Spelling patterns in English

Forming plurals

		Pattern	Example
1.	Regular words	Add -*s*	table - tables
2.	Words ending in -*ch, -sh, -x,* or -*ss*	Add -*es*	church - churches
3.	Words ending in a consonant + o	Add -*es*	hero - heroes
4.	Words ending in a consonant + y	Change -*y* to -*i* and add -*es*	baby - babies
5.	Words ending in -*f* or -*fe*	Drop -*f,* and add -*ves*	life - lives

Note: some English words with origins in other languages form their plurals differently. You need to note these in your readings and learn them. Some common examples include:

analysis – analyses	datum – data	alga – algae	stimulus – stimuli
crisis – crises	medium – media	larva – larvae	locus – loci
thesis – theses	phenomenon – phenomena	vertebra – vertebrae	radius – radii

Using *-ie* and *-ei*

Remember this common pattern:

- *I* before *e* except after *c* or when pronounced *ay* as in *neighbour* or *weigh*.

Remember the exceptions by using mnemonics (a nonsense sentence that helps you learn).

- The weird species neither seizes leisure nor forfeits height.
- Ancient science made efficient caffeine.

Using *-ce* and *-se*

Some common words that end in *-ce* use *-se* for the verb form. This leads to spelling mistakes if you are not mindful of this while you write. Some common examples include:

advice (noun)	practice (noun)	licence (noun)
to advise (verb)	to practise (verb)	to license (verb)

To help you remember, think of this: *Ice is a noun.*

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Adding suffixes

		Pattern	Example
1.	One syllable words that end with a consonant	Double the final consonant	shop + ing = shopping
2.	One syllable words with more than one vowel that end with a consonant	Do not double the final consonant	feel + ing = feeling
3.	Multisyllable words with stress on the final syllable	Double the final consonant	re**fer** + ing = referring
4.	Multisyllable words with no stress on the final syllable	Do not double the final consonant	**vis**it + ing = visiting
5.	Words ending in -*e* and a suffix beginning with a vowel	Drop the final -*e*	approve + al = approval
6.	Words ending in -*ce* or -*ge* and the suffixes -*ous* or -*able*	Keep the final -*e*	service + able = serviceable
7.	Words ending in a consonant + *y*	Change -*y* to -*i* and add the suffix	happy + ly = happily

Adding prefixes

		Pattern	Example
1.	Adding prefixes to most words	No change in spelling	dis + obey = disobey mis + spell = misspell
2.	Adding the prefixes *self-, all-, ex-*	Add a hyphen	self + control = self-control ex + president = ex-president
3.	Adding prefixes that end in a vowel to words that begin with a vowel	Add a hyphen	de + emphasise = de-emphasise anti + intellectual = anti-intellectual

Homophones

Some common words sound the same – or almost the same – but are spelled differently. This can lead to mistakes if you do not learn them. Some common examples include:

cite, sight, site	effect, affect	except, accept
passed, past	principle, principal	stationery, stationary
there, their, they're	two, to, too	weather, whether

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