



Why Isn't 'Phonetic' Spelled the Way It Sounds??

Or, as it is more commonly known, our
“Spelling Rules Book”

-4th Edition-
September, 2015

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Hexco Academic Publishing

4th Edition Published September, 2015

Notes:

The dictionaries used for researching this book don't always agree, and I have not chosen any particular dictionary as an authority instead of another. Rather, in many cases, where two sources spelled words differently, I have included both spellings. Primarily, I have used *The American Heritage Dictionary* and *Webster's Third International Dictionary* as my guide.

In most cases, I have omitted words which the dictionaries call slang, obsolete, or archaic. I have also, at points, used part of a pronunciation scheme that I've used for my spelling bee study materials for years, because I find it simpler than the diacritical marks used by most dictionaries. Following is a summary of that simplified pronunciation scheme.

ii=sign eh=care uh=ago ay=wade ah=calm aw=paw a=cap
i=hit e=pet ee=heat oh=home oo=too ow=how u=put

I have included a bibliography at the end of the book listing most of the materials I used as reference.

Another notation I have used which may not be entirely clear at first, is the indication that a word may also be capitalized. I have indicated this in the following manner:

caddo (C) meaning the lowercase version is more common, but uppercase is acceptable, or both are used, or

Ndorobo (n) meaning that the uppercase version is more common, but lowercase is acceptable, or both are used.

The rest of the book should be self-explanatory.

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Dear Reader:

We've all been taught, since early elementary school, that there are certain "rules" for spelling English words, and so have assumed that if we knew all these rules, we'd presumably never misspell anything. So why, then, aren't any of us able to recall more than a handful of rules, and why do we misspell words all the time? The problem is not that we don't *know* the rules, but that there really are none that always work. We have some conventions for spelling words that hold true sometimes, but for every convention, there is a seemingly infinite number of exceptions.

In this book, I've attempted to give you as many of the conventions as I've seen, and explain how they work, but in addition, tell you when they **don't** work. I've given, in almost every case, a list or lists of words which don't follow the "rule," and in some cases, explained to the best of my abilities, *why* the words don't follow the rules.

In some other cases, where I don't know of a convention one can use to determine a particular spelling, I've given lists of words that are spelled a particular way. For example, when determining whether a word ends in -er, -or, or -ar, I don't have any guidelines, but instead have listed all the -ar and -or words for you to look through for visual recognition, and you can assume that pretty much anything else will be an -er word.

For those spellers interested in the more esoteric words in the English language, I've also included some lists. The first includes words with funny double letters. These are words such as markkaa, bhikku, egueiite, and sayyid, as well as a host of others. The second list includes words with funny first letter combinations, like bdelloid, ctenodus, tjaele, and again, a host of others.

This brings us to the second half of the book: the Foreign Language Conventions. We all know that English is composed of words from as many origins as there are languages. I've included some guidelines for spelling some of the more common languages from which English words are derived, such as French, Spanish, German, and a few more, as well as lists of words derived from them. Following these, I've included some lists of words from more unusual languages, like Yiddish, Welsh, Dutch, and Turkish. These lists, though they don't have any guidelines for spelling the words, should give you a picture of what words of these derivations look like in general, and may help you spell one of them later.

I've started with the only spelling rule we all think we know: "I before e except after c..." etc. and given some examples of words where the rule works. Following this, there is a tremendous number of categories of exceptions. I hope this will be helpful. I don't expect anyone to study and memorize all the exceptions or even all the types of exceptions, but if you'll read over them, they'll at least be familiar.

Good luck and good spelling!

Valerie

P.S. If you've got rules you use that I haven't included, PLEASE send them to me. You can mail these to me, call Hexco with the new rules, or email me at hexco@hexco.com. Thanks!

Why So Weird??

A Brief Synopsis of the Historical Development of English Spelling

You've probably often wondered why so many English words are spelled with seemingly illogical letter combinations. For example, why isn't knight spelled nite? We've got both an extra k at the beginning and an extra g in the middle of this one. Believe it or not, there actually was some logic behind some of these spellings at one point. Whether it makes sense to keep these spellings is under some debate, however.

First, keep in mind that English is spoken differently in different parts of the world. As a native Texas speaker, I'm critically aware that my English pronunciation and choice of words is entirely different than that of my peers in New York. Even more extreme is British versus American pronunciation. There are also other countries all over the world which speak English, and all of them differently.

In the Anglo-Saxon period, the first version of our alphabet was created from the 23-letter Latin alphabet, along with four additional symbols. These 27 letters had to represent nearly 40 phonemes, or individual sounds. This in itself causes some problems, as a single letter has to be used in different combinations to represent different sounds.

After the Norman conquest in England, much of our language was transcribed by French scribes who introduced such conventions as qu for cw (queen), gh for h (right), soft c (cell, or circle), and ie for ee (thief).

The printing process itself caused even more spelling changes. One of the main problems was that the first English printer was English, but had lived in Holland for nearly thirty years, so had adopted many of their spelling conventions, such as ghost instead of gost. These early printers also, in an effort to make all the lines on one page the same length, shortened and abbreviated certain words, instead of adding extra spaces. Thus we were first introduced to our good friend, "silent e."

In the 15th century, many, if not most, of the vowels in our language changed their pronunciations. This is the primary reason for the diversity of vowel spellings in words like mouse, ray, road, and hide. Similarly, letters that had been pronounced during the Anglo-Saxon period, like the k in knife, became silent letters, but were not dropped from the spellings. Still later, in the 16th century, it was fashionable to make words look more like their Greek and Latin roots. For example, the g was added to reign (from Latin regno) and the b added to debt (from Latin debitum.) Unfortunately, many mistakes were made here. For example, the s was added to island, as it was thought to derive from Latin insula, when, in actuality, it derives from an Anglo-Saxon word which doesn't contain an s.

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, English borrowed a host of new words from other languages, like Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. Thus new spelling patterns were introduced from each of these sources.

The result is a language with essentially no spelling system of its own, but one with spellings adopted from every imaginable source, and then changed for the last four or five hundred years. With this in mind, I leave you with this compilation of spelling "rules" for English and wish you luck.

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Conventional Spelling Rules

The *most* common of the spelling rules is perhaps the “I-before-e rule,” which is generally remembered in a children’s rhyme.

Use i before e except after c or when sounded like <ay> as in neighbor or weigh.

This rhyme has served many of us well for many years, but it only works up to a certain point. The following will outline some other guidelines for spelling words with *ie* or *ei* combinations, as well as list some of the exceptions and categories of exceptions.

If the *ie* or *ei* combination is preceded by *r* or *l*, the *i* usually comes before the *e*.

The following words follow the conventional *ie* rule, and though they are by no means all the words which follow the rule, they should give you an idea of how the rule works.

achieve	feign	reprieve
believe	field	retrieve
brief	grief	shield
cavalier	neighbor	siege
chief	receipt	vein
clothier	receive	weigh
cockatiel	rein	wield
diesel	relief	

The rest of this section will be devoted to the numerous exceptions and categories of exceptions to the *i-before-e rule*.

When *c* is pronounced <sh> or <ch>, it is followed by *-ie*

abortifacient	febrifacient	proficient
absorbefacient	glacier	putrefacient
ancient	inconscious	rubefacient
cafacient	liquefacient	somnifacient
coefficient	mutafacient	sorbefacient
conscience	nescient	stupefacient
conscious	objicient	sufficient
conscientious	omniscient	tubifacient
deficient	parturifacient	tumefacient
efficient	perficent	unconscious
facient	prescient	

Note that a vast majority of the above listed words come from only two root words.

facio, facere, feci, factum (Latin) meaning *to make* or *to do*. Past participle is *facient* or *faciens*.
scio, scire, scivi (or scii), scitum (Latin) meaning *to know*. Its past participle is *scient* or *sciens*.

Tricky Word Endings

Often we are confused about how to spell just the ending of a word. Is it -ize or -ise? What about -yze? And then there's -cious, -tious, and -ceous, and -us and -ous. This section should identify some of these problems and give you a little help attacking these particular spelling problems.

-cious/ -tious/ -ceous

For these three endings, I've included only two lists. The most common of the three is -tious, so I have listed for you the -cious and -ceous words, thus most words that are left out probably belong on the -tious list.

For the -ceous words, you will find that all but a handful of the listed words end in -aceous, which is actually the suffix. The -aceous suffix means related to, resembling, or belonging to a taxonomic group. This should at least help you distinguish between these words and the others.

-ceous words

alliaceous	frumentaceous	rosaceous
amentaceous	furfuraceous	saponaceous
amylaceous	gallinaceous	schorlaceous
arenaceous	glumaceous	scoriaceous
argillaceous	herbaceous	sebaceous
butyraceous	holosericeous	sericeous
camphoraceous	iridaceous	sericeous
carbonaceous	latericeous, lateritious	setaceous
ceraceous	micaceous	siliceous, silicious
cetaceous	olivaceous	spadiceous
chylaceous	orchidaceous	sporaceous
coriaceous	pandanaceous	stercoraceous
Cretaceous	papilionaceous	strobilaceous
cretaceous	pennaceous	testaceous
crustaceous	Phaeophyceous	triticeous
curvaceous	piceous	tufaceous
cyanophceous	pomaceous	tuffaceous
diatomaceous	predaceous	vinaceous
drupaceous	proteinaceous	Zygomyceteous
farinaceous	pumiceous	
foliaceous	Rhodophyceous	

-cious words

atrocious	bodacious	delicious (D)
audacious	bowdacious	diecious
auspicious	capacious	dioecious
autoecious	capricious	edacious
avaricious	conscious	efficacious
bardacious	contumacious	fallacious

Latin Roots

LATIN ROOT	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
<i>ace-</i>	sharp, pungent; sour; sour wine or vinegar; sharp wit	acetic, acetous, acetabulum, acetometer
<i>acer-, acid-, acri-, acu-</i>	sharp, pungent; sour, bitter; hot; fierce; cruel; angry	acerbic, acerb, exacerbate, acerose, acidic, acidify, acidogenic, acidophilic, acrid, acrimonious, acridine, acriflavine, acute, acumen, acupuncture, acuminate
<i>ag-, agi-</i>	do, drive; lead; act, perform; urge; conduct	agent, agenda, agentival, agency, agile, agitate, agilmente, agitato
<i>ali-</i>	other, another	alias, alien, alienicola, aliunde
<i>alter-</i>	other, one of two, the second one of two	alternate, altercation, alter ego, alterocentric
<i>ami-</i>	friend	amiable, amical, amicability, amicus curiae
<i>amo-</i>	love, be fond of	enamored, amorous, inamorata, amoroso
<i>anim-</i>	soul, life, mind, intellect; heart; pride, courage; wind, breath	magnanimous, inanimate, animalcule, animadversion
<i>ann-, enni-</i>	year, lasting for a year, occurring every other year	annual, anniversary, annuitant, superannuated, centennial, sesquicentennial
<i>aqu(a)-</i>	water, body of water; place for bathing; tears	aquamarine, aqueduct, aquarelle, aquiclude
<i>arm-</i>	furnish with weapons or tools for battle	armada, armadillo, armigerous, armorial, army
<i>aud-</i>	hear, listen to	audio, audience, oculauditory, cliraudience
<i>bell-</i>	war, given to fighting, warlike, martial	rebellious, belligerent, antebellum, bellicosity
<i>bell-</i>	beautiful, pretty, charming, handsome	belle, bella, belladonna, belles-lettres
<i>bene-</i>	well, properly, rightly, exactly	benefit, benefactor, beneficiate, benefic
<i>bon-</i>	good; suitable; brave; noble	bonus, bonbon, pro bono, bonhomous
<i>cad-, cid-, cas-</i>	fall, sink down, decline, fall prostrate; be conquered or killed; slip down; lose strength, decay	cadaver, decadent, caducicorn, caducity, accident, incident, deciduous, recidivate, casualty, cascade, casuistic, casus belli
<i>calor-</i>	heat, warmth; slow; zeal	calories, caloric, calorescence, calorifacient
<i>canon-</i>	rule	canon, canonical, canonize, deuterocanonical, canoness
<i>cant-</i>	sing; play an instrument; recite chants	cantor, incantation, cantatrice, cantabile
<i>cap-, cept-, cip-, capt-</i>	seize, take, hold, grasp	captivate, capias, ad captandum, perceptive, intercept, nociceptor, reciprocate, emancipation, recipient, forcipiform, capture, captivity, captious
<i>capit-, capt-, cipit-</i>	head; apex; origin; main point; principal sum of money	capital, decapitate, capitatum, capitulum, captain, caption, captainess, captaincy, precipitate, precipitous, occipital, ancipital