Topic 1: Spelling

What you need to know and revise

English spelling can be tricky. Here are some key points to help with your revision. Study them and try the sample questions. The answers are on page 11.

Plurals

- To make most nouns plural, **-s** is added: *tree* → *trees*
- If the singular noun ends in **-s**, **-ss**, **-sh**, **-ch**, or **-x**, add **-es** to make it plural:
  *bus – bus**es**, pass → pass**es**, bush → bush**es**, bunch → bunch**es**, box → box**es***
- If the noun ends with **-f** or **-fe**, the ending is often changed to **-ve** before adding **-s**:
  knife → kniv**es**, wife → wiv**es**
  BUT: *roof → roof**s**, chief → chief**s**, chef → chef**s***
- If a singular noun ends in a **consonant + y**, change the **-y** to **-ies**: *berry → berr**ies**, city → cit**ies***
- If a singular noun ends in a **vowel + y**, **-s** is added: *boy → boy**s**, monkey → monkey**s***
- If the singular noun ends in **-o**, add **-es** to make it plural: *potato → potato**es***

BUT: *piano → piano**s**, photo → photo**s***

NOTE: Plural nouns never end in 's: ~~valley's~~ ✗ valleys ✓

1 Choose the correct spelling of the word to complete the sentence. Mrs Baxter bought four ____ of bread from the baker.

(A) loafs
(B) loafes
(C) loaves

Suffixes

Suffixes are groups of letters added to the ends of words to change their meaning. Often when suffixes are added, the spelling of the word changes too.

Doubling rule

- For one-syllable words ending in a **vowel + consonant**, the final consonant is **doubled** when suffixes are added.
  *cla**p** → cla**pp**ing, cla**pp**ed ho**p** → ho**pp**ing, ho**pp**ed*
  This also happens in longer words, when the final syllable is stressed.
  *begin → begi**nn**er, begi**nn**ing occu**r** → occu**rr**ing, occu**rr**ence*
- The final **-l** in words like *faithful* is ***doubled*** when a suffix is added
  *faithfu**l** → faithfu**ll**y*

Dropping or keeping -e

- The final **-e** is usually dropped, when suffixes are added.
  *writ**e** → writ**ing** hop**e** → hop**ing** tru**e** → tru**ly** responsible → responsibl**y***
- The final **-e** is kept, if the words ends in **-ce** or **-ge** to give a soft sound.
  *mana**ge** → mana**ge**able noti**ce** → noti**ce**able*

Changing -y to -i

- If a word ends in a **consonant + y**, the '**y**' changes to '**i**' when a suffix is added.
  *happ**y** → happ**ier**, happ**iest** angr**y** → angr**ily***

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2 Choose the correct spelling of the word to complete the sentence.
The newspaper article ____ to events which took place last year.

(A) refered
(B) referred
(C) refeered

Prefixes

Prefixes are groups of letters added to the beginnings of words to change their meaning.

- We do not change the spelling of words when we add prefixes.
  dis + *like* → ***dis****like* ***im*** + *prove* → ***im****prove* ***un*** + *true* → ***un****true*
- Even if the prefix ends in the same letter, the spelling of the word is not changed.
  un + *necessary* → ***un****necessary* ***im*** + *mature* → ***im****mature*

3 Choose the correct spelling of the word to complete the sentence.
Carl was _____ with his score in the cricket match.

(A) disatisfied
(B) dissatisfied
(C) dessatisfied

ie or ei?

Remember the rule for spelling words with '**ie**' and '**ei**':

- *'i' before 'e', when the sound is 'ee', except if you please, the little word 'seize'*
  ie: *fi**e**ld, bel**ie**ve*
- **ei** after '**c**': *rec**ei**ve, dec**ei**ve*

BUT remember how to spell these words: eight, height, neighbour, n**ei**ther, r**ei**gn, w**ei**gh

4 Choose the correct spelling of the word to complete the sentence. Marie is very _____ ; she is always boasting about her singing.

(A) concieted
(B) conseited
(C) conceited

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Grammatical homophones

Homophones are words which sound the same, but are spelt differently, depending on the function they perform in the sentence.

it's or its?

- '**It's**' is short for 'it is'. But '**its**' shows ownership. ***It's*** getting late. The dog was waiting for ***its*** master.

to/ too/ two

- '**To**' shows movement: *I'm going **to** the shops.*
- '**Too**' means also or extremely: *I would like to come **too**, but I'm **too** tired.*
- '**Two**' is a number: *I saw my **two** friends.*

who's or whose?

- '**Who's**' is short for 'who is'. ***Who's** coming to the beach with me?*
- '**Whose**' shows ownership. ***Whose** things are these?*

There/ their/ they're

- '**There**' refers to a place: *My friend is sitting over **there**.*
- '**Their**' shows ownership: *They forgot to bring **their** books.*
- '**They're**' is short for 'they are': ***They're** coming with us to the shops.*

5 Choose the correct spelling of the word to complete the sentence. I invited my friends but ____ not able to come.

(A) they're
(B) their
(C) there

Tricky spellings

The words below are often mis-spelt. Often there are no rules to help you spell them. You have to learn them. Use the LOOK – COVER – WRITE – CHECK method to help you.

LOOK: Look at the word.

COVER: Cover it.

WRITE: Write the word from memory.

CHECK: Check that you have spelt it correctly.

definitely	surprising	beautiful
necessary	argument	responsible
separate	Wednesday	opportunity
independent	February	independent
disappointed	library	popular

Answers

Question 1: The correct answer is C. Most nouns ending in -f change to -ve in the plural.

Question 2: The correct answer is B. The final consonant in words is doubled when the last syllable is stressed.

Question 3: The correct answer is B. The prefix *dis-* is added to the adjective *satisfied*. In answer C an incorrect prefix is used.

Question 4: The correct answer is C. After the letter 'c', the spelling is 'ei'.

Question 5: The correct answer is A . *They're* is short for *they are*.

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