuvre
mantelpiece  (not mantle-)
mantelshelf  (not mantle-)
margarine  (not margerine)
marihuana/marijuana  Both spellings are correct.

marriage

marvel  marvelled, marvelling

marvellous

masterful or masterly?  MASTERFUL = dominating
MASTERLY = very skilful

mathematics  (not mathematics)

mating or matting?  mate + ing = mating
mat + ing  = matting
See ADDING ENDINGS (i) + (ii).

matrix (singular)  matrices or matrixes (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

may  See CAN OR MAY?.

may or might?  (i) Use may/might in a present context
and might in a past context:

If I receive a written invitation, I
MAY/MIGHT accept. (still possible)
If I had received a written invitation,
I MIGHT HAVE accepted. (possibility
over now)
If I don’t hurry, I MAY/MIGHT miss
the bus. (possibility exists)
If I hadn’t hurried, I MIGHT HAVE
missed the bus. (risk now over)

(ii) Convert ‘may’ to ‘might’ when
changing direct speech to indirect or
reported speech:

‘MAY I come in?’ she asked.
She asked if she MIGHT come in.
‘You MAY be lucky,’ she said.
She said that I MIGHT be lucky.

(iii) There is a slight difference between
the meaning of ‘may’ and ‘might’ in
the present tense when they are used
in the sense of ‘asking permission’:
MAY I suggest that we adjourn the meeting? (agreement assured)

MIGHT I suggest that we adjourn the meeting? (suggestion more tentative)

me See I/ME/MYSELF.

meant (not ment, not mean’t)

medal or meddle? MEDAL = a small metal disc given as an honour
to MEDdle = to interfere

mediaeval/medieval Both spellings are correct.

medicine (not medecine) medicinal

mediocre

Mediterranean

medium (singular) media or mediums (plural)

Note, however, that the two plurals differ in meaning.

The MEDIA hounded him to his death. (= radio, television, newspaper journalists)

She consulted a dozen MEDIUMS in the hope of making contact with her dead husband. (= people through whom the spirits of the dead are said to communicate)

medicals See medium.

meet, meet up, meet up with, or meet with? British English distinguishes between the first and last of these:

You MEET a person.

You MEET WITH an accident.

Avoid using ‘meet up’ and ‘meet up with’.

They are clumsy expressions.

7 When shall we MEET UP?
3 When shall we MEET?

7 We MET UP with friends in town.
3 We MET friends in town.
memento (singular)  mementoes or mementos (plural)  
See PLURALS (iv).

memorandum (singular)  memoranda or memorandums (plural)  
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

memory (singular)  memories (plural)  
See PLURALS (iii).

ment  Wrong spelling. See MEANT.

mention  mentioned, mentioning.

Mesdames  
(i) Plural of French Madame.
(ii) Used as a plural title before a number of ladies’ names:

Mesdames Smith, Green, Brown and Kelly won prizes.  
Always used with an initial capital letter.

message

messenger  (not messanger)

metaphor  (not metaphore)  
A metaphor is a compressed comparison:

He wolfed his food. (note the apparent identification with a wolf’s eating habits)

Compare SIMILE.

meteorology  (six syllables)

meter or metre?  Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Put these coins in the parking METER.  
You’ll need a METRE of material to make a skirt.

Sonnet is always written in iambic METRE.

might  See MAY OR MIGHT?

might of  This is an incorrect construction.  
See COULD OF.
milage/mileage  Both spellings are correct.

milieu (singular)  milieus or milieux (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

militate or mitigate?  To MILITATE (against) comes from the Latin verb meaning 'to serve as a soldier' and it has the combative sense of having a powerful influence on something.

Despite his excellent qualifications, his youthful criminal record MILITATED against his appointment as school bursar.

To MITIGATE comes from the Latin adjective meaning 'mild' and it means to moderate, to make less severe.

Don’t condemn the young man too harshly. There are MITIGATING circumstances.

millennium (singular) millennia or millenniums (plural) (not -n-)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

millepede/millipede  Both spellings are correct.

mimic  mimicked, mimicking
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

miniature

minuscule (not miniscule)

minute (not minuit)

miracle

miscellaneous  miscellany

mischief  See EI/EI SPELLING RULE.

mischievous (not mischievous, as it is often mispronounced)

misplace  See DISPLACE OR MISPLACE?.

misrelated participles  See PARTICIPLES.
misspell
  mis + spell
misspelled/misspelt
  Both spellings are correct.
mistletoe
moccasin
modern
  (not modren)
moment
  (not momment)
momentary or momentous?
  \textbf{MOMENTARY} = \textit{lasting for only a very short time}
  \textbf{MOMENTOUS} = \textit{of great significance}
monastery (singular)
  monasteries (plural)
  (not monastry/monasteries)
  See \textsc{plurals} (iii).
mongoose (singular)
  mongooses (plural)
  (not mongeese)
monotonous
moping or mopping?
  mope + ing = moping
  mop + ing = mopping
  See \textsc{adding endings} (i) + (ii).
moral or morale?
  Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:
  Denise is guided by strong \textbf{MORAL} principles.
  My \textbf{MORALE} suffered badly when I failed my exams and I lost all faith in myself for years.
Morocco
mortgage
  (not mortage as it is pronounced)
mosquito (singular)
  mosquitoes (plural)
  See \textsc{plurals} (iv).
motto (singular)
  mottoes or mottos (plural)
  See \textsc{plurals} (iv).
mould
mouldy
MOUSTACHE

moustache

mucous or mucus?  MUOUS is an adjective, as in MUOUS membrane.
The name of the thick secretion of the mucous membrane is called MUCUS.

murmur  murmured, murmuring (not murmer-)

mustn’t  This is the contracted form of ‘must not’. Take care to place the apostrophe carefully.

must of  This is an incorrect construction. See COULD OF.

mute -e  Also known as magic -e and silent -e. See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

mutual  reciprocal

Our dislike was MUTUAL. Their marriage is based on MUTUAL respect.

Some would avoid the use of ‘mutual’ in expressions such as ‘our mutual friend’ because a third person is then introduced and the feelings of each person for the other two are not necessarily identical. It might be best here to describe the friend as one ‘we have in common’.

myself  See I/ME/MYSELF.

myth  See LEGEND OR MYTH?.
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<td>All these forms are correct.</td>
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<td>naivety/naïvety</td>
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<td>nationalise or naturalise?</td>
<td>to NATIONALISE = to transfer ownership from the private sector to the state to NATURALISE = to confer full citizenship on a foreigner</td>
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<td>-ness</td>
<td>Take care when adding this suffix to a word already ending in -n. You will have double n: cleaness openness suddeness</td>
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nineteen  
nineteenth
ninety  
ninetieth
no  
See KNOW OR NO?.

no body or nobody?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

It was believed that he had been murdered but NO BODY was ever found, and so nothing could be proved. (= no corpse)

NOBODY likes going to the dentist. (= no one)

none

The problem with ‘none’ is deciding whether to use with it a singular or a plural verb.

Strictly speaking, a singular verb should accompany ‘none’:

NONE of the passengers WAS hurt. (= not one)
NONE of the milk WAS spilt. (= not any)

Colloquially, a singular verb is always used with expressions of quantity but a plural verb is often used when plural nouns follow the ‘none of . . .’ construction:

NONE of the passengers WERE hurt.
NONE of my friends LIKE pop music.
NONE of the children WANT an ice-cream.

Some would reserve plural verbs in these cases for informal occasions; others would see them as perfectly acceptable formally as well.

no one

‘No one’ is singular and requires a singular verb:

NO ONE likes meanness.

‘No one’ should be written as two words and not hyphenated.
nosey/nosy

Both spellings are correct.  
*Note:* for informal use only.

noticeable

*(not noticeable)*  
See *soft c and soft g*.

not only . . . but also

Take care with the positioning of each part of this pair:

1. Denise not only enjoys composing but also conducting.

   Denise enjoys two musical activities: composing, conducting.

   Put ‘not only’ in front of the first and ‘but also’ in front of the second, and let ‘enjoys’ refer to both.

2. Denise enjoys **NOT ONLY** composing **BUT ALSO** conducting.

   Compare **BOTH . . . AND**; **EITHER . . . OR**; **NEITHER . . . NOR**.

nouns

There are four kinds of nouns: common, proper, abstract and collective.

- Take care with the punctuation of *proper nouns*. Because they are the special individual names of people, towns, countries, newspapers, days of the week, businesses, and so on, they require initial capital letters:

  Dennis Blakely  
  Ipswich  
  Sweden  
  *The Times*  
  Wednesday  
  Blazing Fireplaces Ltd.

  Note that months of the year begin with a capital letter but the seasons generally do not:

  April, the spring, but the Spring term.
Do not confuse proper and common nouns.
labrador – common noun
Tinker – proper noun (needs initial capital)

There is a certain flexibility in sentences like this:

Bishop Flynn will be arriving at three o’clock. The bishop/Bishop would like to meet the confirmation candidates before the service begins.

Abstract nouns are the names of ideas, emotions, states of mind, and so on.

The correct form can sometimes be difficult to remember. Do check in a dictionary when you are uncertain. Abstract nouns can have a huge variety of endings:

optimism, pride, complexity, failure, diffidence, depth, bravery, kindness, excitement, exhilaration, and so on

Unsophisticated writers often add -ness to an adjective in the hope that it will then be converted to an abstract noun. Sometimes this works; often it doesn’t.

Collective nouns (audience, flock, herd, congregation) are treated as singular nouns if regarded as a single whole:

The audience WAS wildly enthusiastic.

They are treated as plural nouns when regarded as a number of units making up the whole:

The jury WERE divided over his guilt.
**nucleus** (singular)  **nuclei** (plural)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

**nuisance**

**number**

See **SINGULAR OR PLURAL?**.

**numbers**

Should numbers be written in figures or in words? In mathematical, scientific, technical and business contexts, figures are used, as you would expect.

The problem arises in straightforward prose (an essay, perhaps, or a short story or a letter).

The rule of thumb is that small numbers are written as words and large numbers are written as figures.

What are small numbers? Some people would say numbers up to ten; others numbers up to twenty; others numbers up to one hundred. If you’re not bound by the house-style of a particular organisation, you can make up your own mind. Numbers up to one hundred can be written in one or two words and this is why this particular cut-off point is favoured.

There were eight children at the party.
There were eighty-four/84 people in the audience.

Remember to hyphenate all compound numbers between twenty-one and ninety-nine when they are written as words.

Round numbers over one hundred, like two thousand, five million, and so on, are also usually written in words.

Write dates (21 October 2001) and sums of money (£10.50) and specific measurements (10.5 cm) in figures.

Time can be written in words or figures (three o’clock/3 o’clock) but 24-hour clock
times are always written in figures (08.00).

Centuries can be written in words or figures (the 18th century/the eighteenth century).

It is important to be consistent within one piece of writing.

**nursery** (singular) nurseries (plural)
See PLURALS (iii).
oasis (singular)  oases (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

obedience  (not -ance)
obedient  (not -ant)
occasion  occasional (not -ss-)
occur  occurred, occurring, occurrence
See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

o’clock  Take care with the punctuation of this contraction. The apostrophe represents the omission of four letters:
o’clock = of the clock

Do not write: o’Clock, O’Clock or o,clock.

of or off?  These exemplar sentences may help:

He is the youngest OF four children.
(pronounced ov)
Jump OFF the bus. (rhymes with cough)

Avoid the clumsy construction:
7  Jump off of the bus.
3  Jump off the bus.

official or officious?  OFFICIAL = authorised, formal

an OFFICIAL visit
an OFFICIAL invitation

OFFICIAL = fussy, self-important, interfering

an OFFICIAL secretary
an OFFICIAL waiter
often  

*(not offen)*

**omission**

omit

omitted, omitting

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

**one**

This can be a useful impersonal pronoun:

**ONE** never knows.

However, it can be difficult to keep up in a long sentence:

**ONE** never knows if **ONE’S** husband is likely to approve of **ONE’S** choice but that is a risk **ONE** has to take.

Use ‘one’ sparingly and beware the risk of pomposity.

**only**

The position of ‘only’ in a sentence is crucial to meaning.

See **AMBIGUITY** (ii).

**onnist**

Wrong spelling. See **HONEST**.

**onto or on to?**

There are circumstances when the words must always be written separately. We will consider these first.

- Always write the words separately if ‘to’ is part of an infinitive (e.g. to eat, to speak, to be, to watch, etc.):

  She drove **ON TO** test the brakes.

  As a matter of interest you can double-check the ‘separateness’ of the two words by separating them further:

  She drove **ON** because she wanted **TO** test the breaks.

- Always write the words separately when ‘to’ means ‘towards’:

  We cycled **ON TO** Oxford.
Once again, the two words can be further separated:

We cycled ON the few remaining miles TO Oxford.

► It is permissible to write ‘onto’ or ‘on to’ when you mean ‘to a position on’:

The acrobat jumped ONTO the trapeze.
The acrobat jumped ON TO the trapeze.

It should be borne in mind, however, that many careful writers dislike ‘onto’ and always use ‘on to’.

‘Onto’ is more common in American English but with the cautions expressed above.

ophthalmologist  
(opth-)

opinion  
(opinion)

opposite

oral  
See aural or oral?

organise/organize  
Both spellings are correct.

original

originally  
original + ly

ought  
‘Ought’ is always followed by an infinitive (to visit, to read, to do, etc).

We OUGHT to write our thank-you letters.

The negative form is ‘ought not’

We OUGHT NOT to hand our work in late.

The forms ‘didn’t ought’ and ‘hadn’t ought’ are always wrong.
7 You didn’t ought to say this.
3 He OUGHT NOT to say this.
7 He hadn’t ought to have hit her.
3 He OUGHT NOT to have hit her.

ours

There are eight possessive pronouns:
mine, thine, his, hers, its, ours, yours, theirs. They never need an apostrophe:

This house is OURS.

outfit

outfitted, outfitting, outfitter
(exception to 2-1-1 rule).
See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

out of

Avoid using ‘of’ unnecessarily:
7 He threw it OUT OF the window.
3 He threw it OUT the window.

outrageous

(not outrageous)
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

over-

Take care when adding this prefix to a word already beginning with r-. You will have -rr-:

overreact
overripe
overrule, etc.

overreact

over + react

ovum (singular)

ova (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

owing to

See DUE TO/OWING TO.
packed 7 We took a pack lunch with us.
3 We took a PACKED lunch with us.

paid (exception to the -y rule; not payed)
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

paiment Wrong spelling. See PAYMENT.

pajamas American spelling. See PYJAMAS.

palate, palette, pallet PALATE = the top part of the inside of your mouth
PALETTE = a small board with a hole for the thumb which an artist uses when mixing paints
PALLET = a platform used to lift and to carry goods

panic panicked, panicking, panicky
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

paparazzo (singular) paparazzi (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

paraffin

paragraphing

There is no mystery about paragraphing although many students find it difficult to know when to end one paragraph and begin another.

A paragraph develops a particular point that is relevant to the overall subject. If you wish to write a letter or an essay that develops five or six points, then each point will have its own paragraph and you will add two more, one by way of an introductory paragraph and another at the end as a conclusion.

There are no rules about how long a paragraph should be. Some paragraphs,
often the introduction or the conclusion, may be a single sentence; other paragraphs may be a page or more long. Too many short paragraphs in succession can be very jerky; too many very long ones can look forbidding. It is best to mix long and short paragraphs, if you can.

You may also find that a paragraph which is becoming very long (a page or more) will benefit from being subdivided. The topic of the paragraph may be more sensibly developed as two or three subsidiary points.

Clear paragraphing is not possible without clear thinking. Think of what you want to say before you begin to write. List the topics or points you want to make in a sensible order. Then develop each one in turn in a separate paragraph.

A paragraph usually contains within it one sentence which sums up its topic. Sometimes the paragraph will begin with this sentence (called a topic sentence) and the rest of the paragraph will elaborate or illustrate the point made. Sometimes the topic sentence occurs during the paragraph. It can be effective, from time to time, to build up to the topic sentence as the last sentence in a paragraph.

Careful writers will try to move smoothly from one paragraph to the next, using link words or phrases such as: on the other hand; however; in conclusion.

In handwriting and in typing, it is usual to mark the beginning of a paragraph either by indenting it by 2cm or so, or by leaving a clear line between paragraphs. The only disadvantage of the latter method is that it is not always clear, when a sentence begins on a new page, whether a new paragraph is also intended.
Compare also the paragraphing of speech.
See inverted commas.

paralyse/paralyze Both spellings are correct.
paralysis
paraphernalia
parent (not perant)
parenthesis (singular) parentheses (plural)
See foreign plurals.
parliament
parliamentary
parrafin Wrong spelling. See paraffin.
partake or participate? PARTAKE = to share with others (especially food and drink)
PARTICIPATE = to join in an activity; to play a part in
They PARTOOK solemnly of lamb, herbs and salt.
Will you be able to PARTICIPATE in the firm’s pension scheme?
partener Wrong spelling. See partner.
participles Participles help to complete some tenses. Present participles end in -ing:
I am COOKING.
They were WASHING.
You would have been CELEBRATING.
Past participles generally end in -d or -ed but there are many exceptions:
I have LABOURED.
You are AMAZED.
It was HEARD.
We should have been INFORMED.
Care needs to be taken with the irregular
forms of the past participle. They can be checked with a good dictionary.

to choose chosen
to teach taught
to begin begun

The past participle is the word that completes the construction:

having been . . .?

Participles can also be used as verbal adjectives (that is, as describing words with a lot of activity suggested):

a HOWLING baby
a DESECRATED grave

As verbal adjectives, they can begin sentences:

HOWLING loudly, the baby woke everyone up.
DESECRATED with graffiti, the tombstone was a sad sight.

Take care that the verbal adjective describes an appropriate noun or pronoun. A mismatch can result in unintended hilarity.
See AMBIGUITY (v).

particle
particular
particularly particular + ly
partner (not partener)
passed or past? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

You PASSED me twice in town yesterday.
In the PAST, women had few rights.
In PAST times, women had few rights.
I walk PAST your house every day.
passenger  
*not* passanger

past  
See PASSED OR PAST?

pastime  
*not* -tt-

payed  
Wrong spelling. See PAID.

payment  
*not* paiment
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

peace or piece?  
There were twenty-one years of PEACE between the two wars. Would you like a PIECE of pie?

peculiar  
*not* perc-

pedal or peddle?  
a PEDAL = a lever you work with your foot
PEDDLE = to sell (especially drugs)

penicillin

peninsula or peninsular?  
PENINSULA is a noun meaning a narrow piece of land jutting out from the mainland into the sea. It is derived from two Latin words: *paene* (almost) and *insula* (island).

Have you ever camped on the Lizard PENINSULA?

PENINSULAR is an adjective, derived from the noun:

The PENINSULAR War (1808–1814) was fought on the Iberian PENINSULA between the French and the British.

*Note*: It may be useful in a quiz to know that the P&O shipping line was in 1837 The Peninsular Steam Navigation Company (it operated between Britain and the Iberian Peninsula). In 1840, when its operation was extended to Egypt, it became the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (hence P&O).
people  (not peple)
perant  Wrong spelling. See PARENT.
peculiar  Wrong spelling. See PECULIAR.
perhaps  (not prehaps)
period  (not pieriod)
permanent  (not -ant)
permissible
perseverance  (not perser-)

personal or personnel? Sarah has taken all her PERSONAL belongings with her.
She was upset by a barrage of PERSONAL remarks.
All the PERSONNEL will be trained in first aid.
Write to the PERSONNEL office and see if a vacancy is coming up.

(Note the spelling of personnel with -nn-)
Note: Personnel Officers are now often called Human Resources Officers.

perspicacity or perspicuity? PERSPICACITY = discernment, shrewdness, clearness of understanding
PERSPICUITY = lucidity, clearness of expression

phenomenon (singular) phenomena (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

physical
physically
physique
Piccadilly
piccalilli
picnic  picnicked, picnicking, picnicker
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.
piece

See PEACE OR PIECE?

period

Wrong spelling. See PERIOD.

pigmy/pygmy (singular) pigmies/pygmies (plural)

pining or pinning?
pine + ing = pining
pin + ing = pinning
See ADDING ENDINGS (i), (ii).

plateau (singular) plateaus or plateaux (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

plausible

pleasant (not plesant)

pleasure

plural

See SINGULAR OR PLURAL?

plurals

(i) Most words form their plural by adding -s:

door doors; word words; bag bags; rainbow rainbows; shop shops; car cars

(ii) Words ending in a sibilant (a hissing sound) add -es to form their plural. This adds a syllable to their pronunciation and so you can always hear when this has happened:

bus buses; box boxes; fez fezes/fezzes; bench benches; bush bushes; hutch hutches.

(iii) Words ending in -y are a special case. Look at the letter that precedes the final -y. If the word ends in vowel + y, just add -s to form the plural (vowels: a, e, i, o, u):

day days
donkey donkeys
boy boys
guy guys
If the word ends in consonant + y, change the y to i, and add -es:

lobby    lobbies
opportunity opportunities
body      bodies
century    centuries

This rule is well worth learning by heart. There are no exceptions. Remember an easy example as a key like boy/boys.

(iv) Words ending in -o generally add -s to form the plural:

piano    pianos
banjo    banjos
studio    studios
soprano    sopranos
photo     photos
kimono    kimonos

There are nine exceptions which add -es:

domino    dominoes
echo      echoes
embargo    embargoes
hero      heroes
mosquito    mosquitoes
no        noes
potato    potatoes
tomato    tomatoes
torpedo    torpedoes

About a dozen words can be either -s or -es and so you’ll be safe with these. Interestingly, some of these words until recently have required -es (words like cargo, mango, memento, volcano). The trend is towards the regular -s ending and some words are in a transitional stage.
(v) Words ending in -f and -fe generally add -s to form the plural:

roof  roofs
cliff  cliffs
handkerchief  handkerchiefs
carafe  carafes
giraffe  giraffes

There are 13 exceptions which end in -ves in the plural. You can always hear when this is the case, but here is the complete list for reference:

knife/knives; life/lives; wife/wives; elf/elves; self/selves; shelf/shelves; calf/calves; half/halves; leaf/leaves; sheaf/sheaves; thief/thieves; loaf/loaves; wolf/wolves.

Four words can be either -fs or -ves:

hoofs/hooves; scarfs/scarves; turfs/turves; wharfs/wharves.

(vi) Some nouns are quite irregular in the formation of their plural. Some words don’t change:

aircraft, cannon, bison, cod, deer, sheep, trout

Some have a choice about changing or staying the same in the plural:

buffalo or buffaloes
Eskimo or Eskimos

Other everyday words have very peculiar plurals which perhaps we take for granted:

man  men  ox  oxen
woman  women  mouse  mice
child  children  louse  lice
foot  feet  die  dice
goose  geese
After goose/geese, mongoose/mongooses seems very strange but is correct.

See also FOREIGN PLURALS.

pneumonia

possability Wrong spelling. See POSSIBILITY.

possible Wrong spelling. See Possible.

possess possessed, possessing

possession

possessive apostrophes See APOSTROPHES (ii), (iii).

possessive pronouns No apostrophes are needed with possessive pronouns:

That is MINE. That is OURS.
That is THINE. That is YOURS.
That is HERS. That is THEIRS.
That is HIS.
That is ITS.

possessor

possibility

possible (not -able)

possible or probable? POSSIBLE = could happen
PROBABLE = very likely to happen

potato (singular) potatoes (plural)
See PLURALS (iv).

practical or practicable?

A PRACTICAL person is one who is good at doing and making things.

A PRACTICAL suggestion is a sensible, realistic one that is likely to succeed.

A PRACTICABLE suggestion is merely one that will work. The word ‘practicable’ means ‘able to be put into practice’. It does not carry all the additional meanings of ‘practical’.
practice or practise? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

**PRACTICE** makes perfect.
An hour’s **PRACTICE** every day will yield returns.
The young doctor has built up a busy **PRACTICE**.

In the examples above, ‘practice’ is a noun.

You should **PRACTISE** every day.
**PRACTISE** now!

In these examples, ‘practise’ is a verb.

precede or proceed? **PRECEDE** = to go in front of
**PROCEED** = to carry on, especially after having stopped

prefer preferred, preferring, preference
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

prehaps Wrong spelling. See **PERHAPS**.

prejudice

preparation

prepositions Prepositions are small words like ‘by’, ‘with’, ‘for’, ‘to’, which are placed before nouns and pronouns to show how they connect with other words in the sentence:

They gave the flowers **TO** their mother.
Let him sit **NEAR** you.

Two problems can arise with prepositions.

(i) Take care to choose the correct preposition. A good dictionary will help you:

comply with
protest at
deficient in
ignorant of
similar to, and so on.
(ii) Don’t take too seriously the oft-repeated advice not to end a sentence with a preposition. Use your discretion, and word your sentence however it sounds best to you.

Do you prefer the first or the second sentence here?

(a) WITH whom are you?
(b) Who are you WITH?

Which do you prefer here?

(c) She’s a politician FOR whom I have a great deal of respect.
(d) She’s a politician I have a great deal of respect FOR.

**present** (not -ant)

**presume** See assume or presume?.

**priest** See ei/ie spelling rule.

**primitive** (not -mat-)

**principal or principle?** Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

- Rebuilding the school is their PRINCIPAL aim. (= chief)
- The PRINCIPAL announced the results. (= chief teacher)
- His guiding PRINCIPLE was to judge no one hastily. (= moral rule)

**privilege** (not primelege or priviledge)

**probable** See possible or probable?.

**probably** (not propably)

**procedure** (not proceedure)

**proceed** See precede or proceed?.

**proclaim**

**proclamation** (not -claim-)

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**PROPHECY OR PROPHESY?**

**profession**

(profession)

**professional**

**professor**

profit

(profit)

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

**prognosis**

(prognosis)

See **DIAGNOSIS OR PROGNOSIS?**.

**prognosis** (singular)

(prognosis)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

**program or programme?**

(programme)

Use **PROGRAM** when referring to a computer program.

Use **PROGRAMME** on all other occasions.

**prominent**

(prominent)

**pronounceable**

(pronounceable)

See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

**pronouns**

See **I/ME/MYSELF**.

See **WHO/WHOM**.

**pronunciation**

(pronunciation)

**propably**

Wrong spelling. See **PROBABLY**.

**propaganda**

(propaganda)

See **NOUNS**.

**proper nouns**

(prophecy or prophesy?)

These two words look very similar but are pronounced differently.

The last syllable of **PROPHECY** rhymes with ‘sea’; the last syllable of **PROPHESY** rhymes with ‘sigh’.

Use the exemplar sentences as a guide:

Most of us believed her **PROPHECY** that the world would end on 31 December.

(prophecy = a noun)

In the example above, you could substitute the noun ‘prediction’.

é
We all heard him PROPHESY that the world would end at the weekend. (prophesy = a verb)

In the example above, you could substitute the verb ‘predict’.

**propaganda**
Wrong spelling. See PROPAGANDA.

**protein**
See **ei/e** SPELLING RULE.

**psychiatrist**

**psychiatry**

**psychologist**

**psychology**

**publicly**
(not publically)

**punctuation**
See under individual entries:
APOSTROPHES; BRACKETS; CAPITAL LETTERS;
COLONS; COMMAS; DASHES; EXCLAMATION MARKS; HYPHENS; INVERTED COMMAS;
SEMICOLONS; QUESTION MARKS.
See also **END STOPS**.

**pyjamas**
(American English: pajamas)
quarrel
quarrelled, quarrelling
See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

quarrelsome

quarter

question marks
A question mark is the correct end stop for a question. Note that it has its own built-in full stop and doesn’t require another.

Has anyone seen my glasses?

Note that indirect questions do not require question marks because they have become statements in the process and need full stops.

He asked if anyone had seen his glasses.

See INDIRECT SPEECH/REPORTED SPEECH.

questionnaire (not -n-)

questions (direct and indirect)
See QUESTION MARKS.

See INDIRECT SPEECH/REPORTED SPEECH.

queue
queued, queuing or queueing

quiet or quite?
The children were as QUIET as mice. (quiet = two syllables)
You are QUITE right. (quite = one syllable)

quotation or quote?
Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

3 Use as many QUOTATIONS as you can.
7 Use as many quotes as you can. (quotation = a noun)
3 I can QUOTE the whole poem. (quote = a verb)

quotation marks See INVERTED CommAS.
radiator  (not -er)
radically   radical + ly
radius (singular)  radii or radiuses (plural)
    See FOREIGN PLURALS.
raise or rise?  Let us look at these two words first as verbs (doing words):
    My landlord has decided to RAISE the rent.
    He RAISED the rent a year ago.
    He has RAISED the rent three times in four years.
    My expenses RISE all the time.
    They ROSE very steeply last year.
    They have RISEN steadily this year.
    Now let us look at them as nouns (a raise, a rise):

3  You should ask your employer for a RISE.
7  You should ask your employer for a RAISE.

An increase in salary is called ‘a rise’ in the UK and ‘a raise’ in America.

raping or rapping?  rape + ing = raping
                        rap + ing = rapping
    See ADDING ENDINGS (i), (ii).

rapt or wrapped?  RAPT = enraptured (RAPT in thought)
                        WRAPPED = enclosed in paper or soft material

raspberry  (not rasberry)
ratable/rateable  Both spellings are correct.
realise/realize
Both spellings are correct.

really
real + ly

reason

reasonable

reccomend
Wrong spelling. See recommend.

receipt
See ei/ie spelling rule.

receive
See ei/ie spelling rule.

recent or resent?
RECENT = happening not long ago
RESENT = to feel aggrieved and be indignant

recipe

recognise/recognize
Both spellings are correct.

recommend

recover or re-cover?
Bear in mind the difference in meaning that the hyphen makes:
RECOVER = get better, regain possession
RE-COVER = to cover again
See hyphens (iv).

rediculous
Wrong spelling. See RIDICULOUS.

refectory
(not refrectory)

refer
referred, referring, referee, reference
See adding endings (iv).

referee or umpire?
REFEREE = football, boxing
UMPIRE = baseball, cricket, tennis

refrigerator
(abbreviation = fridge)

regal or royal?
REGAL = fit for a king or queen;
resembling the behaviour of a king or queen
ROYAL = having the status of a king or queen, or being a member of their family

regret
regretted, regretting, regrettable, regretful
See adding endings (iv).
rehearsal
rehearse
relevant (not revelant)
relief See ei/ie SPELLING RULE.
remember (not rember)
repellent or repulsive? Both words mean ‘causing disgust or aversion’. REPULSIVE, however, is the stronger of the two; it has the sense of causing ‘intense disgust’, even horror in some circumstances.
REPELLENT can also be used in the sense of being able to repel particular pests (a mosquito repellent) and in the sense of being impervious to certain substances (water-repellent).
repetition (not -pit-)
repetitious or repetitive? Both words are derived from ‘repetition’. Use REPETITIOUS when you want to criticise something spoken or written for containing tedious and excessive repetition. ‘Repetitious’ is a derogatory term.
Use REPETITIVE when you want to make the point that speech, writing or an activity involves a certain amount of repetition (e.g. work on an assembly line in a factory). ‘Repetitive’ is a neutral word.
reported speech See INDIRECT SPEECH/REPORTED SPEECH.
representative
repulsive See REPELLENT OR REPULSIVE?
resent See RECENT OR RESENT?
reservoir From ‘reserve’. (not resevoir)
resistance
reson
Wrong spelling. See reason.

resonable
Wrong spelling. See reasonable.

responsibility
(not -ability)

responsible
(not -able)

restaurant

restaurateur
(not restaurateur)

resuscitate
(not resuscitate)

revelant
Wrong spelling. See relevant.

revenge
See avenge or revenge?

reverend or reverent?
REVEREND = deserving reverence; title for a cleric.

The Revd. C. Benson
The Rev. C. Benson

REVERENT = showing reverence
REVERENT pilgrims

reversible
(not -able)

rheumatism

rhubarb

rhyme

rhythm

ridiculous
(not ridiculous)
The word comes from the Latin ridere, meaning ‘to laugh’.

rigorous or vigorous?
RIGOROUS = exhaustive, very thorough, exacting physically or mentally
VIGOROUS = full of energy

robing or robbing?
robe + ing = robing
rob + ing = robbing
See adding endings (i) and (ii).

rococo
Romania/Rumania  Both spellings are correct.  
A third variant, Roumania, is now  
considered old-fashioned and should be  
avoided.

roof (singular)  roofs (plural) (not rooves)

royal  See regal or royal?.
sacrifice  

(\textit{not} sacra-)  

sacilege  

(\textit{not} sacra-)  

safely  

\textit{safe} + ly  

said  

(exception to the -\textit{y} rule)  

See \textit{adding endings} (iii).  

salary  

salmon  

sanatorium (singular)  

\textit{sanatoria} or \textit{sanatoriums} (plural)  

See \textit{foreign plurals}.  

sandwich  

(\textit{not} sanwich)  

sarcasm  

See \textit{irony or sarcasm?}.  

sat  

See \textit{sit}.  

satellite  

Saturday  

saucer  

scan  

Scan has a number of meanings in different subject areas:  

\begin{itemize}  
  \item It can mean to analyse the metre of a line of poetry.  
  \item It can mean ‘to look at all parts carefully in order to detect irregularities’ (as in radar \textit{scanning} and body \textit{scanning}).  
  \item It can mean to read intently and quickly in order to establish the relevant points.  
\end{itemize}  

When we talk of ‘just \textit{scanning} the headlines’, we shouldn’t mean ‘glancing
quickly over them without taking them in’. Scanning is a very intensive and selective process.

**scarcely**

This word needs care both in spelling and in usage.
See **DOUBLE NEGATIVES**.

**scarf** (singular) scarfs or scarves (plural)
See **PLURALS** (v).

**scaring or scarring?**

scare + ing = scaring
scar + ing = scarring
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (i) and (ii).

**scarsly**

Wrong spelling. See **SCARCELY**.

**scenery**

(not -ary)

**sceptic or septic?**

A **SCEPTIC** is one who is inclined to doubt or question accepted truths.
**SEPTIC** is an adjective meaning ‘infected by bacteria’ (a **SEPTIC** wound).
It also describes the drainage system in country areas which uses bacteria to aid decomposition (**SEPTIC** drainage, a **SEPTIC** tank).

**schedule**

**scheme**

**scissors**

**Scotch, Scots or Scottish?**

Use **SCOTCH** only in such phrases as **SCOTCH** broth, **SCOTCH** whisky, **SCOTCH** eggs, **SCOTCH** mist and so on.

When referring to the people of Scotland, call them the **SCOTS** or the **SCOTTISH**. The term **SCOTCH** can cause offence.

The words **SCOTS** is often used in connection with aspects of language:

He has a strong **SCOTS** accent.
The **SCOTS** language is quite distinct from English.

What is the **SCOTS** word for ‘small’?

We also talk about **SCOTS** law being different from English law.

In connection with people, we have the rather formal terms **Scotsman/Scotsmen** and **Scotswoman/Scotswomen**.

Remember also the **Scots Guards**.

**SCOTTISH** is used rather more generally to refer to aspects of landscape and culture:

**SCOTTISH** history, **SCOTTISH** dancing, **SCOTTISH** traditions, **SCOTTISH** universities, the **SCOTTISH** Highlands

**search**

| seasonal or seasonal? | **SEASONABLE** = normal for the time of year (**SEASONABLE** weather)  
**SEASONAL** = happening at a particular season (**SEASONAL** employment) |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| secretary (singular) | secretaries (plural)  (*not secer-*)  
See **PLURALS** (iii). |
| seize                | (*not -ie-; an exception to the ei/ie spelling rule*) |
| self (singular)      | selves (plural)  
See **PLURALS** (v). |
| Sellophane           | Wrong spelling. See **cellophane**. |
| Sellotape            | (*not cellotape*) |
| semicolons           | Semicolons have two functions:  
(i) They can replace a full stop by joining two related sentences.  
Ian is Scottish. His wife is Irish.  
Ian is Scottish; his wife is Irish.  
(ii) They can replace the commas in a list which separate items. Semicolons are |

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particularly useful with longer items where commas might be needed for other reasons.

Emily has bought some lovely things for her new flat: five huge, brightly coloured floor cushions; some woven throws, in neutral colours and of wonderful textures; an Afghan rug; a brilliant blue glass vase; and a wine-rack, very elegant, shaped like two Ss on their backs.

sensual or sensuous?

SENSUAL = appealing to the body (especially through food, drink and sex)
SENSUOUS = appealing to the senses aesthetically (especially through music, poetry, art)

sentence

(not -ance)

sentiment or sentimentality?

SENTIMENT = a sincere emotional feeling
SENTIMENTALITY = over-indulgent, maudlin wallowing in emotion (sometimes with the suggestion of falseness and exaggeration)

sentimental

This adjective comes from both ‘sentiment’ and ‘sentimentality’ and so can be used in a fairly neutral way as well as a pejorative way:

SENTIMENTAL value (from sentiment)
for SENTIMENTAL reasons (from sentiment)
sickly SENTIMENTAL songs (from sentimentality)

separate

(not seperate)
Remember that there is A RAT in sep/A/RAT/e.

separate

separated, separating, separation
See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).
sequence of tenses
This means that tenses must match within a sentence. You have to keep within a certain time-zone:

7 I telephoned everyone on the committee and tell them exactly what I thought.
3 I telephoned everyone on the committee and TOLD them exactly what I thought.
7 He said that he will ask her to marry him.
3 He said that he WOULD ask her to marry him.
7 I should be grateful if you will send me an application form.
3 I should be grateful if you WOULD send me an application form.
7 Fergal smiles at us, waves goodbye and was gone.
3 Fergal smiles at us, waves goodbye and IS gone.

septic
See SCEPTIC OR SEPTIC?.

sergeant
(not sergant)
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

serial
See CEREAL OR SERIAL?.

servere
Wrong spelling. See SEVERE.

serviceable
(not servicable)
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

sesonable
Wrong spelling. See SEASONABLE OR SEASONAL?

sesonal
Wrong spelling. See SEASONABLE OR SEASONAL?

several
(three syllables)

severe
(not servere)
severely

severely + ly

sew or sow?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Sarah can *SEW* and knit beautifully.
She is *SEWING* her trousseau now.
She *SEWED* my daughter’s christening
gown by hand.
She has *SEWN* all her life.
The best time to *SOW* broad beans is in
the autumn.
He’s out now *SOWING* parsley and sage.
He *SOWED* seed that he saved from the
year before.
He has *SOWN* the last of the lettuce seed.

sewage or sewerage?

*SEWAGE* = the waste products carried
off by means of sewers
*SEWERAGE* = the provision of a
drainage system

shall or will?

The simple future tense uses ‘shall’ with I
and we and ‘will’ with the other
pronouns:

I shall drive
you (singular) will drive
he/she/it will drive
we shall drive
you (plural) will drive
they will drive

By reversing ‘shall’ and ‘will’ you
introduce a note of determination.

I will drive
you shall drive
he/she/it shall drive
we will drive
you shall drive
they shall drive

This distinction is lost in the contraction:
I’ll drive. However, in speech, the tone of
voice will indicate which is intended.
shaming or shamming? shame + ing = shaming
sham + ing = shamming
See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).

shan’t
This contraction for ‘shall not’ would at one time have been punctuated with two apostrophes to indicate where letters have been omitted (sha’n’t).
Use just one apostrophe nowadays (shan’t).
See CONTRACTIONS.

sheaf (singular)
sheaves (plural)
See PLURALS (v).

shear or sheer?
SHEAR is a verb (a doing word) and means to cut off.
SHEER is an adjective and means very thin (SHEER material), almost perpendicular (a SHEER cliff) or whole-hearted (SHEER delight).

sheikh
(also sheik, shaikh, shaykh – but these are less usual spellings)

shelf (singular)
shelves (plural)
See PLURALS (v).

sheriff
(not -rr-)

shining or shinning?
shine + ing = shining
shin + ing = shinning
(See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).)

shoe
These are the tricky tenses of the verb ‘to shoe’:
The blacksmith SHOES the horse.
He is SHOEING the horse now.
He SHOD the horse last week.
He has SHOD the horse regularly.

should or would?
‘Should’ and ‘would’ follow the pattern of ‘shall’ and ‘will’.
I should work (if I had the choice)
you (singular) would work
he/she/it would work
we should work
you (plural) would work
they would work

The correct construction often needed in a formal letter is:

I **SHOULD** be grateful if you **WOULD** send me . . .

In the sense of ‘ought to’, use ‘should’ in all cases:

I know I **SHOULD** apologise.
You **SHOULD** write to your parents.
She **SHOULD** understand if you explain.
He **SHOULD** understand.
We **SHOULD** repair the shed.
You all **SHOULD** work harder.
They **SHOULD** resign.

**shouldn’t** *(note the position of the apostrophe)*

**should of** This is an incorrect construction.
See **COULD OF**.

**shriek** *(not shreik)*
See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

**shy**
shyer, shyest
Follows the -y rule.
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iii).

**shyly** *(exception to the -y rule)*
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iii).

**shyness** *(exception to the -y rule)*
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iii).

**sieve** *(not -ei)*
See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

**sieve** See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

**sieve** Wrong spelling. See **SEIZE**.

**sight** See **CITE, SIGHT OR SITE?**.
silent -e  Also known as magic -e and mute -e.  
See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

silhouette

silicon or silicone?  
SILICON = element used in electronics industry (SILICON chip)  
SILICONE = compound containing silicon and used in lubricants and polishes and in cosmetic surgery (SILICONE implants)

similarly  similar + ly

simile  (not similie)  
A simile is a comparison, usually beginning with ‘like’ or ‘as’/‘as if’.

You look as if you’ve seen a ghost.  
Her hair was like silk.

Compare METAPHOR.

sincerely  sincere + ly (not sincerely)  
Note the punctuation required when ‘sincerely’ is used as part of a complimentary close to a letter.  
Traditional layout:

Yours sincerely,  
Aisling Hughes

Fully blocked layout:

Yours sincerely  
Aisling Hughes

singeing or singing?  
singe + ing = singeing  
sing + ing = singing  
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

singular or plural?  (i)  Always match singular subjects with singular verbs. Always match plural subjects with plural verbs.

The dog (singular) is barking (singular).  
The dogs (plural) are barking (plural).
These pronouns are always singular:

- everyone, everybody, everything
- anyone, anybody, anything
- someone, somebody, something
- no one, nobody, nothing
- either, neither, each

Everybody (singular) loves (singular) a sailor.

Remember that double subjects (compound subjects) are plural.

The Alsatian and the Pekinese (two dogs = plural subject) are barking (plural).

(ii) ‘Either . . .or’ and ‘neither . . .nor’ are followed by a singular verb.

Either James or Donal is lying and that’s certain. (singular)

(iii) The choice between ‘there is’ (singular) and ‘there are’ (plural) will depend on what follows.

There is (singular) a good reason (singular) for his bad behaviour.

(iv) Take care to match nouns and pronouns.

7 Ask any teacher (singular) and they (plural) will tell you what they (plural) think (plural) about the new curriculum.

3 Ask any teacher (singular) and he or she (singular) will tell you what he or she (singular) thinks (singular) about the new curriculum.

(v) Don’t be distracted by any additional details attached to the subject.
7 The variety (singular) of courses available at the colleges were (plural) impressive.
3 The variety (singular) of courses available at the colleges was (singular) impressive.
3 The addition (singular) of so many responsibilities makes (singular) the job very stressful.

(vi) Collective nouns are singular when considered as a whole but plural when considered as combined units.

7 The audience (singular) was divided (singular) in its (singular) response.
3 The audience (here seen as a crowd of single people) were divided (plural) in their (plural) response.

sirocco/scirocco Both spellings are correct.
sit Don’t confuse the grammatical formation of tenses:

We SIT by the fire in the evening and relax.
We ARE SITTING by the fire now.
We ARE SEATED by the fire.
We HAVE BEEN SITTING here all evening.
We HAVE BEEN SEATED here all evening.
We SAT by the fire yesterday.
We WERE SITTING by the fire when you phoned.
We WERE SEATED by the fire when you phoned.

Never write or say:

7 We were sat.
say 3 We were sitting/we were seated.

site See CITE, SIGHT OR SITE?
siting or sitting?  
site + ing = siting  
sit + ing = sitting  
See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).

sizable/sizeable  
Both spellings are correct.

skein  
See EI/E SPELLING RULE.

skilful  
skilful + ly

slain  
(exception to -y rule)  
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

slander  
See LIBEL OR SLANDER?.

slily/slyly  
Both spellings are correct but the second is more commonly used.

sloping or slopping?  
slope + ing = sloping  
slop + ing = slopping

sly  
slyer, slyest

slyly  
See SLILY/SLYLY.

slyness

smelled/smelt  
Both spellings are correct.

sniping or snipping?  
snipe + ing = sniping  
snip + ing = snipping

sobriquet/soubriquet  
Both spellings are correct.

social or sociable?  
SOCIAL = related to society.

a SOCIAL worker, a SOCIAL problem,  
SOCIAL policy, SOCIAL housing

SOCIABLE = friendly

a very SOCIABLE person

These two words are quite distinct in meaning even though they may be used with the same noun:

a SOCIAL evening = an evening organised for the purpose of recreation
a SOCIABLE evening = a friendly evening where everyone mixed well

With any luck the social evening was also a sociable one!

soft c and soft g

The letter c has two sounds. It can be hard and sound like k or it can be soft and sound like s.

The letter g has two sounds. It can be hard and sound like g in got and it can be soft and sound like j.

Usually, but not always, c and g sound hard when they precede a, o, u:

cat  cot  cut
gap  got  gut

They are generally soft when they precede e and i (and y):

cell  cider  cyberspace
germ  gin  gyrate

Sometimes an extra e is inserted into a word before a, o, u, so that the c or g in the word can sound soft:

noticeable  (not noticable)
manageable  (not managable)

Sometimes an extra k is inserted into a word between c and a, o, u, so that c can sound hard:

picnicking  (not picnicing)
trafficking  (not trafficking)

soldier

Take care with the spelling of this word.
(soldiers of the Queen, not soliders!)

soliloquy

somebody  (not somebody)

somersault
something (not somthing)
some times or sometimes?
Use the exemplar sentences as a guide:
There are SOME TIMES when I want to leave college. (= some occasions)
SOMETIMES I want to leave college. (= occasionally)
soubriquet See sobriquet/soubriquet.
souvenir
sovereign (exception to the -ie- rule)
See ei/ie spelling rule.
sow See sew or sow?.
spaghetti
speach Wrong spelling. See speech.
speak
specially See especially or specially?.
speech (not speach)
speech marks See inverted commas.
spelled/spelt Both spellings are correct.
spilled/spilt Both spellings are correct.
split infinitive The infinitive of a verb is made up of two words:
to eat, to speak, to begin, to wonder
If a word (or a group of words) comes between the two words of an infinitive, the infinitive is said to be 'split'.
   It is not a serious matter at all!
   You may sometimes find it is effective to split an infinitive. Do so. On other occasions to split the infinitive may seem clumsy. Avoid doing so on those occasions. Use your own judgement.
   Here are some examples of split infinitives:
to boldly go where no man has gone before
to categorically and emphatically deny any wrongdoing
to sometimes wonder how much will be achieved

They can easily be rewritten:
to go boldly
to deny categorically and emphatically
to wonder sometimes

spoiled/spoilt
Both spellings are correct.

stand
Don’t confuse the grammatical formation of tenses.

We STAND by the window after breakfast.
We ARE STANDING now.
We HAVE BEEN STANDING for an hour.
We STOOD by the window yesterday.
We WERE STANDING there when you called.

Never write or say:

7 We were stood.
say 3 We were standing.

stationary or stationery?

STATIONARY = standing still (a STATIONARY car)
STATIONERY = notepaper and envelopes

stilettos (plural)
See PLURALS (iv).

stimulant or stimulus?
Both words are related to ‘stimulate’ but there is a difference in meaning:
A STIMULANT is a temporary energiser like drink or drugs.
A STIMULUS is something that motivates (like competition).
stimulus (singular)  stimuli (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

stomach ache

stood  See STAND.

storey (plural storeys)  STOREY = one floor or level in a building
or story (plural stories)?

A bungalow is a single-STOREY structure.
A tower block can have twenty STOREYS.

STORY = a tale

I read a STORY each night to my little brother.
Children love STORIES.

strategem or strategy?  STRATEGEM = a plot, scheme, sometimes a trick, which will outwit an opponent or overcome a difficulty
STRATEGY = the overall plan for conducting a war or achieving a major objective

strategy or tactics?  STRATEGY = the overall plan or policy for achieving an objective
TACTICS = the procedures necessary to carry out the strategic policy

stratum (singular)  strata (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

subjunctive
The subjunctive form of the verb is used to express possibilities, recommendations and wishes:

If he WERE a gentleman (and he’s not) he would apologise on bended knee.
(7 If he was a gentleman . . .)

If I WERE rich (and I’m not), I would help you.
(7 If I was rich . . .)
I wish I were going with you (and sadly I'm not!).
(7 I wish I was going with you.)

I recommend that he be sacked immediately.
(7 . . . he is sacked)

I propose that the treasurer leave the room.
(7 . . . leaves)

It is vital that these questions be answered.
(7 . . . are answered)

The subjunctive is also used in these expressions but there is no change to the verb.

God save the Queen.
God bless you.
Heaven forbid.

submit submitted, submitting
See adding endings (iv).

subtle

subtlety

subtly

success (singular) successes (plural)
See plurals (ii).

successful

successfully successful + ly

sufferance

suffixes See adding endings.

suggest (not surjest)

superlative See comparative and superlative.

supersede (not -cede)
supervise  
(not -ize)

surfeit  
(not -ie-, exception to rule) 
See ei/e spelling rule.

surjest  
Wrong spelling. See suggest.

surprise  
(not suprise or surprize)

surprising

surreptitious

survivor  
(not -er)

swam or swum?  
Note these tenses of ‘to swim’:

I SWAM the Channel last year.  
I have SWUM the Channel five times.

swinging or
swingeing?  
swing + ing = swinging  
swinge + ing = swingeing
See soft c and soft g.

swum  
See swam or swum.

syllabus (singular)  
syllabuses or syllabi (plural) 
See foreign plurals.

synchronise/  
synchronize

synonym

synonymous

synopsis (singular)  
synopses (plural) 
See foreign plurals.
tableau (singular) tableaux (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

tactics See STRATEGY OR TACTICS?
taping or tapping? tape + ing = taping
       tap + ing = tapping
tariff (not -rr-)
taught or taut? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:
Mrs Jenkins TAUGHT maths.
Hold the line TAUT. Pull it tight.
technical
tee shirt/T-shirt Both versions are correct.
temperature (four syllables)
tempo (singular) tempi or tempos (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.
temporarily
temporary (four syllables)
temprature Wrong spelling. See TEMPERATURE.
tendency (not -ancy)
tenses See SEQUENCE OF TENSES.
See entries for individual verbs.
terminus (singular) termi or terminuses (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.
terrible (not -able)
testimonial or testimony? TESTIMONIAL = formal statement in the form of an open letter bearing witness to someone’s character, qualifications and relevant experience.
TESTIMONY = formal written or spoken statement of evidence, especially in a court of law

thank you or thank-you? (never thankyou!)
I should like to THANK YOU very much for your help.
THANK YOU for your help.
I have written all my THANK-YOU letters.

You will see that ‘thank you’ is NEVER written as one word. It is hyphenated only when used as a compound adjective describing ‘letter’ or another noun.

Those who care about such things can never bring themselves to buy otherwise attractive thank-you cards that have THANKYOU or THANK-YOU printed on them!

their, there or they’re? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

They have sold THEIR house.
He is waiting for you over THERE.
THERE is no point in lying to me.
THEY’RE going to Krakow for Christmas.
(= they are)

theirs (no apostrophe)
This is my dog; THEIRS has a white patch on his forehead.

themselves Incorrect formation. See THEMSELVES.

themselves They blame THEMSELVES for the crash.
They THEMSELVES were there.

there See THEIR, THERE OR THEY’RE?

there is/there are See SINGULAR OR PLURAL? (iii).

thesis (singular) theses (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

they’re See THEIR, THERE OR THEY’RE?
thief (singular) thieves (plural)
See PLURALS (v).

thorough

thoroughly thorough + ly

threshold (not -hh-)
tingeing See SOFT C AND SOFT G.
tiny (not -ey)
tired (not I am tiered)
I feel very TIRED today.
titbit (not tidbit)
titles

When punctuating the title of a book, film, poem, song, etc., take care to begin the first word and all subsequent key words with a capital letter.

Have you read ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ by Harper Lee?

Titles can be italicised (in print and word-processing) or underlined or enclosed in inverted commas (single or double).

The film Schindler’s List is based on the book by Thomas Keneally called Schindler’s Ark.
I’m so pleased that A Diary of a Nobody is being serialised.
Have you seen the new production of ‘Macbeth’ at the Barbican?

to, too or two?

You should give this TO the police.
Do you know how TO swim?
(part of infinitive = to swim)
I was TOO embarrassed to say anything.
(= excessively)
Can we come TOO? (= also)
They have TWO houses, one in London and one in France.
tolerant

(not tollerant or tolerent)

tomato (singular)
tomatoes (plural) (an exception to rule)
See PLURALS (iv).

tomorrow

(not tommorrow)

tonsillitis

tornado (singular)
tornadoes or tornados (plural)
See PLURALS (iv).

torpedo (singular)
torpedoes (plural) (an exception to rule)
See PLURALS (iv).

tortuous or torturous?
TORTUOUS = full of twists and turns, complex, convoluted
TORTUOUS = painful, agonising, excruciating

total

totally

total + ly

toupee

(not toupée)

traffic

trafficked, trafficking, trafficker
See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

tragedy

(not tradgedy)

tragic

(not tradgic)

transfer

transferred, transferring, transference
See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

transpire

Strictly speaking, this verb has two meanings:

- to give off moisture (of plant or leaf)
- to come slowly to be known, to leak out (of secret information)

It is often used loosely in the sense of ‘to happen’.

Why not use ‘to happen’ instead of this rather pompous word?
travel travelled, travelling, traveller
See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

trivia
This is a plural noun and should be matched with a plural verb.
Such TRIVIA are to be condemned.

troop or troupe?
TROOP refers to the armed forces or to groups of people or particular animals:
a TROOP of scouts
a TROOP of children
a TROOP of monkeys
TROUPE refers to a group of touring actors, dancers, musicians or other entertainers.

trooper or trouper?
TROOPER = cavalry soldier or member of an armoured unit
He swears like a TROOPER at nine years old.
TROUPE = a touring entertainer
Jack Densley is a grand old TROUPE.

truly (not truely, an exception to the -y rule)
See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

try tried, trying
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

Tumulus (singular) tumuli (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

turf (singular) turfs or turves (plural)
See PLURALS (v).

twelfth (not twelth, as it is often mispronounced)
twentieth

twenty

typical

typically typical + ly
ultimatum (singular) ultimata or ultimatums (plural)
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

umbrella (not umbrella)

umpire See REFEREE OR UMPIRE?

un- Remember that when un- is added to a word beginning with n-, you will have -nn-:

un + natural = unnatural
un + nerve = unnerve

unconscious

under- Remember that when you add under- to a word beginning with r-, you will have -rr-:

under + rate = underrate

underlay or underlie? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

to UNDERLAY = to lay or place under
You should UNDERLAY the carpet with felt if your floorboards are very uneven.
I UNDERLAID this carpet with very thick felt because the floorboards were so uneven.
This carpet IS UNDERLAID with felt.

to UNDERLIE = to be situated under (esp. rocks)

Granite UNDERLIES the sandstone here.
Granite UNDERLAY the sandstone, as we soon discovered.
The sandstone here IS UNDERLAIN by granite.
also:

The **UNDERLYING** problem is poverty.

**underrated**
under + rate

**undoubtedly**
unequivocal + ly (*not* unequivocably)

**unequivocally**
unequivocal + ly (*not* unequivocably)

**unexceptionable or unexceptional?**
**UNEXCEPTIONABLE** = inoffensive, not likely to cause criticism or objections
**UNEXCEPTIONAL** = ordinary, run-of-the-mill

**unget-at-able**
(*not* un-get-at-able)

**uninterested**
See **DISINTERESTED OR UNINTERESTED?**

**unique**
Remember, that ‘unique’ is absolute. It means ‘the only one of its kind’. Something is either unique or it’s not. It can’t be ‘quite unique’ or ‘very unique’.

**unmanageable**
(*not* unmanagable)
See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

**unmistakable/unmistakeable**
Both spellings are correct.

**unnatural**
un + natural

**unnecessary**
un + necessary

**unparalleled**

**until**
(*not* untill)

**unusually**
unusual + ly

**upon**
(*not* apon)

**upstairs**
(one word)

**urban or urbane?**
**URBAN** = relating to a town or city
**URBAN** population
**URBANE** = suave, courteous
used to

3 I USED TO like him very much
The negative form is:

3 I USED NOT TO like him very much.
7 I didn’t used to like him.

useful

useless

usurper (not -or)
Vase

Vehicle

Wrong spelling. See VEHICLE.

Vegetable

(not vegetable)

Vegetation

(not vegetable)

Vehicle

(not vehicle)

Veil

See EI/E SPELLING RULE.

Vengeance

(not vengance)

See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

Ventilation

(not venta-)

Veracity or voracity?

VERACITY = truthfulness

VORACITY = greed

Veranda/verandah

Both spellings are correct.

Vertebra (singular)

Vertebræ (plural)

See FOREIGN PLURALS.

Veterinary

(five syllables!)

Vice versa

Vicious

View

Vigorous

(not vigourous)

See also RIGOROUS OR VIGOROUS?

Vigour

Villain

Violent

Virtuoso (singular)

Virtuosi or virtuosos (plural)

See FOREIGN PLURALS.

Visible

(not -able)
visitor  
(not -er)

vocabulary  
(five syllables)

volcano (singular)  
vulcans or vulcans (plural)  
See PLURALS (iv).

voluntary

volunteer  
volunteered, volunteering

voracity  
See VERACITY OR VORACITY?

vortex (singular)  
vortices or vortices (plural)  
See FOREIGN PLURALS.

vowels  
Five letters of the alphabet are always vowels:

a e i o u

The letter y is sometimes a vowel and sometimes a consonant. It is a vowel when it sounds like e or i:

pretty, busy  
sly, pylon

Y is a consonant at the beginning of syllables and words and has a different sound:

yellow, beyond
waist or waste? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Tie this rope around your **WAIST**.
Don’t **WASTE** paper.
What do you do with **WASTE** paper?
Industrial **WASTE** causes pollution.

waive or wave? **WAIVE** = to give something up or not exact it

I shall **WAIVE** the fine on this occasion.

**WAVE** = to move something to and fro

WAVE to the Queen.

wander or wonder? I love to **WANDER** through the forest.
(rhymes with girl’s name, Wanda)
I **WONDER** what has happened to him.
(rhymes with ‘under’)

wasn’t Place the apostrophe carefully.

waste See **WAIST OR WASTE?**.

wave See **WAIVE OR WAVE?**.

weak or week? **WEAK** = feeble
**WEEK** = seven days

weather or whether? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

The **WEATHER** this winter has been awful.
I don’t know **WHETHER** I can help.
(= if)

**Wednesday** *(not Wensday)*

**week** See **weak or week?**.

weir (exception to the -ie- rule)
See **ei/ie spelling rule**.

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weird (exception to the -ie- rule)
See ei/ie spelling rule.

Wensday
Wrong spelling. See WEDNESDAY.

were or where?
Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

We WERE walking very fast. (rhymes with ‘her’)
WHERE are you? (rhymes with ‘air’)
Do you know WHERE he is?
This is the house WHERE I was born.

weren’t
Place the apostrophe carefully.

wharf (singular)
wharfs or wharves (plural)
Both spellings are correct.

where
See WERE OR WHERE?.

whether
See WEATHER OR WHETHER?.

whilst
(exception to magic -e rule)
See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

whiskey or whisky?
WHISKEY is distilled in Ireland.
WHISKY is distilled in Scotland.

who or whom?
The grammatical distinction is that ‘who’ is a subject pronoun and ‘whom’ is an object pronoun.

(i) Use this method to double-check whether you need a subject pronoun or an object pronoun when who/whom begins a question:

Ask yourself the question and anticipate the answer. If this could be one of the subject pronouns (I, he, she, we or they), then you need ‘who’ at the beginning of the question:

Who/whom is there?
The answer could be: I am there.

WHO is there?
If the answer could be one of the object pronouns (me, him, her, us or them), then you need ‘whom’ at the beginning of the question:

Who/whom did you meet when you went to London?
The answer could be: I met him.

WHOM did you meet?

(ii) Use this method if who/whom comes in the middle of a sentence:

Break the sentence into two sentences and see whether a subject pronoun (I, he, she, we, they) is needed in the second sentence or an object pronoun (me, him, her, us, them).

Here is the man who/whom can help you.
Divide into two sentences:
Here is the man. He can help you.

3 Here is the man WHO can help you.
He is a writer who/whom I have admired for years.
Divide into two sentences:
He is a writer. I have admired him for years.
3 He is a writer WHOM I have admired for years.

whole
See HOLE OR WHOLE?

wholly
(exception to the magic e- rule)
See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

who’s or whose?
Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

WHO’S been eating my porridge? (= who has)
WHO’S coming to supper? (= who is)
WHOSE calculator is this? (= belonging to whom)
There’s a girl WHOSE cat was killed.

wierd
Wrong spelling. See WEIRD.

wife (singular)
wives (plural)
See PLURALS (v).

wilful
(not willful)
will
See SHALL OR WILL?.

wining or winning?
wine + ing = wining
win + ing = winning
See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).

wisdom
(exception to magic -e rule)
See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).

withhold
(not withhold)

wolf (singular)
wolves (plural)
See PLURALS (v).

woman (singular)
women (plural)
See PLURALS (vi).

wonder
See WANDER OR WONDER?.

won’t
See CONTRACTIONS.

woollen
(not woolen)

worship
worshipped, worshipping, worshipper
(exception to 2-1-1 rule)
See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

would
See SHOULD OR WOULD?.

wouldn’t
Take care to place the apostrophe correctly.

would of
Incorrect construction.
See COULD OF.

wrapped
See RAPT OR WRAPPED?.

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wreath or wreathe? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

She lay a WREATH of lilies on his grave. (= noun)
Look at him WREATHED in cigarette smoke. (verb, rhymes with ‘seethed’)

write Use these sentences as a guide to tenses:

I WRITE to her every day.
I AM WRITING a letter now.
I WROTE yesterday.
I have WRITTEN every day.

writer (not writter)

wry wrier or wryer, wriest or wryest

wryly (exception to the y- rule)
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

wryness (exception to the -y rule)
See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
-y rule

- See ADDINGS ENDINGS (iii).
- See PLURALS (iii).

yacht

yield

yoghurt/youghourt/yougurt

All these spellings are correct.

yoke or yolk?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

The YOKE of the christening gown was beautifully embroidered.
The oxen were YOKED together.
She will eat only the YOLK of the egg.

your or you’re?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

YOUR essay is excellent. (= belonging to you)
YOU’RE joking! (= you are)

yours

This is YOURS.

No apostrophe needed!
zealot
zealous
zealously
Zimmer frame
zloty (singular) zloties or zlotys (plural)
See PLURALS (iii).
zoological
zoology
Appendix A
Literary Terms

Here are a few of the most widely used literary devices. You will probably be familiar with them in practice but perhaps cannot always put a name to them.

**alliteration**  the repetition of sounds at the beginning of words and syllables.
  ▶ Around the rugged rocks the ragged rascals ran.

**climax**  ▶ I came; I saw; I conquered!

**epigram**  a short pithy saying.
  ▶ Truth is never pure, and rarely simple. (Oscar Wilde)

**euphemism**  an indirect way of referring to distressing or unpalatable facts.
  ▶ I’ve lost both my parents. (= they’ve died)
  ▶ She’s rather light-fingered. (= she’s a thief)

**hyperbole**  exaggeration.
  ▶ Jack cut his knee rather badly and lost gallons of blood.
  ▶ What’s for lunch? I’m starving.
  ▶ I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers Could not, with all their quantity of love, Make up my sum. (Shakespeare: ‘Hamlet’)

**irony**  saying one thing while clearly meaning the opposite.
  ▶ For Brutus is an honourable man. (Shakespeare: ‘Julius Caesar’)

**litotes**  understatement.
  ▶ He was not exactly polite. (= very rude)
  ▶ I am a citizen of no mean city. (= St Paul boasting about Tarsus and hence about himself)

**metaphor**  a compressed comparison.
  ▶ Anna flew downstairs. (i.e. her speed resembled the speed of a bird in flight)
  ▶ Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care. (Shakespeare: ‘Macbeth’)

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No man is *an island, entire of itself.* (John Donne)

**metonymy**  the substitution of something closely associated.

- The *bottle* has been his downfall. (= alcohol)
- The *kettle’s* boiling. (= the water in the kettle)
- The *pen* is mightier than the *sword*.

**onomatopoeia**  echoing the sound.

- Bees *buzz*; sausages *sizzle* in the pan; ice-cubes *tinkle* in the glass.

Frequently, alliteration, vowel sounds and selected consonants come together to evoke the sounds being described:

- Only the monstrous anger of the guns
  - Only the stuttering rifles’ rapid rattle
  - Can patter out their hasty orisons.

  *(Wilfred Owen: ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’)*

**oxymoron**  apparently contradictory terms which make sense at a deeper level.

- The *cruel mercy* of the executioner bought him peace at last.

**paradox**  a deliberately contradictory statement on the surface which challenges you to discover the underlying truth.

- If a thing is worth doing, it’s worth doing badly. (G. K. Chesterton)

**personification**  describing abstract concepts and inanimate objects as though they were people.

- Death *lays his icy band* on kings. (James Shirley)

Often human feelings are also attributed. This extension of personification is called the *pathetic fallacy*.

- The wind *sobbed* and *s shrieked* in *impotent rage*.

**pun**  a play on words by calling upon two meanings at once.

- Is life worth living? It depends on the *liver*.

**rhetorical question**  no answer needed!

- Do you *want* to fail your exam?

**simile**  a comparison introduced by ‘like’, ‘as’, ‘as if’ or ‘as though’.

- *O, my Luve’s like a red red rose*
  - *That’s newly sprung in June.* (Robert Burns)
- *I wandered lonely* *as a cloud.* (William Wordsworth)
You look *as if you’ve seen a ghost*.

**synecdoche** referring to the whole when only a part is meant, or vice versa.
- *England* has lost the Davis Cup. (= one person)
- *All hands* on deck!

**transferred epithet** the adjective is moved from the person it describes to an object.
- She sent an *apologetic* letter.
- He tossed all night on a *sleepless* pillow.

**zeugma** grammatical play on two applications of a word.
- She *swallowed* her pride and three dry sheries.
- She went straight home *in* a flood of tears and a sedan chair.
  (Charles Dickens: ‘The Pickwick Papers’)
Each part of speech has a separate function.

**Verbs** are ‘being’ and ‘doing’ words.
- It *seems*.
- She *is laughing*.
- All the pupils *have tried* hard.
- Note also these three verb forms: the infinitive (*to seem*); the present participle (*trying*); the past participle (*spoken*).

**Adverbs** mainly describe verbs.
- He spoke *masterfully*.
- She *often* cries.
- My grandparents live *here*.

**Nouns** are names (of objects, people, places, emotions, collections, and so on).
- common noun: *table*
- proper noun: *Emma*
- abstract noun: *friendship*
- collective noun: *swarm*

**Pronouns** take the place of nouns.
- *He* loves me.
- *This* is *mine*.

**Adjectives** describe nouns and pronouns.
- a *hard* exercise
- a *noisy* class
- *red* wine

**Conjunctions** are joining words.
- co-ordinating: fish *and* chips; naughty *but* nice; now *or* never
- subordinating: We trusted him *because* he was honest.
  - She’ll accept *if* you ask her.
  - Everyone knows *that* you are doing your best.

**Prepositions** show how nouns and pronouns relate to the rest of the sentence.
- Put it *in* the box. Phone me *on* Thursday. Give it *to* me. Wait *by* the war memorial. He’s the boss *of* Tesco.

**Interjections** are short exclamations.
- *Hi! Ouch! Hurray! Ugh! Oh! Sbb! Hear, bear!*

**The articles:**
- definite (*the*)
- indefinite (*a*; *an* – singular; *some* – plural)
Appendix C
Planning, Drafting and Proofreading

PLANNING
Whenever you have an important essay, letter, report or article to write, it’s well worth taking time to work out in advance exactly what you want to say. Consider also the response you hope to get from those who read the finished document and decide on the tone and style which would be most appropriate.

► Next, jot down, as they come into your head, all the points that you want to include. Don’t try to sort them into any order. Brainstorm. (It’s better to have too much material at this stage than too little.)
► Then, read through these jottings critically, rejecting any that no longer seem relevant or helpful.
► Group related points together. These will form the basis of future paragraphs.
► Sequence these groups of points into a logical and persuasive order.
► Decide on an effective introduction and conclusion.

DRAFTING
Now you are ready to write the first draft.

► Concentrate on conveying clearly all that you want to say, guided by the structure of your plan.
► Choose your words with care. Aim at the right level of formality or informality.
► Put to one side any doubts about spelling, punctuation, grammar or usage. These can be checked later. (If you wish, you can pencil queries in the margin, or key in a run of question marks – ????.)
► When you have finished this first draft, read it critically, concentrating initially on content. (It can help to read aloud.) Have you included everything? Is your meaning always clear? Should some points be expanded? Should some be omitted? Have you repeated yourself unnecessarily?
Read the amended text again, this time checking that you have maintained the appropriate tone. Make any adjustments that may be needed.

Examine the paragraphing. Does each paragraph deal adequately with each topic? Should any paragraphs be expanded? Should any be divided? Should the order be changed? Does each paragraph link easily with the next? Are you happy with the opening and closing paragraphs? (Sometimes they work better when they are reversed.) Should any paragraphs be jettisoned?

Are you happy with the layout and the presentation?

If you have made a lot of alterations, you may wish to make a neat copy at this stage. Read through again, critically, making any adjustments that you feel necessary. You may find third and fourth drafts are needed if you are working on a really important document. Don’t begrudge the time and effort. Much may depend on the outcome.

PROOFREADING

When you are happy with the content, style and tone, you are ready to proofread. Proofreading means scrutinising the text for spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage and typographical errors.

Make yourself read very slowly. Best of all, read aloud. Read sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph. Read what is actually there, not what you meant to write.

Check anything that seems doubtful. Check all the queries you tentatively raised earlier. Don’t skimp this vital penultimate stage. Don’t rely wholly on a computer spellcheck; it will take you only so far (and, in some cases, introduce errors of its own).

If you know you have a particular weakness (spelling, perhaps, or not marking sentence boundaries – commas are not substitutes for full stops!), then devote one read-through exclusively to this special area.

When you are satisfied that you have made this important document as good as you possibly can, you are ready to make the final neat version. If, in the process, you make any small errors, don’t simply cross them out and don’t use correction fluid. Rewrite. When the last word is written, you can be
satisfied that you have done your very best. Good luck!

Note: If you have a form to fill in, it is well worth making a few photocopies before you start. Practise what you want to say on the photocopies. Fit what you want to say carefully in the space available. Then complete the original form. It’s well worth the extra time taken.