

## 100 Most Often Misspelled Words in English

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### A

- **acceptable**
  - Several words made the list because of the suffix pronounced -êbl but sometimes spelled -ible, sometimes -able. Just remember to accept any table offered to you and you will spell this word OK.
- **accidentally**
  - It is no accident that the test for adverbs on -ly is whether they come from an adjective on -al ("accidental" in this case). If so, the -al has to be in the spelling. No publical, thenpublicly.
- **accommodate**
  - Remember, this word is large enough to accommodate both a double "c" AND a double "m".
- **acquire**
  - Try to acquire the knowledge that this word and the next began with the prefix ad- but the [d] converts to [c] before [q].
- **acquit**
  - See the previous discussion.
- **a lot**
  - Two words! Hopefully, you won't have to allot a lot of time to this problem.
- **amateur**
  - Amateurs need not be mature: this word ends on the French suffix -eur (the equivalent of English -er).
- **apparent**
  - A parent need not be apparent but "apparent" must pay the rent, so remember this word always has the rent.
- **argument**
  - Let's not argue about the loss of this verb's silent [e] before the suffix -ment.
- **atheist**
  - This word comprises the prefix a- "not" + the "god" (also in the-ology) + -ist "one who believes."

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### B

- **believe**
  - [i] before [e] except after [c]
- **bellwether**
  - Often misspelled "bellweather." A wether is a gelded ram, chosen to lead the herd (thus his bell) due to the greater likelihood that he will remain at all times ahead of the ewes.

## C

- **calendar**
  - This word has an [e] between two [a]s. The last vowel is [a].
- **category**
  - This word is not in a category with "catastrophe" even if it sounds like it: the middle letter is [e].
- **cemetery**
  - Don't let this one bury you: it ends on -ery—nary an -ary in it. You already know it starts on [c], of course.
- **changeable**
  - The verb "change" keeps its [e] here to indicate that the [g] is soft, not hard. (That is also why "judgement" is the correct spelling of this word, no matter what anyone says.)
- **collectible**
  - Another -ible word. You just have to remember.
- **column**
  - Silent final [e] is commonplace in English but a silent final [n] is not uncommon, especially after [m].
- **committed**
  - If you are committed to correct spelling, you will remember that this word doubles its final [t] from "commit" to "committed."
- **conscience**
  - Don't let misspelling this word weigh on your conscience: [ch] spelled "sc" is unusual but legitimate.
- **conscientious**
  - Work on your spelling conscientiously and remember this word with [ch] spelled two different ways: "sc" and "ti".
- **conscious**
  - Try to be conscious of the "sc" [ch] sound and all the vowels in this word's ending and i-o-u a note of congratulations.
- **consensus**
  - The census does not require a consensus, since they are not related.

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## D

- **daiquiri**
  - Don't make yourself another daiquiri until you learn how to spell this funny word—the name of a Cuban village.
- **definite (ly)**
  - This word definitely sounds as though it ends only on -it, but it carries a silent "e" everywhere it goes.
- **discipline**
  - A little discipline, spelled with the [s] and the [c] will get you to the correct spelling of this one.
- **drunkenness**
  - You would be surprised how many sober people omit one of the [n]s in this one.
- **dumbbell**
  - Even smart people forget one of the [b]s in this one. (So be careful who you call one when you write.)

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## E

- **embarrass (ment)**
  - This one won't embarrass you if you remember it is large enough for a double [r] AND a double [s].
- **equipment**
  - This word is misspelled "equipment" 22,932 times on the web right now.
- **exhilarate**
  - Remembering that [h] when you spell this word will lift your spirits and if you remember both [a]s, it will be exhilarating!
- **exceed**
  - Remember that this one is -ceed, not -cede. (To exceed all expectations, master the spellings of this word, "precede" and "supersede" below.)
- **existence**
  - No word like this one spelled with an [a] is in existence. This word is a ménage a quatre of one [i] with three [e]s.
- **experience**
  - Don't experience the same problem many have with "existence" above in this word: -ence!

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## F

- **fiery**
  - The silent "e" on "fire" is also cowardly: it retreats inside the word rather than face the suffix -y.
- **foreign**
  - Here is one of several words that violate the i-before-e rule.

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## G

- **gauge**
  - You must learn to gauge the positioning of the [a] and [u] in this word. Remember, they are in alphabetical order (though not the [e]).
- **grateful**
  - You should be grateful to know that keeping "great" out of "grateful" is great.
- **guarantee**
  - I guarantee you that this word is not spelled like "warranty" even though they are synonyms.

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## H

- **harass**
  - This word is too small for two double letters but don't let it harass you, just keep the [r]s down to one.
- **height**
  - English reaches the height (not heighth!) of absurdity when it spells "height" and "width" so differently.
- **hierarchy**
  - The i-before-e rule works here, so what is the problem?
- **humorous**
  - Humor us and spell this word "humorous": the [r] is so weak, it needs an [o] on both sides to hold it up.

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## I

- **ignorance**
  - Don't show your ignorance by spelling this word -ence!
- **immediate**
  - The immediate thing to remember is that this word has a prefix, in- "not" which becomes [m] before [m] (or [b] or [p]). "Not mediate" means "direct" which is why "immediately" means "directly."
- **independent**
  - Please be independent but not in your spelling of this word. It ends on -ent.
- **indispensable**
  - Knowing that this word ends on -able is indispensable to good writing.
- **inoculate**
  - This one sounds like a shot in the eye. One [n] the eye is enough.
- **intelligence**
  - Using two [l]s in this word and ending it on -ence rather than -ance are marks of . . . you guessed it.

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## J

- **jewelry**
  - Sure, sure, it is made by a jeweler but the last [e] in this case flees the scene like a jewel thief. However, if you prefer British spelling, remember to double the [l]: "jeweller," "jewellery."
- **judgment**
  - Traditionally, the word has been spelled judgment in all forms of the English language. However, the spelling judgement (with e added) largely replaced judgment in the United Kingdom in a non-legal context. In the context of the law, however, judgment is preferred. In the US, judgment is still preferred and judgement is considered incorrect by many American style guides.

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## K

- **kernel (colonel)**
  - There is more than a kernel of truth in the claim that all the vowels in this word are [e]s. So why is the military rank (colonel) pronounced identically? English spelling can be chaotic.

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## L

- **leisure**
- Yet another violator of the i-before-e rule.
- **liaison**
  - Another French word throwing us an orthographical curve: a spare [i], just in case. That's an [s], too, that sounds like a [z].
- **library**
  - It may be as enjoyable as a berry patch but that isn't the way it is spelled. That first [r] should be pronounced, too.
- **license**
  - Where does English get the license to use both its letters for the sound [s] in one word?
- **lightning**
  - Learning how to omit the [e] in this word should lighten the load of English orthography a little bit.

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## M

- **maintenance**
  - The main tenants of this word are "main" and "tenance" even though it comes from the verb "maintain."
- **maneuver**
  - Man, the price you pay for borrowing from French is high. This one goes back to French main + oeuvre "hand-work," a spelling better retained in the British spelling, "manoeuvre."
- **medieval**
  - The medieval orthography of English even lays traps for you: everything about the MIDDLE Ages is MEDieval or, as the British would write, mediaeval.
- **memento**
  - Why would something to remind of you a moment be spelled "memento?" Well, it is.
- **millennium**
  - Here is another big word, large enough to hold two double consonants, double [l] and double [n].
- **miniature**
  - Since that [a] is seldom pronounced, it is seldom included in the spelling. This one is a "mini ature". Remember that.
- **minuscule**
  - Since something minuscule is smaller than a miniature, shouldn't they be spelled similarly? Less than cool, or "minus cule."

- **mischievous**
  - This mischievous word holds two traps: [i] before [e] and [o] before [u]. Four of the five vowels in English reside here.
- **misspell**
  - What is more embarrassing than to misspell the name of the problem? Just remember that it is mis + spell and that will spell you the worry about spelling "spell."

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## N

- **neighbor**
  - The word "neighbor" breaks the i-before-e rule and invokes the silent "gh". This is fraught with error potential. If you use British spelling, it will cost you another [u]: "neighbour."
- **noticeable**
  - The [e] is noticeably retained in this word to indicate the [c] is "soft," pronounced like [s]. Without the [e], it would be pronounced "hard," like [k], as in "applicable."

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## O

- **occasionally**
  - Writers occasionally tire of doubling so many consonants and omit one, usually one of the [l]s.
- **occurrence**
  - Remember not only the occurrence of double double consonants in this word, but that the suffix is -ence, not -ance.

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## P

- **pastime**
  - Since a pastime is something you do to pass the time, you would expect a double [s] here. Well, there is only one. The second [s] was slipped through the cracks in English orthography long ago.
- **perseverance**
  - All it takes is perseverance and you, too, can be a (near-)perfect speller. The suffix is -ance for no reason at all.
- **personnel**
  - **Funny Story (passed along by Bill Rudersdorf):** The assistant Vice-President of Personnel notices that his superior, the VP himself, upon arriving at his desk in the morning opens a small, locked box, smiles, and locks it back again. Some years later when he advanced to that position (inheriting the key), he came to

work early one morning to be assured of privacy. Expectantly, he opened the box. In it was a single piece of paper which said: "Two Ns, one L."

- **playwright**
  - Those who play right are right-players, not playwrights. Well, since they write plays, they should be "play-writes," wright right? Rong Wrong. Remember that a play writer in Old English was called a "play worker" and "wright" is from an old form of "work" (wrought iron, etc.)
- **possession**
  - Possession possesses more [s]s than a snake.
- **precede**
  - What follows, succeeds, so what goes before should, what? No, no, no, you are using logic. Nothing confuses English spelling more than common sense. "Succeed" but "precede." (Wait until you see "supersede.")
- **principal/principle**
  - The spelling principle to remember here is that the school principal is a prince and a pal (despite appearances)--and the same applies to anything of foremost importance, such as a principal principle. A "principle" is a rule.
- **privilege**
  - According to the pronunciation (not "pronunciation!") of this word, that middle vowel could be anything. Remember: two [i]s + two [e]s in that order.
- **pronunciation**
  - The best way to remember this one is to think of the word "enunciation". To enunciate, one must pronounce correctly.
- **publicly**
  - Let me publicly declare the rule (again): if the adverb comes from an adjective ending on -al, you include that ending in the adverb; if not, as here, you don't.

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## Q

- **questionnaire**
  - The French doing it to us again. Double up on the [n]s in this word and don't forget the silent [e].

## R

- **receive/receipt**
  - I hope you have received the message by now: [i] before [e] except after . . . .
- **recommend**
  - I would recommend you think of this word as the equivalent of commending all over again: re+commend. That would be recommendable.
- **referred**
  - Final consonants are often doubled before suffixes (remit: remitted, remitting). However, this rule applies only to accented syllables ending on [l] and [r], e.g. "rebelled," "referred" but "traveled," "buffered" and not containing a diphthong, e.g. "prevailed," "coiled."
- **reference**
  - Refer to the last mentioned word and remember to add -ence to the end for the noun.
- **relevant**
  - The relevant factor here is that the word is not "revelant," "revelent," or even "relevent." [l] before [v] and the suffix -ant.
- **restaurant**
  - 'Ey, you! Remember, these two sounds when you spell "restaurant." They are in the middle of it.
- **rhyme**
  - Actually, "rime" was the correct spelling until 1650. After that, egg-heads began spelling it like "rhythm." Why? No rhyme nor reason other than to make it look like "rhythm."
- **rhythm**
  - This one was borrowed from Greek (and conveniently never returned) so it is spelled the way we spell words borrowed from Greek and didn't return.
- **Roommate**
  - You room with this mate. You are like one.

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## S

- **schedule**
  - If perfecting your spelling is on your schedule, remember the [sk] is spelled as in "school."
- **separate**
  - How do you separate the [e]s from the [a]s in this word? Simple: the [e]s surround the [a]s.
- **sergeant**
  - The [a] needed in both syllables of this word has been pushed to the back of the line. Remember that, and the fact that [e] is used in both syllables, and you can write your sergeant without fear of misspelling his rank.
- **supersede**
  - This word supersedes all others in perversity. As if we don't have enough to worry about, keeping words on -ceed and -cede ("succeed," "precede," etc.) straight in our minds, this one has to be different from all the rest. The good news is: this is the only English word based on this stem spelled -sede.

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## T

- **threshold**
  - This one can push you over the threshold. It looks like a compound "thresh + hold" but it isn't. Two [h]s are enough.
- **twelfth**
  - Even if you omit the [f] in your pronunciation of this word (which you shouldn't do), it is retained in the spelling.
- **tyranny**
  - The guy is a "tyrant" and his problem is "tyranny." Don't forget to double up on the [n]s, too.

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## U

- **until**
  - I will never stop harping on this till this word is spelled with an extra [l]!

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## V

- **vacuum**
  - If your head is not a vacuum, remember that the silent [e] on this one married the [u] and joined him inside the word where they are living happily ever since. Well, the evidence is suggestive, but not conclusive. Anyway, spell this word with two [u]s and not like "volume."

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## WXYZ

- **weather**
  - Whether you like the weather or not, you have to write the [a] after the [e] when you spell it.
- **weird**
  - It is weird having to repeat this rule so many times: [i] before [e] except after...? (It isn't [w]!)

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