



SPELLING RULES

BRITISH ENGLISH

SHAMS BHATTI
TMC WYTHENSHAW CAMPUS
ESOL Level 1

British English spelling rules can be complex, with many exceptions due to its historical development and the influences of other languages. However, several consistent patterns and rules can help with understanding and mastering British English spelling.

1. 'ou' vs 'o'

- British English: Words often use "ou" where American English uses "o."
- Examples: colour, honour, flavour, labour
- Rule: Generally, if a word is derived from Latin or French, it will retain the "ou" spelling in British English.

2. 're' vs 'er'

- British English: Words often end in "re" where American English uses "er."
- Examples: centre, metre, litre, fibre
- Rule: This occurs mainly in words of French origin, maintaining closer ties to the original French spelling.

3. 'ise' vs 'ize'

- British English: "ise" is commonly used where American English uses "ize." However, both "ise" and "ize" are acceptable in British English, with "ise" being more common.
- Examples: organise (organize), realise (realize), recognise (recognize)
- Rule: Words derived from Greek, which use "izein," may use "ize," but "ise" is more prevalent in British English.

4. Double Consonants in Suffixes

- British English: When adding a suffix that begins with a vowel to a word ending in a single vowel followed by a single consonant, the consonant is usually doubled.
- Examples: travel → travelling, cancel → cancelling, model → modelling
- Rule: This doubling typically happens if the last syllable is stressed (e.g., "begin" becomes "beginning") but not if it is unstressed (e.g., "enter" becomes "entering").

5. 'l' Doubling

- British English: The letter "l" is often doubled in verbs and their derivatives when adding suffixes, even when the last syllable is not stressed.
- Examples: travel → travelled, cancel → cancelled, marvel → marvellous
- Rule: British English tends to double "l" where American English might not.

6. 'ce' vs 'se'

- British English: Some words end in "ce" where American English uses "se."
- Examples: defence, licence, offence, practice (noun)
- Rule: "Ce" is used for nouns, while "se" is often used for the corresponding verbs (e.g., license as a verb).

7. 'ogue' vs 'og'

- British English: Words often retain the "ogue" ending where American English uses "og."
- Examples: catalogue, dialogue, monologue, analogue
- Rule: British English often preserves the older, French-influenced spelling.

8. 'ae' and 'oe' vs 'e'

- British English: Words often use "ae" or "oe" where American English simplifies to "e."
- Examples: encyclopaedia, haemoglobin, manoeuvre, oestrogen
- Rule: British English retains the Latin or Greek spelling.

9. 'yse' vs 'yze'

- British English: Words ending in "yse" where American English uses "yze."
- Examples: analyse, paralyse, catalyse
- Rule: The "yse" ending is used in verbs derived from Greek in British English.

10. Use of 'll' in Words like 'Fulfill'

- British English: Words like "fulfill" are spelled with a single "l" at the end.
- Example: fulfil, instil, enrol
- Rule: British English often simplifies the double "l" before certain suffixes.

11. 'ce' vs 'se' in Pronunciation Changes

- British English: "Ce" and "se" endings can indicate a change in pronunciation depending on whether the word is a noun or verb.
- Examples: advice (noun) vs advise (verb), practice (noun) vs practise (verb)
- Rule: The spelling reflects the change in pronunciation and part of speech.

12. Plurals of Nouns Ending in 'f' or 'fe'

- British English: Words ending in "f" or "fe" often change to "ves" in the plural form.
- Examples: knife → knives, leaf → leaves, wolf → wolves
- Rule: This applies to many, but not all, words ending in "f" or "fe."

13. Use of Hyphens

- British English: Hyphens are more commonly used in compound words and to clarify meaning.
- Examples: co-operate, re-enter, mother-in-law
- Rule: Hyphens are used to avoid ambiguity or where prefixes are added to a word that begins with a vowel.

14. 'l' and 'll' in Verbs

- British English: Verbs ending in "l" often double the "l" before adding "-ed" or "-ing."
- Examples: cancel → cancelled, travel → travelled, compel → compelling
- Rule: This doubling rule also applies to many other verbs in British English.

These rules can help guide correct spelling in British English, but remember that there are always exceptions, so familiarity with specific words and practice is essential.