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quick solutions to everyday spelling,
punctuation and grammar problems

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ANGELA BURT

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2ND
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Correct English

ANGELA BURT

2nd edition

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regulations are complex and liable to change, and readers
should check the current position with the relevant authorities
before making personal arrangements.

Introduction

The A–Z of Correct English is a reference book which has been written for the student and the general reader. It aims to tackle the basic questions about spelling, punctuation, grammar and word usage that the student and the general reader are likely to ask.

Throughout the book there are clear explanations, and exemplar sentences where they are needed. When it's helpful to draw attention to spelling rules and patterns, these are given so that the reader is further empowered to deal with hundreds of related words. The aim always has been to make the reader more confident and increasingly self-reliant.

This is a fast-track reference book. It is not a dictionary although, like a dictionary, it is arranged alphabetically. It concentrates on problem areas; it anticipates difficulties; it invites cross-references. By exploring punctuation, for example, and paragraphing, it goes far beyond a dictionary's terms of reference. It is not intended to replace a dictionary; it rather supplements it.

Once, in an evening class, one of my adult students said, 'If there's a right way to spell a word, I want to know it.' On another occasion, at the end of a punctuation session on possessive apostrophes, a college student said rather angrily, 'Why wasn't I told this years ago?'

This book has been written to answer all the questions that my students over the years have needed to ask. I hope all who now use it will have their questions answered also and enjoy the confidence and the mastery that this will bring.

Angela Burt

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How to use this book

For ease of reference, all the entries in this book have been listed alphabetically rather than being divided into separate spelling, usage, punctuation and grammar sections.

You will therefore find **hypocrisy** following **hyphens**; **paragraphing** following **paraffin**; **who or whom?** following **whiskey or whisky?**; and so on.

WANT TO CHECK A SPELLING?

Cross-referencing will help you locate words with tricky initial letters.

aquaint	Wrong spelling. See ACQUAINT.
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Plural words are given alongside singular nouns, with cross-referencing to relevant rules and patterns.

knife (singular)	knives (plural). See PLURALS (v).
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There is also a general section on **plurals** and another on **foreign plurals**.

If it's the complication of adding an ending that is causing you trouble, you will find some words listed with a useful cross-reference.

dining or dinning?	dine + ing = dining (as in dining room)
	din + ing = dinning (noise dinning in ears)
	See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).

There are individual entries for confusing endings like **-able/-ible**; **-ance,-ant/-ence,-ent**; **-cal/-cle**; **-ise or -ize?** and for confusing beginnings like **ante-/anti-**; **for-/fore-**; **hyper-/hypo-**; **inter-/intra-** and many others.

A

abandon	abandoned, abandoning, abandonment (<i>not</i> -bb-)
abattoir	(<i>not</i> -bb-)
abbreviate	abbreviated, abbreviating, abbreviation (<i>not</i> -b-)
abbreviations	See CONTRACTIONS.
-able/-ible	Adjectives ending in -able or -ible can be difficult to spell because both endings sound identical. You'll always need to be on guard with these words and check each word individually when you are in doubt, but here are some useful guidelines: (i) Generally use -able when the companion word ends in -ation: abominable, abomination irritable, irritation (ii) Generally use -ible when the companion word ends in -ion: comprehensible, comprehension digestible, digestion (iii) Use -able after hard c and hard g: practicable (c sounds like k) navigable (hard g) (iv) Use -ible after soft c and soft g: forcible (c sounds like s) legible (g sounds like j) See also ADDING ENDINGS (ii); SOFT C AND SOFT G.

abridgement/ abridgment	Both spellings are correct. Use either but be consistent within one piece of writing.
abscess	This is a favourite word in spelling quizzes. (<i>not</i> absess or abcess)
absence	absent (<i>not</i> absc-)
absolute	absolutely (<i>not</i> absoloute, absolutely)
absorb	absorption. Notice how b changes to p here.
abstract nouns	<i>See</i> NOUNS.
accept or except?	We ACCEPT your apology. Everybody was there EXCEPT Stephen.
accessary or accessory?	If you want to preserve the traditional distinction in meaning between these two words, use ACCESSARY to refer to someone associated with a crime and ACCESSORY to refer to something that is added (a fashion accessory or car accessories). However, the distinction has now become blurred and it is perfectly acceptable to use one spelling to cover both meanings. Of the two, accessory is the more widely used, but both are correct.
accessible	(<i>not</i> -able)
accidentally	The adverb is formed by adding -ly to accidental. (<i>not</i> accidently)
accommodation	This is a favourite word in spelling quizzes and is frequently seen misspelt on painted signs. (<i>not</i> accomodation or accommadation)
accross	Wrong spelling. See ACROSS .
accumulate	(<i>not</i> -mm-)

achieve	achieved, achieving, achievement (<i>not</i> -ei-) See also ADDING ENDINGS (ii.); EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
acknowledgement/ acknowledgment	Both spellings are correct but be consistent within one piece of writing.
acquaint	acquainted (<i>not</i> aq-)
acquaintance	(<i>not</i> -ence)
acquiesce	acquiesced, acquiescing (<i>not</i> aq-)
acquiescence	(<i>not</i> -ance)
acquire	acquired, acquiring, acquisition (<i>not</i> aq-)
acreage	<i>Note</i> that there are three syllables here. (<i>not</i> acrage)
across	(<i>not</i> accross)
adapter or adaptor?	Traditional usage would distinguish between these two words and reserve -er for the person (an adapter of novels, for instance) and -or for the piece of electrical equipment. However, the distinction has become very blurred and the two spellings are considered by many authorities to be interchangeable. Use either for both meanings but be consistent within a single piece of writing.
addendum (singular)	addenda (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
adding endings	Usually endings (suffixes) can be added to base words without any complications. You just add them and that is that! e.g. iron + ing = ironing steam + er = steamer list + less = listless However, there are four groups of words which need especial care. Fortunately, there are some straightforward rules



which save your learning thousands of words individually.

(i) *The 1-1-1 rule*

This rule applies to:

words of	ONE syllable
ending with	ONE consonant
preceded by	ONE vowel

e.g. drop, flat, sun, win.

When you add an ending beginning with a consonant to a 1-1-1 word, there is no change to the base word:

drop + let	= droplet
flat + ly	= flatly
win + some	= winsome

When you add an ending beginning with a vowel to a 1-1-1 word, you double the final letter of the base word:

drop + ed	= dropped
flat + est	= flattest
win + ing	= winning
sun + *y	= sunny

*y counts as a vowel when it sounds like i or e.

See **VOWELS**.

Treat qu as one letter:

quit + ing	= quitting
quip + ed	= quipped

Don't double final w and x. They would look very odd and so we have correctly:

tax + ing	= taxing
paw + ed	= pawed

(ii) *The magic -e rule*

This rule applies to all words ending

with a silent -e.

e.g. hope, care, achieve, sincere, separate.

When you add an ending beginning with a consonant, keep the -e:

hope + ful	= hopeful
care + less	= careless
sincere + ly	= sincerely
separate + ly	= separately
achieve + ment	= achievement

When you add an ending beginning with a vowel, drop the -e:

hope + ing	= hoping
care + er	= carer
sincere + ity	= sincerity
separate + ion	= separation
achieve + ed	= achieved

Do, however, keep the -e in words like singeing (different from singing) and dyeing (different from dying) and whenever you need to keep the identity of the base word clear (e.g. shoeing, canoeing).

Do remember to keep the -e with soft c and soft g words. It's the e that keeps them soft (courageous, traceable). (See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.)

Don't keep the -e with these eight exceptions to the rule: truly, duly, ninth, argument, wholly, awful, whilst, wisdom.

(iii) *-y rule*

This rule applies to all words ending in -y. Look at the letter before the -y in the base word.

It doesn't matter at all what kind of ending you are adding. When you add an ending to a word ending in a



vowel + y, keep the y:

portray + ed = portrayed
employ + ment = employment

When you add an ending to a word ending in a consonant + y, change the y to i:

try + al = trial
empty + er = emptier
pity + less = pitiless
lazy + ness = laziness

Do keep the y when adding -ing. Two i's together would look very odd, despite our two words ski-ing and taxi-ing.

try + ing = trying
empty + ing = emptying

Don't apply the rule in these fourteen cases: daily, gaily, gaiety, laid, paid, said, slain, babyhood, shyly, shyness, dryness, slyness, wryly, wryness.

(iv) *The 2-1-1 rule*

This rule applies to:

words of TWO syllables
ending with ONE consonant
preceded by ONE vowel.

With this rule, it all depends on which syllable of the word is stressed. The 2-1-1 words below are stressed on the first syllable, and both vowel and consonant endings are added without any complications:

gossip gossiping
target targeted
limit limitless
eager eagerness

But note that kidnap, outfit, worship, always double their final letter:

kidnapped, outfitter, worshipping

Take care with 2-1-1 words which are stressed on the second syllable. There is no change when you add a consonant ending:

forget + ful = forgetful
equip + ment = equipment

Double the final consonant of the base word when you add a vowel ending:

forget + ing = forgetting
equip + ed = equipped
forbid + en = forbidden
begin + er = beginner

This rule is really valuable but you must be aware of some exceptions:

- 2-1-1 words ending in -l seem to have a rule all of their own. Whether the stress is on the first or the second syllable, there is no change when a consonant ending is added:

quarrel + some = quarrelsome
instal + ment = instalment

Double the -l when adding a vowel ending:

quarrel + ing = quarrelling
instal + ed = installed
excel + ent = excellent

- Notice how the change of stress in these words affects the spelling:

confer	conferred	conferring	conference
defer	deferred	deferring	deference
infer	inferred	inferring	inference
prefer	preferred	preferring	preference
refer	referred	referring	reference
transfer	transferred	transferring	transference

See also -ABLE/-IBLE; -ANCE,-ANT/-ENCE,-ENT;
-CAL/-CLE; -FUL,-LY.

ADDRESS

address	(<i>not</i> adr-)
adieu (singular)	adieu or adieux (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
adrenalin/adrenaline	Both spellings are correct.
adress	Wrong spelling. See ADDRESS .
advantageous	advantage + ous Keep the -e in this instance. See SOFT C AND SOFT G .
adverse or averse?	These two words have different meanings. The ferries were cancelled owing to ADVERSE weather conditions. (= unfavourable) She is not AVERSE to publicity. (= opposed)
advertisement	advertise + ment See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).
advice or advise?	My ADVICE is to forget all about it. (noun = recommendation) What would you ADVISE me to do? (verb = recommend)
adviser or advisor?	Adviser is the traditionally correct British spelling. Advisor is more common in American English.
advisory	(<i>not</i> -ery)
aerial	Use the same spelling for the noun (a television AERIAL) and the adjective (an AERIAL photograph).
affect or effect?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: Heavy drinking will AFFECT your liver. (verb) The EFFECT on her health was immediate. (noun) The new manager plans to EFFECT sweeping changes. (verb = to bring about)

afraid	(<i>not</i> affraid)
ageing or aging?	Both spellings are correct but many would prefer ageing as it keeps the identity of the base word (age) more easily recognised. See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).
aggravate	Strictly speaking, aggravate means to make worse. His rudeness AGGRAVATED an already explosive situation. It is, however, widely used in the sense of to irritate or to annoy. Be aware that some authorities would regard this second usage as incorrect.
aggressive	(<i>not</i> agr-)
agree to/agree with	The choice of preposition alters the meaning of the verb: I AGREED TO do what he advised. I AGREED TO all the conditions. I AGREED WITH all they said. See PREPOSITIONS .
agreeable	(<i>not</i> agreeable)
agreement	For grammatical agreement, see SINGULAR OR PLURAL? .
agressive	Wrong spelling. See AGGRESSIVE .
alga (singular)	algae (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
allege	(<i>not</i> -dge)
alley or ally?	An ALLEY is a little lane. An ALLY is a friend. alley (singular), alleys (plural) ally (singular), allies (plural) See PLURALS (iii).

ALL MOST OR ALMOST?

all most or almost?

There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

They were **ALL** (= everyone) **MOST** kind.
The child was **ALMOST** (= nearly) asleep.

allowed or aloud?

There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Are we **ALLOWED** (= permitted) to smoke in here?
I was just thinking **ALOUD** (= out loud).

all ready or already?

There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

We are **ALL** (= everyone) **READY**.
It is **ALL** (= everything) **READY**.
She was **ALREADY** dead (= by then).

all right or alright?

Traditional usage would consider **ALL RIGHT** to be correct and **ALRIGHT** to be incorrect. However, the use of 'alright' is so widespread that some would see it as acceptable although the majority of educated users would take care to avoid it.

all so or also?

There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

You are **ALL** (= everyone) **SO** kind.
You are **ALSO** (= in addition) generous.

all together or altogether?

There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

They were **ALL** (= everybody) huddled **TOGETHER** for warmth.
His situation is **ALTOGETHER** (= totally) different from yours.

allude or elude?

There is a difference in meaning.

ALLUDE means to refer to indirectly.
ELUDE means to evade capture or recall.

**allusion, delusion
or illusion?**

There is a difference in meaning.
An **ALLUSION** is an indirect reference.
A **DELUSION** is a false belief (often associated with a mental disorder).
An **ILLUSION** is a deceptive appearance.

all ways or always?

There is a difference in meaning.
These three routes are **ALL** (= each of them) **WAYS** into town.
She **ALWAYS** (= at all times) tells the truth.

almost

See **ALL MOST OR ALMOST?**.

a lot

Write as two words, not as one. Bear in mind that this construction is slang and not to be used in a formal context.

aloud

See **ALLOWED OR ALOUD?**.

already

See **ALL READY OR ALREADY?**.

altar or alter?

There is a difference in meaning.
The bride and groom stood solemnly before the **ALTAR**.
Do you wish to **ALTER** (= change) the arrangements?

**alternate or
alternative?**

We visit our grandparents on **ALTERNATE** Saturdays. (= every other Saturday)
I **ALTERNATE** between hope and despair. (= have each mood in turn)
An **ALTERNATIVE** plan would be to go by boat. (= another possibility)
The **ALTERNATIVES** are simple: work or go hungry. (= two choices)
Strictly speaking, the choice can be between only two alternatives (one choice or the other).

alternatives

However, the word is frequently used more loosely and this precise definition is becoming lost.

altogether

See **ALL TOGETHER OR ALTOGETHER?**.

Alzheimer's disease

(*not* Alze-)

amateur

(*not* -mm-)

ambiguity

Always try to anticipate any possible confusion on the part of your reader. Check that you have made your meaning absolutely clear.

- (i) Bear in mind that pronouns can be very vague. Consider this sentence:

My brother told his friend that **HE** had won first prize in the local photographic exhibition.

Who is 'he', my brother or his friend? Rewrite more clearly:

- (a) My brother congratulated his friend on winning first prize in the local photographic exhibition.
(b) My brother, delighted to have won first prize in the local photographic exhibition, told his friend.

The other possibility is rather clumsy but is otherwise clear:

- (c) My brother told his friend that he (his friend) had won first prize.
(d) My brother told his friend that he (my brother) had won first prize.

- (ii) Position the adverb **ONLY** with great care. It will refer to the word nearest to it, usually the word following. This may not be the meaning you intended. See how crucial to the meaning the position of 'only' can be:

ONLY Sean eats fish on Fridays.
(= No one else but Sean eats fish on Fridays.)

Sean **ONLY** eats fish on Fridays.
 (= Sean does nothing else to the fish on Fridays but eat it. He doesn't buy it, cook it, look at it, smell it . . .)

Sean eats **ONLY** fish on Fridays.
 (= Sean eats nothing but fish on Fridays.)

Sean eats fish **ONLY** on Fridays.
 Sean eats fish on Fridays **ONLY**.
 (= Sean eats fish on this one day in the week and never on any other.)

- (iii) Take care with the positioning of **BADLY**.

This room needs cleaning **BADLY**.

Does it? Or does it not need cleaning well? Rewrite like this:

This room **BADLY** needs cleaning.

- (iv) Beware of causing initial bewilderment by not introducing a comma to indicate a pause.

The shabby little riverside café was empty and full of wasps and flies.

Empty and full?

The shabby little riverside café was empty, and full of wasps and flies.

See **COMMAS** (ix).

- (v) Avoid the danger of writing nonsense!

DRIVING slowly along the road, **THE CASTLE** dominated the landscape.
 The castle is driving?

Rewrite:

As we drove slowly along the road, we saw how the castle dominated the landscape.



COOKED slowly, the **FAMILY** will enjoy the cheaper cuts of meat.

Rewrite:

If the cheaper cuts of meat are cooked slowly, the family will enjoy them.

See **PARTICIPLES**.

- (vi) Make sure the descriptive details describe the right noun!

For sale: 1995 Peugeot 205 – one owner with power-assisted steering.

Rewrite:

For sale: 1995 Peugeot 205 with power-assisted steering – one owner.

amend or emend?

Both words mean ‘to make changes in order to improve’. Use **AMEND** or **EMEND** when referring to the correction of written or printed text. Use **AMEND** in a wider context such as **AMENDING** the law or **AMENDING** behaviour.

ammount

Wrong spelling. See **AMOUNT**.

among

(*not* amoung)

among/amongst

Either form can be used.

among or between?

Use **BETWEEN** when something is shared by two people. Use **AMONG** when it is shared by three or more.

Share the sweets **BETWEEN** the two of you.

Share the sweets **AMONG** yourselves.

However, **BETWEEN** is used with numbers larger than two when it means an exact geographical location or when it refers to relationships.

Sardinia lies **BETWEEN** Spain, Algeria, Corsica and Italy.

It will take a long time before the rift **BETWEEN** the five main parties heals.

amoral or immoral?

There is a difference in meaning.

AMORAL means not being governed by moral laws, acting outside them.

(note -m-)

IMMORAL means breaking the moral laws. (note -mm-)

among

Wrong spelling. See **AMONG**.

amount

(*not* ammount)

amount or number?

AMOUNT is used with non-count nouns:

a small **AMOUNT** of sugar; a surprising **AMOUNT** of gossip.

NUMBER is used with plural nouns: a **NUMBER** of mistakes; a **NUMBER** of reasons.

analyse

(*not* -ize as in American English)

analysis (singular)

analyses (plural)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

-ance,-ant/-ence,-ent

Words with these endings are difficult to spell and you'll always need to be on your guard with them. Check each word individually when in doubt, but here are some useful guidelines:

- (i) People are generally -ant: attendant, lieutenant, occupant, sergeant, tenant (but there are exceptions like superintendent, president, resident . . .).
- (ii) Use -ance, -ant, where the companion word ends in -ation: dominance, dominant, domination, variance, variant, variation.



- (iii) Use -ence, -ent after qu:
consequence, consequent,
eloquence, eloquent.
- (iv) Use -ance, -ant after hard c or hard g:
significance, significant (c sounds like k)
elegance, elegant (hard g)
- (v) Use -ence, -ent after soft c or soft g:
innocence, innocent (c sounds like s)
intelligent, intelligence (g sounds like j)

See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

and/but

Many of us have been taught never to begin a sentence with **AND** or **BUT**. Generally speaking this is good advice. Both words are conjunctions and will therefore be busy joining words within the sentence:

I should love to come **AND** I look forward to the party very much.

They wanted to come **BUT** sadly they had to visit a friend in hospital some miles away.

However, there are some occasions when you may need the extra emphasis that starting a new sentence with **AND** or **BUT** would give. If you have a good reason to break the rules, do so!

anxiety

Wrong spelling. See **ANXIETY**.

anxious

Wrong spelling. See **ANXIOUS**.

annex or annexe?

To **ANNEX** is to take possession of a country or part of a country.

An **ANNEX** is another word for an appendix in an official document.

An **ANNEXE** is a building added to the main building.

annoint

Wrong spelling. See **ANOINT**.

announce

announced, announcing, announcer,
announcement
(*not* -n-)

annoy	annoyed, annoying, annoyance (<i>not</i> anoy or annoied)
annul	annulled, annulling, annulment See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
anoint	(<i>not</i> -nn-)
anounce	Wrong spelling. See ANNOUNCE .
anoy	Wrong spelling. See ANNOY .
ante-/anti-	ANTE- means before. antenatal = before birth ANTI- means against. antifreeze = against freezing
antecedent	This means earlier in time or an ancestor. (<i>not</i> anti-) See ANTE-/ANTI- .
antediluvian	This means very old-fashioned and primitive, literally 'before the flood of Noah'. (<i>not</i> anti-) See ANTE-/ANTI- .
antenna	This word has two plurals, each used in a different sense: Use ANTENNAE to refer to insects. Use ANTENNAS to refer to television aerials. See FOREIGN PLURALS .
anticlimax	(<i>not</i> ante-) See ANTE-/ANTI- .
antirrhinum	(<i>not</i> -rh-)
antisocial	(<i>not</i> ante-) See ANTE-/ANTI- .
anxiety	(<i>not</i> ang-)
anxious	(<i>not</i> ang-)
apologise/apologize	Both spellings are correct. (<i>not</i> -pp)
apology	apologies (plural) See PLURALS (iii).

apon

Wrong spelling. See UPON.

apostrophes

(i) Apostrophes can be used to show that letters have been omitted:

► *in contractions*

didn't
o'clock
you've
won't

► *in poetry*

o'er vales and hills
where'er you walk

► *in dialect*

'Ere's, 'Arry

► *in retail*

pick 'n' mix
salt 'n' vinegar

(ii) Apostrophes can be used to show ownership. Follow these simple guidelines and you'll never put the apostrophe in the wrong place.

Singular nouns or 'owners'

The tail of the dog

The dog's tail

Who 'owns' the tail?	the dog
Put the apostrophe after the owner.	the dog'
Add -s.	the dog's
Add what is 'owned'.	the dog's tail

The smile of the princess

The princess's smile

Who 'owns' the smile?	the princess
Put the apostrophe after the owner.	the princess'
Add -s.	the princess's
Add what is 'owned'.	the princess's smile

With proper names ending in -s, you have a choice, depending upon how the name is pronounced.

Keats' poetry or Keats's poetry

But St James's Square, London, SW1

St James' (two syllables)

St James's (three syllables)

Plural nouns or 'owners'

Don't worry about whether you use 's or s' in the plural. It will sort itself out.

The tails of the dogs

The dogs' tails

Who 'owns' the tails? the dogs

Put the apostrophe

after the owners. the dogs'

Add -s if there isn't one. (no need here)

Add what is 'owned' the dogs' tails

The laughter of the women

The women's laughter

Who 'owns' the laughter? the women

Put the apostrophe

after the owners. the women'

Add -s if there isn't one. the women's

Add what is 'owned'. the women's
 laughter

And so, when reading, you will be able to distinguish singular and plural 'owners'.

The princess's suitors.

The princesses' suitors.

The 'owner' is the word before the apostrophe.

(iii) Apostrophes are also used in condensed expressions of time.

The work of a moment.

A moment's work.



The work of three years.
Three years' work.

If you follow the guidelines in (ii) above,
you will never make a mistake.

appal

appalled, appalling (*not* -aul-)
See also **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

appearance

(*not* -ence)

appendix

This word has two plurals, each used in a
different sense.
Use **APPENDIXES** in an anatomical sense.
Use **APPENDICES** when referring to
supplementary sections in books or formal
documents.
See also **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

appologise/-ize

Wrong spelling. See **APOLOGISE/APOLOGIZE**.

appology

Wrong spelling. See **APOLOGY**.

appreciate

There are three distinct meanings of this
word.

I **APPRECIATE** your kindness
(= recognise gratefully).

I **APPRECIATE** that you have had a
difficult time lately (= understand).

My cottage **HAS APPRECIATED** in value
already (= increased).

Some people would choose to avoid the
second use above (understand, realise) but
the verb is now widely used in this sense
and this has become acceptable.

approach

approached, approaching (*not* apr-)

aquaint

Wrong spelling. See **ACQUAINT**.

aquaintance

Wrong spelling. See **ACQUAINTANCE**.

aquarium (singular)

aquaria or aquariums (plural)
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

aquiesce	Wrong spelling. See ACQUIESCE .
aquiescence	Wrong spelling. See ACQUIESCENCE .
acquire	Wrong spelling. See ACQUIRE .
arange	Wrong spelling. See ARRANGE .
arbiter or arbitrator?	An ARBITER is a judge or someone with decisive influence (an arbiter of fashion). In addition, an ARBITER may intervene to settle a dispute (-er). An ARBITRATOR is someone who is officially appointed to judge the rights and wrongs of a dispute (-or).
arbitrator or mediator?	An ARBITRATOR reaches a judgement but is not necessarily obeyed. A MEDIATOR attempts to bring two opposing sides together and to settle a dispute.
archipelago	There are two interchangeable plural forms: archipelagoes, archipelagos.
arctic	(<i>not</i> artic, although frequently mispronounced as such)
argument	(<i>not</i> arguement)
arrange	arranged, arranging, arrangement (<i>not</i> -r-) See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).
artic	Wrong spelling. See ARCTIC .
article	(<i>not</i> -cal) See -CAL/-CLE.
artist or artiste?	Traditionally, an ARTIST is skilled in one or more of the fine arts (painting, for example, or sculpture). Traditionally, the term ARTISTE is reserved for a performer or entertainer (a music-hall ARTISTE). However, ARTIST is now being used to cover both meanings in the sense of 'skilled practitioner', and ARTISTE is becoming redundant.

as or like?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: You look AS if you have seen a ghost. You look AS though you have seen a ghost. AS I expected, he's missed the train. You look LIKE your mother.
asma	Wrong spelling. See ASTHMA .
asphalt	(<i>not</i> asphalt, as it is frequently mispronounced)
aspirin	(<i>not</i> aspirin, as it is frequently mispronounced)
assassin	(<i>not</i> assassin or assassin)
assma	Wrong spelling. See ASTHMA .
assume or presume?	To ASSUME something to be the case is to take it for granted without any proof. To PRESUME something to be the case is to base it on the evidence available.
assurance or insurance?	Insurance companies distinguish between these two terms. ASSURANCE is the technical term given for insurance against a certainty (e.g. death) where payment is guaranteed. INSURANCE is the technical term given for insurance against a risk (such as fire, burglary, illness) where payment is made only if the risk materialises.
asthma	(<i>not</i> asma or assma)
astrology or astronomy?	ASTROLOGY is the study of the influence of the stars and planets on human life and fortune. ASTRONOMY is the scientific study of the stars and planets.
athlete	(<i>not</i> athelete)
athletics	(<i>not</i> atheletics)

attach	attached, attaching, attachment (<i>not</i> -tch)
audible	(<i>not</i> -able)
audience	(<i>not</i> -ance)
aural or oral?	AURAL refers to the ears and hearing. ORAL refers to the mouth and speaking. In speech these words can be very confusing as they are pronounced identically.
authoritative	(<i>not</i> authoritative)
autobiography or biography?	An AUTOBIOGRAPHY is an account of his or her life by the author. A BIOGRAPHY is an account of a life written by someone else.
automaton (singular)	automata, automatons (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
avenge or revenge?	The words are very close in meaning but AVENGE is often used in the sense of just retribution, punishing a wrong done to another. Hamlet felt bound to AVENGE his father's death. REVENGE is often used in the sense of 'getting one's own back' for a petty offence.
averse	See ADVERSE or AVERSE? .
awkward	<i>Notice</i> -wkw-. The spelling itself looks awkward!
axis (singular)	axes (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .

B

babyhood	(<i>not</i> -i-) This word is an exception to the -y rule. See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
bachelor	(<i>not</i> -tch-)
bacillus (singular)	bacilli (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
bacterium (singular)	bacteria (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
badly	This word is often carelessly positioned with disastrous effects on meaning. See AMBIGUITY (iii).
banister/bannister	banisters, bannisters (plural) Although the first spelling is more widely used, both spellings are correct.
bargain	(<i>not</i> -ian)
basically	basic + ally (<i>not</i> basicly)
batchelor	Wrong spelling. See BACHELOR .
bath or bathe?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: I have a BATH every morning (= I have a wash in the bath). I BATH the baby every day (= wash in a bath). I have had a new BATH fitted. We BATHE every day (= swim). BATHE the wound with disinfectant (= cleanse). We have a BATHE whenever we can (= a swim).
beach or beech?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: Budleigh Salterton has a stony BEACH . BEECH trees shed their leaves in autumn.

beautiful	Use your knowledge of French <i>beau</i> to help you.
before	(<i>not</i> befor)
begin	<i>Note</i> these forms and spellings: I begin, I am beginning. I began, I have begun.
beginner	(<i>not</i> -n-)
beige	(<i>not</i> -ie-) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.
belief	(<i>not</i> -ei) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.
believe	believed, believing, believer See EI/IE SPELLING RULE. See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).
benefit	benefited, benefiting It is a common mistake to use -tt-.
berth or birth?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: We have a spare BERTH on our boat. We are proud to announce the BIRTH of a daughter.
beside or besides?	Use BESIDE in the sense of next to, by the side of: Your glasses are BESIDE your bed. May I sit BESIDE you? Use BESIDES in the sense of also, as well as: BESIDES , I can't afford it. BESIDES being very clever, Ann also works hard.
between	See AMONG OR BETWEEN?.
between you and I	Incorrect. Write: between you and me. See PREPOSITIONS.

bi-	This prefix means 'two'. Hence bicycle bifocals bigamy, and so on. <i>Note</i>, however, that some words beginning with 'bi' can be ambiguous. See BIMONTHLY and BIWEEKLY. See also BIANNUAL OR BIENNIAL?.
biannual or biennial?	BIANNUAL means twice a year (<i>not</i> -n-). BIENNIAL means every two years (a biennial festival) or lasting for two years (horticultural, etc). (<i>not</i> -ual)
bicycle	bi + cycle (<i>not</i> bycycle or bycicle)
bidding or biding?	bid + ing = bidding The BIDDING at the auction was fast and furious. BIDDING farewell, the knight cantered away. bide + ing = biding. Her critics were just BIDING their time. See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).
biege	Wrong spelling. See BEIGE.
biennial	See BIANNUAL OR BIENNIAL?.
bimonthly	Avoid using BIMONTHLY as it has two conflicting meanings. It can mean both every two months and also twice a month. (Compare BIWEEKLY.)
binoculars	(<i>not</i> -nn-)
biography	See AUTOBIOGRAPHY OR BIOGRAPHY?
biscuit	(<i>not</i> -iu-)
biulding	Wrong spelling. See BUILDING.
bivouac	bivouacked, bivouacking See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

biweekly	This word has two conflicting meanings and is perhaps best avoided. It can mean both every two weeks (i.e. fortnightly) and also twice a week. (Compare BIMONTHLY .)
bizarre	(<i>not</i> -zz-)
blond or blonde?	BLOND is used to describe men's hair. BLOND is used to describe women's hair. A BLONDE is a woman.
board or bored?	A BOARD is a piece of wood, also a committee or similar group of people. To BOARD means to get on (train, etc.) and also to pay for living in someone's house and having food provided. BORED means uninterested.
boarder or border?	A BOARDER is a person who pays to live in someone's house. A BORDER is the edge or boundary of something.
boisterous	(<i>not</i> boistrous, although often mispronounced as two syllables)
boney/bony	Both spellings are correct, although the second spelling is more commonly used.
border	See BOARDER OR BORDER? .
bored	See BOARD OR BORED? .
bored by, bored with	(<i>not</i> bored of)
born or borne?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: Dickens was BORN in Portsmouth. She has BORNE five children. He has BORNE a heavy burden of guilt all his life.
borrow or lend?	May I BORROW your pen? (= use your pen temporarily) Please LEND me your pen. (= pass it to me and allow me to use it)

both... and

Take care with the positioning of each half of this paired construction. Each must introduce grammatically similar things:

He is **BOTH** clever **AND** hardworking.
(*not*: He both is clever and hardworking!)

He **BOTH** paints **AND** sculpts.
He bought **BOTH** the gardening tools
AND the DIY kit.

Notice, however, the ambiguity in the last example. It could mean that there were just two gardening tools and he bought both of them. In the case of possible confusion, always replace:

He bought the gardening tools and also the DIY kit.

He bought the two gardening tools and also the DIY kit.

He bought both of the gardening tools and also the DIY kit.

bought or brought?

BOUGHT is the past tense of to buy.

She **BOUGHT** eggs, bacon and bread.

BROUGHT is the past tense of to bring.

They **BROUGHT** their books home.

bouncy

(*not* -ey)

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

brackets

Round brackets enclose additional information which the writer wants to keep separate from the main body of the sentence.

Jane Austen (born in 1775) died in Winchester.

My neighbour (have you met her?) has won £250,000.

Notice how sentences in brackets are not fully punctuated.

They don't begin with a capital letter or have a full stop at the end if they occur within another sentence as in the example above. They do, however, have a question mark or an exclamation mark, if appropriate.

Square brackets indicate the material has been added to the original by another writer:

When I [Hilaire Belloc] am dead, I hope it may be said:

'His sins were scarlet, but his books were read.'

breath or breathe?

BREATH is the noun, and rhymes with 'death'.

He called for help with his dying

BREATH.

BREATHE is the verb and rhymes with 'seethe'.

BREATHE deeply and fill those lungs!

brief, briefly

(*not* -ei-)

Britain

(*not* -ian)

Brittany

(*not* Britanny)

broach or brooch?

You **BROACH** a difficult topic or **BROACH** a bottle.

You wear a **BROOCH**.

broccoli

(*not* brocolli)

broken

(*not* brocken)

brought

See **BOUGHT OR BROUGHT?**.

buffalo (singular)

buffaloes (plural)

See **PLURALS** (iv).

building

(*not* -iu-)

buisness

Wrong spelling. See **BUSINESS**.

BUREAU

bureau	bureaux, bureaus (plural) Both forms are correct. See FOREIGN PLURALS .
bureaucracy	(<i>not</i> -sy)
burglar	(<i>not</i> burgular, as often mispronounced)
burned/burnt	Both forms are correct.
business	(<i>not</i> buisness)
but	See AND/BUT .
buy/by	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: I need to BUY some new jeans. The book is BY Charlotte Brontë. Wait BY the gate. The children rushed BY .

C

cactus (singular)

cactuses or cacti (plural)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

caffeine

(*not* -ie-)

-cal/-cle

Adjectives end in -cal.

Nouns end in -cle.

e.g. critical	article
logical	bicycle
magical	circle
musical	cubicle
nautical	cuticle
physical	miracle
practical	particle
theatrical	spectacle
tropical	uncle
whimsical	vehicle

calculator

(*not* -er)

calendar

calf (singular)

calves (plural)

See **PLURALS** (v).

callous or callus?

CALLOUS means cruel, insensitive, not caring about how others feel.

CALLUS means a hard patch of skin or tissue.

Interestingly, skin may be **CALLOUSED** (made hard) or **CALLUSED** (having calluses).

can or may?

Strictly speaking, **CAN** means 'being able' and **MAY** means 'having permission'. It is best to preserve this distinction in formal contexts. However, informally, **CAN** is used to cover both meanings:

	You CAN go now (= are permitted).
caning or canning?	cane + ing = caning CANING is now banned in all schools. Can + ing = canning The CANNING factory is closing down. (See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).)
canister	(<i>not</i> -nn-)
cannon or canon?	A CANON is a cleric. A CANNON is a large gun.
cannot or can not?	Both forms are acceptable but the second is rarely seen.
canoe	canoed, canoeing, canoeist See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).
canon	See CANNON OR CANON? .
can't	Contraction of CANNOT .
canvas or canvass?	CANVAS is a rough cloth. To CANVASS is to ask for votes.
capital letters	Use a capital letter in these circumstances: ▶ to begin a sentence: My father will be fifty tomorrow. ▶ to begin sentences of direct speech: 'You will be sorry for this in the morning,' she said. She said, 'You will be sorry for this in the morning. You never learn.' ▶ for the pronoun 'I' wherever it comes in the sentence: You know that I have no money. ▶ for all proper nouns – names of: people (Mary Browne) countries (Malta)

Note these adjectives derived from proper nouns also have a capital letter:

However, the capital is dropped when the connection with the proper noun becomes lost:

Note also that titles are capitalised only when part of a proper noun:

Captain Llewellyn, otherwise the captain

- # The Taming of the Shrew
- ## An Old Wives' Tale

- And then – BANG!

- 

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT OR CORPORAL PUNISHMENT?

NATO
UNESCO
CAFOD
OXFAM
PTO
RSVP

Note that some acronyms have now become words in their own right and are no longer written in capitals: laser, sauna, radar.

Note also that some initialisms are usually written in lower case: i.e., e.g., c/o, wpm.

- for the Deity as a mark of respect and for sacred books:

God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Almighty, Allah, Jehovah, Yahweh the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas

- for each word of an address:

Mrs Anna Sendall
10 Furze Crescent
ALPHINGTON
Hants PD6 9EF

- for the salutation in a letter (first word and key words only) and for the first letter of the complimentary close:

Dear Sir
Dear Mrs Hughes
My dear niece
Yours faithfully
Yours sincerely
With much love
With best wishes

**capital punishment or
corporal punishment?**

cappuccino

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT = death
CORPORAL PUNISHMENT = beating

(*not* -p-)

capsize	This is the <i>only</i> verb in the English language of more than one syllable that <i>must</i> end in -ize.
captain	(<i>not</i> -ian)
capuccino	Wrong spelling. See CAPPUCCINO.
career	(<i>not</i> -rr-)
cargo (singular)	cargoes (plural) See PLURALS (iv).
Caribbean	(<i>not</i> -rr-, <i>not</i> -b-)
carreer	Wrong spelling. See CAREER.
carrying	carry + ing See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
cast or caste?	Use CAST for a group of actors in a play and for a plaster CAST and a CAST in an eye. Use CASTE when referring to a social group in Hindu society.
caster or castor?	Both caster sugar and castor sugar are correct. Both sugar caster and sugar castor are correct. Both casters and castors can be used when referring to the little wheels fixed to the legs of furniture. But castor oil, <i>not</i> caster oil.
catagorical	Wrong spelling. See CATEGORICAL.
catagory	Wrong spelling. See CATEGORY.
catarrh	(<i>not</i> -rh)
catastrophe	(<i>not</i> -y)
categorical	categorically (<i>not</i> cata-)
category (singular)	categories (plural) (<i>not</i> cata-)
cauliflower	(<i>not</i> -flour)

ceiling	<i>(not -ie-)</i> See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
Cellophane	<i>(not Sello-)</i>
censer, censor or censure?	A CENSER is a container in which incense is burnt during a religious ceremony. A CENSOR is a person who examines plays, books, films, etc. before deciding if they are suitable for public performance or publication. To CENSOR is to do the work of a CENSOR . CENSURE is official and formal disapproval or condemnation of an action. To CENSURE is to express this condemnation in a formal written or spoken statement.
centenarian or centurion?	A CENTENARIAN is someone who is at least 100 years old. A CENTURION is the commander of a company of 100 men in the ancient Roman army.
century (singular)	centuries (plural) <i>(not centua-)</i> See PLURALS (iii) .
cereal or serial?	CEREAL is food processed from grain. A SERIAL is a book or radio or television performance delivered in instalments.
ceremonial or ceremonious?	Both adjectives come from the noun CEREMONY . CEREMONIAL describes the ritual used for a formal religious or public event (a CEREMONIAL occasion). CEREMONIOUS describes the type of person who likes to behave over-formally on social occasions. It is not altogether complimentary (a CEREMONIOUS wave of the hand).

ceremony (singular)	ceremonies (plural) See PLURALS (iii).
certain or curtain	CERTAIN means sure. Are you CERTAIN that he apologised? CURTAINS are window drapes. Do draw the CURTAINS . <i>Note</i> that the c sounds like s in certain and like k in curtain. See SOFT C AND SOFT G .
changeable	(<i>not</i> -gable) See SOFT C AND SOFT G .
chaos	chaotic
character	(<i>not</i> charachter)
chateau/château (singular)	chateaux or châteaux (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
check or cheque?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: Always CHECK your work. May I pay by CHEQUE ? (<i>not</i> 'check' as in the United States)
cherub (singular)	This word has two plurals. Cherubim is reserved exclusively for the angels often portrayed as little children with wings. Cherubs can be used either for angels or for enchanting small children.
chestnut	(<i>not</i> chesnut, as it is often mispronounced)
chief (singular)	chiefs (plural) See PLURALS (v).
childish or childlike?	The teenager was rebuked by the magistrate for his CHILDISH behaviour. (i.e. which he should have outgrown) The grandfather has retained his sense of CHILDLIKE wonder at the beauty of the



	natural world. (i.e. marvellously direct, innocent and enthusiastic)
chimney (singular)	chimneys (plural) See PLURALS (iii).
chior	Wrong spelling. See CHOIR .
chocolate	(<i>not</i> chocat although often mispronounced as such)
choice	(<i>not</i> -se)
choir	(<i>not</i> -io-)
choose	I CHOOSE my words carefully. I am CHOOSING my words carefully. I CHOSE my words carefully yesterday. I have CHOSEN them carefully.
chord or cord?	CHORD is used in a mathematical or musical context. CORD refers to string and is generally used when referring to anatomical parts like the umbilical cord, spinal cord and vocal cords. <i>Note:</i> you will occasionally see CHORD used instead of CORD in a medical context but it seems very old-fashioned now.
Christianity	(<i>not</i> Cr-)
Christmas	(<i>not</i> Cristmas or Chrismas)
chronic	(<i>not</i> cr-) This word is often misused. It doesn't mean terrible or serious. It means long-lasting, persistent, when applied to an illness.
chrysanthemum	(<i>not</i> cry-)
crystal	Wrong spelling. See CRYSTAL .
cieling	Wrong spelling. See CEILING .
cigarette	(<i>not</i> -rr)

cite, sight or site?	To CITE means to refer to. SIGHT is vision or something seen. A SITE is land, usually set aside for a particular purpose.
clarity	See AMBIGUITY .
clothes or cloths?	CLOTHES are garments. CLOTHS are dusters or scraps of material.
coarse or course?	COARSE means vulgar, rough: COARSE language, COARSE cloth. COURSE means certainly: OF COURSE COURSE also means a series of lectures, a direction, a sports area, and part of a meal: an advanced COURSE to change COURSE a golf COURSE the main COURSE
codeine	(<i>not</i> -ie-)
colander	(<i>not</i> -ar)
collaborate	collaborated, collaborating
collaborator	collaboration
collapse	collapsed, collapsing
collapsible	(<i>not</i> -able)
colleagues	
collective nouns	See NOUNS .
college	(<i>not</i> colledge)
colloquial	
colossal	Wrong spelling. See COLOSSAL .
colonel or kernel?	A COLONEL is a senior officer. A KERNEL is the inner part of a nut.

colons

- (i) Colons can introduce a list:

Get your ingredients together:
flour, sugar, dried fruit, butter and
milk.

Note that a summing-up word should
always precede the colon (here
'ingredients').

- (ii) Colons can precede an explanation or
amplification of what has gone before:

The teacher was elated: at last the
pupils were gaining in confidence.

Note that what precedes the colon
must always be able to stand
on its own grammatically. It must be
a sentence in its own right.

- (iii) Colons can introduce dialogue in a
play:

Henry (with some embarrassment): It's
all my own fault.

- (iv) Colons can be used instead of a
comma to introduce direct speech:

Henry said, with some embarrassment:
'It's all my own fault.'

- (v) Colons can introduce quotations:

Donne closes the poem with the
moving tribute:

'Thy firmness makes my circle just
And makes me end where I began.'

- (vi) Colons can introduce examples as in
this reference book.

Compare SEMICOLONS.

colossal

(*not* -ll-)

colour

(*not* color, as in American English)

colourful

comemorate

Wrong spelling. See **COMMEMORATE**.

comfortable

(four syllables, not three)

coming

come + ing = coming (*not* comming)

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii)

comission

Wrong spelling. See **COMMISSION**.

commands

- (i) Direct commands, if expressed emphatically, require an exclamation mark:

Stop, thief!

Put your hands up!

Stop talking!

If expressed calmly and conversationally, however, a full stop is sufficient:

Just wait there a moment and I'll be with you.

Tell me your story once again.

- (ii) Reported commands (indirect commands) never need an exclamation mark because, when they are reported, they become statements.

He ordered the thief to stop.

She told him to put his hands up.

The teacher yelled at the class to stop talking.

commas

Commas are so widely misused that it is worth discussing their function in some detail. First, let us make it very clear when commas *cannot* be used.

- (a) A comma should never divide a subject from its verb. The two go together:

My parents, had very strict views. ⑥

My parents had very strict views. ②



Take extra care with compound subjects:

The grandparents, the parents, and the children, were in some ways to blame. ⑥

The grandparents, the parents, and the children were in some ways to blame. ②

- (b) Commas should never be used in an attempt to string sentences together. Sentences must be either properly joined (and commas don't have this function) or clearly separated by full stops, question marks or exclamation marks.

Commas have certain very specific jobs to do within a sentence. Let us look at each in turn:

- (i) Commas separate items in a list:

I bought apples, pears, and grapes.
She washed up, made the beds, and had breakfast.

The novel is funny, touching, and beautifully written.

The final comma before 'and' in a list is optional. However, use it to avoid any ambiguity. See (ix) below.

- (ii) Commas are used to separate terms of address from the rest of the sentence:

Sheila, how nice to see you!

Can I help you, madam?

I apologise, ladies and gentlemen, for this delay.

Note that a pair of commas is needed in the last example above because the term of address occurs mid-sentence. It is a very common error to omit

one of the commas.

- (iii) Commas are used to separate interjections, asides and sentence tags like isn't it? don't you? haven't you?. You'll notice in the examples below that all these additions could be removed and these sentences would still be grammatically sound:

My mother, despite her good intentions, soon stopped going to the gym.

Of course, I'll help you when I can.
You've met Tom, haven't you?

- (iv) Commas are used to mark off phrases in apposition:

Prince Charles, the future king, has an older sister.

The phrase 'the future king' is another way of referring to 'Prince Charles' and is punctuated just like an aside.

- (v) A comma separates any material that precedes it from the main part of the sentence:

Although she admired him, she would never go out with him.

If you want to read the full story, buy *The Sunday Times*.

Note that if the sentences are reversed so that the main part of the sentence comes first, the comma becomes optional.

- (vi) Commas mark off participles and participial phrases, whenever they come in the sentence:

Laughing gaily, she ran out of the room.

He flung himself on the sofa,



overcome with remorse.

The children, whispering excitedly,
crowded through the door.

For a definition of participles see

PARTICIPLES.

- (vii) Commas mark off some adjectival clauses. Don't worry too much about the grammatical terminology here. You'll be able to decide whether you need to mark them off in your own work by matching them against these examples.

Can you see the difference in meaning that a pair of commas makes here? Read the two sentences aloud, pausing where the commas indicate that you should pause in the first sentence, and the two different meanings should become clear:

The firemen, who wore protective clothing, were uninjured. (= nobody injured)

The firemen who wore protective clothing were uninjured. (but those who didn't wear it...)

- (viii) Commas are used to mark a pause at a suitable point in a long sentence.

This will be very much a question of style. Read your own work carefully and decide exactly how you want it to be read.

- (ix) Commas are sometimes needed to clarify meaning. In the examples below, be aware how the reader could make an inappropriate connection:

She reversed the car into the main road and my brother waved goodbye.

She reversed the car into the main road and my brother??

She reversed the car into the main road, and my brother waved goodbye.

In the skies above the stars glittered palely.

In the skies above the stars??

In the skies above, the stars glittered palely.

Notice how the comma can sometimes be essential with 'and' in a list:

We shopped at Moores, Browns, Supervalu, Marks and Spencer and Leonards.

Is the fourth shop called Marks, or Marks and Spencer?

Is the fifth shop called Leonards, or Spencer and Leonards?

A comma makes all clear:

We shopped at Moores, Browns, Supervalu, Marks and Spencer, and Leonards.

commemorate

(*not* -m-)

comming

Wrong spelling. See **COMING**.

commission

(*not* -m-)

commit

committed, committing, commitment
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

committee

common nouns

See **NOUNS**.

comparative

comparatively (*not* compari-)

**comparative and
superlative**

(i) Use the comparative form of adjectives and adverbs when comparing two:

John is **TALLER** than Tom.

John works **MORE ENERGETICALLY** than Tom.

Use the superlative form when comparing three or more:

John is the **TALLEST** of all the engineers.

John works **THE MOST ENERGETICALLY** of all the engineers.

- (ii) There are two ways of forming the comparative and superlative of adjectives:

- (a) Add -er and -est to short adjectives:

tall	taller	tallest
happy	happier	happiest

- (b) Use more and most with longer adjectives:

dangerous	more dangerous	most dangerous
successful	more successful	most successful

The comparative and superlative forms of adverbs are formed in exactly the same way:

- (c) Short adverbs add -er and -est.

You run **FASTER** than I do.

He runs the **FASTEST** of us all.

- (d) Use more and most with longer adverbs.

Nikki works **MORE**

CONSCIENTIOUSLY than Sarah.

Niamh works **THE MOST**

CONSCIENTIOUSLY of them all.

- (iii) There are three irregular adjectives:

good	better	best
bad	worse	worst

many	more	most
There are four irregular adverbs:		
well	better	best
badly	worse	worst
much	more	most
little	less	least

(iv)

A very common error is to mix the two methods of forming the comparative and the superlative:

more simpler ⑥ simpler ②
more easiest ⑥ easiest ②

(v) Another pitfall is to try to form the comparative and superlative of absolute words like perfect, unique, excellent, complete, ideal. Something is either perfect or it isn't. It can't be more perfect or less perfect, most perfect or least perfect.

**compare to/
compare with**

Both constructions are acceptable but many people still prefer to use 'compare with'.

comparative

Wrong spelling. See **COMPARATIVE**.

competition

competitive, competitively.

compleatly

Wrong spelling. See **COMPLETELY**.

**complement or
compliment?**

COMPLEMENT = that which completes
Half the ship's **COMPLEMENT** were recruited in Norway.

To **COMPLEMENT** = to go well with something

Her outfit was **COMPLEMENTED** by well-chosen accessories.

COMPLIMENT = praise, flattering remarks

To **COMPLIMENT** = to praise.

**complementary or
complimentary?**

Use **COMPLEMENTARY** in the sense of completing a whole:



COMPLEMENTARY medicine

COMPLEMENTARY jobs

Use **COMPLIMENTARY** in two senses:

(a) flattering

(b) free of charge

COMPLIMENTARY remarks

COMPLIMENTARY tickets

completely

complete + ly (*not* completly, completley or compleatly)

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

complex
or complicated?

Both words mean 'made up of many different intricate and confusing aspects'. However, use **COMPLEX** when you mean 'intricate', and **COMPLICATED** when you mean 'difficult to understand'.

compliment

See **COMPLEMENT OR COMPLIMENT?**.

compose/comprise

The report **IS COMPOSED OF** ten sections. (= is made up of)

The report **COMPRISES** ten sections. (= contains)

Never use the construction 'is comprised of'. It is always incorrect grammatically.

comprise

(*not* -ize)

compromise

(*not* -ize)

computer

(*not* -or)

concede

conceive

conceived, conceiving, conceivable

See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

concise

confer

conferred, conferring, conference

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

confidant, confidante
or confident?

A **CONFIDANT** (male or female) or a **CONFIDANTE** (female only) is someone

	to whom one tells one's secrets 'in confidence'.
	CONFIDENT means assured.
connection or connexion?	Both spellings are correct, but the first one is more commonly used.
connoisseur	Used for both men and women.
conscientious	
consist in or consist of?	For Belloc, happiness CONSISTED IN 'laughter and the love of friends'. (consist in = have as its essence) Lunch CONSISTED OF bread, cheese and fruit.
consistent	(<i>not</i> -ant)
consonant	There are 21 consonants in the alphabet, all the letters except for the vowels: bcdfghjklmnpqrstvwxyz Note, however, that y can be both a vowel and a consonant: y is a consonant when it begins a word or a syllable (yolk, beyond); y is a vowel when it sounds like i or e (sly, baby).
contagious or infectious?	Both refer to diseases passed to others. Strictly speaking, CONTAGIOUS means passed by bodily contact, and INFECTIOUS means passed by means of air or water. Used figuratively, the terms are interchangeable: INFECTIOUS laughter, CONTAGIOUS enthusiasm.
contemporary	(<i>not</i> contempory, as often mispronounced) Nowadays, this word is used in two senses:

- (a) happening or living at the same time
(in the past)
- (b) modern, current

Be aware of possible ambiguity if both these meanings are possible in a given context:

Hamlet is being performed in contemporary dress (sixteenth-century or modern?).

contemptible or contemptuous

A person or an action worthy of contempt is **CONTEMPTIBLE**.

A person who shows contempt is **CONTEMPTUOUS**.

continual

continually

continual or continuous?

CONTINUAL means frequently repeated, occurring with short breaks only.

CONTINUOUS means uninterrupted.

contractions

Take care with placing the apostrophe in contractions. It is placed where the letter has been omitted and not where the two words are joined. These happen to coincide in some contractions:

I'd (I would)
they aren't (they are not)
it isn't (it is not)
you hadn't (you had not)
you wouldn't (you would not)
she won't (she will not)
we haven't (we have not)
I shan't (I shall not)

It was common in Jane Austen's time to use two apostrophes in shan't (sha'n't) to show that two sets of letters had been omitted but this is no longer correct today.

control

controlled, controlling

controller

(*not* -or)

convenience	(<i>not</i> -ance)
convenient	conveniently (<i>not</i> conven-)
cord	See CHORD OR CORD? .
corporal punishment	See CAPITAL OR CORPORAL PUBLISHMENT? .
correspond	(<i>not</i> -r-)
correspondence	(<i>not</i> -ance)
correspondent or co-respondent?	A CORRESPONDENT is someone who writes letters. A CO-RESPONDENT is cited in divorce proceedings.
could of	This is incorrect and arises from an attempt to write down what is heard. Write 'could've' in informal contexts and 'could have' in formal ones. I COULD HAVE given you a lift. I COULD'VE given you a lift. Beware also: should of/would of/must of/might of. All are incorrect forms.
couldn't	See CONTRACTIONS .
council or counsel?	A COUNCIL is a board of elected representatives. COUNSEL is advice, also the term used for a barrister representing a client in court.
councillor or counsellor?	A COUNCILLOR is an elected representative. A COUNSELLOR is one who gives professional guidance, such as a study COUNSELLOR , a marriage COUNSELLOR , a debt COUNSELLOR .
counterfeit	This is one of the few exceptions to the IE/EI spelling rule. See IE/EI SPELLING RULE .
courageous	(<i>not</i> -gous) See SOFT C AND SOFT G .

COURSE

course	See COARSE OR COURSE? .
courteous	courteously, courtesy
credible or credulous?	If something is CREDIBLE , it is believable. If someone is CREDULOUS , they are gullible (i.e. too easily taken in).
crisis (singular)	crises (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
criterion (singular)	criteria (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
criticise/criticize	Both spellings are correct.
criticism	This word is frequently misspelt. Remember critic + ism.
cronic	Wrong spelling. See CHRONIC .
crucial	
cry	cried, crying See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
crysanthemum	Wrong spelling. See CHRYSANthemum .
crystal	(<i>not</i> chr-)
cupboard	(<i>not</i> cub-)
curb or kerb	To CURB one's temper means to control or restrain it. A CURB is a restraint (e.g. a curb bit for a horse). A KERB is the edging of a pavement.
curious	
curiosity	(<i>not</i> -ious-)
curly	(<i>not</i> -ey)
currant or current?	A CURRANT is a small dried grape used in cooking. A CURRENT is a steady flow of water, air or electricity. CURRENT can also mean happening at

the present time (as in **CURRENT** affairs,
CURRENT practice).

curriculum (singular) curriculums/curricula (plural)
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

curriculum vitae (abbreviation: CV)

curtain See **CERTAIN OR CURTAIN?**.

TEAMFLY

D

daily

(*not* dayly)

This is an exception to the -y rule.

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iii).

dairy or diary?

We buy our cream at a local **DAIRY**.

Kate writes in her **DIARY** every day.

dangling participles

See **PARTICIPLES**.

dashes

Dashes are used widely in informal notes and letters.

- (i) A dash can be used to attach an afterthought:

I should love to come – that's if I can get the time off.

- (ii) A dash can replace a colon before a list in informal writing:

The thieves took everything – video, television, cassettes, computer, camera, the lot.

- (iii) A dash can precede a summary:

Video, television, cassettes, computer, camera – the thieves took the lot.

- (iv) A pair of dashes can be used like a pair of commas or a pair of brackets around a parenthesis:

Geraldine is – as you know – very shy with strangers.

- (v) A dash can mark a pause before the climax is reached:

There he was at the foot of the stairs – dead.

(vi) Dashes can indicate hesitation in speech:

I – er – don’t – um – know what – what to say.

(vii) Dashes can indicate missing letters or even missing words where propriety or discretion require it:

c – – l (ship of the desert)
Susan L— comes from Exeter.
He swore softly, ‘—— it’.

data (plural)

datum (singular)

Strictly speaking, **DATA** should be used with a plural verb:

The **DATA** have been collected by research students.

You will, however, increasingly see **DATA** used with a singular verb and this use has now become acceptable.

The **DATA** has been collected by research students.

dates

See **NUMBERS** for a discussion of how to set out dates.

deceased or diseased?

DECEASED means dead.

DISEASED means affected by illness or infection.

deceit

(*not* -ie)

See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

deceive

decent or descent?

DECENT means fair, upright, reasonable.

DESCENT means act of coming down, ancestry.

decide

decided, deciding (*not* decied-)

deciet

Wrong spelling. See **DECEIT**.

decieve	Wrong spelling. See DECEIVE .
decision	
décolletage	(<i>not</i> de-)
decrepit	(<i>not</i> -id)
defective or deficient?	DEFECTIVE means not working properly (a DEFECTIVE machine). DEFICIENT means lacking something vital (a diet DEFICIENT in vitamin C).
defer	deferred, deferring, deference See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
deffinite	Wrong spelling. See DEFINITE .
deficient	See DEFECTIVE OR DEFICIENT? .
definate	Wrong spelling. See DEFINITE .
definite	(<i>not</i> -ff-, <i>not</i> -ate)
definitely	
deisel	Wrong spelling. See DIESEL .
delapidated	Wrong spelling. See DILAPIDATED .
delusion	See ALLUSION, DELUSION OR ILLUSION? .
denouement/ dénouement	Both spellings are correct.
dependant or dependent?	The adjective (meaning reliant) is always -ent. She is a widow with five DEPENDENT children. I am absolutely DEPENDENT on a pension. The noun (meaning someone who is dependent) has traditionally been spelt -ant. However, the American practice of writing either -ant or -ent for the noun has now spread here. Either spelling is now considered correct for the noun but

	be aware that some conservative readers would consider this slipshod.
	She has five DEPENDANTS/DEPENDENTS .
descent	See DECENT OR DESCENT? .
describe	(<i>not</i> dis-)
description	(<i>not</i> -scrib-)
desease	Wrong spelling. See DISEASE .
desert or dessert?	A DESERT is sandy. A DESSERT is a pudding.
desiccated	(<i>not</i> dess-)
desirable	(<i>not</i> desireable) See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).
desperate	(<i>not</i> desparate) The word is derived from <i>spes</i> (Latin word for hope). This may help you to remember the e in the middle syllable.
dessert	See DESERT OR DESSERT? .
dessiccated	Wrong spelling. See DESICCATED .
destroy	destroyed, destroying (<i>not</i> dis-) See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
detached	(<i>not</i> detatched)
deter	deterred, deterring See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
deteriorate	(<i>not</i> deteriate, as it is often mispronounced)
deterrent	(<i>not</i> -ant)
develop	developed, developing (<i>not</i> -pp-)
development	(<i>not</i> developement)
device/devise	DEVICE is the noun. A padlock is an intriguing DEVICE .



	DEVISE is the verb. Try to DEVISE a simple burglar alarm.
diagnosis (singular)	diagnoses (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
diagnosis or prognosis?	DIAGNOSIS is the identification of an illness or a difficulty. PROGNOSIS is the forecast of its likely development and effects.
diarrhoea	
diary (singular)	diaries (plural) See PLURALS (iii). See DAIRY OR DIARY? .
dictionary (singular)	dictionaries (plural) (<i>not</i> -nn-) See PLURALS (iii).
didn't	(<i>not</i> did'nt) See CONTRACTIONS .
diesel	(<i>not</i> deisel) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
dietician/dietitian	Both spellings are correct.
differcult	Wrong spelling. See DIFFICULT .
difference	(<i>not</i> -ance)
different	(<i>not</i> -ant)
different from/to/than	'Different from' and 'different to' are now both considered acceptable forms. My tastes are DIFFERENT FROM yours. My tastes are DIFFERENT TO yours. Conservative users would, however, much prefer the preposition 'from' and this is widely used in formal contexts. 'Different than' is acceptable in American English but is not yet fully acceptable in British English.
difficult	(<i>not</i> differcult, <i>not</i> difficalt)

dilapidated	(<i>not</i> delapidated)
dilemma	This word is often used loosely to mean 'a problem'. Strictly speaking it means a difficult choice between two possibilities.
dinghy or dingy?	A DINGHY is a boat (plural – dinghies). See PLURALS (iii). DINGY means dull and drab.
dingo (singular)	dingoes or dingos (plural)
dining or dinning?	dine + ing = dining (as in dining room) din + ing = dinning (noise dinning in ears) See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).
diphtheria	(<i>not</i> diphtheria as it is often mispronounced)
diphthong	(<i>not</i> diphthong as it is often mispronounced)
direct speech	See INVERTED COMMAS .
disagreeable	dis + agree + able
disappear	dis + appear
disappearance	(<i>not</i> -ence)
disappoint	dis + appoint
disapprove	dis + approve
disassociate or dissociate?	Both are correct, but the second is more widely used and approved.
disaster	
disastrous	(<i>not</i> disasterous, as it is often mispronounced)
disc or disk?	Use 'disc' except when referring to computer disks.
disciple	(<i>not</i> disiple)
discipline	
discover or invent?	You DISCOVER something that has been there all the time unknown to you (e.g. a star).



	You INVENT something if you create it for the first time (e.g. a time machine).
discreet or discrete?	You are DISCREET if you can keep secrets and behave diplomatically. Subject areas are DISCRETE if they are quite separate and unrelated.
discrepancy (singular)	discrepancies (plural)
discribe	Wrong spelling. See DESCRIBE .
discribtion	Wrong spelling. See DESCRIPTION .
discription	Wrong spelling. See DESCRIPTION .
discuss	discussed, discussing
discussion	
disease	
diseased	See DECEASED OR DISEASED? .
dishevelled	
disintegrate	(<i>not</i> disintergrate)
disinterested or uninterested?	Careful users would wish to preserve a distinction in meaning between these two words. Use the word DISINTERESTED to mean 'impartial, unselfish, acting for the good of others and not for yourself'. My motives are entirely DISINTERESTED; it is justice I am seeking. Use UNINTERESTED to mean 'bored'. His teachers say he is reluctant to participate and is clearly UNINTERESTED in any activities the school has to offer. Originally, DISINTERESTED was used in this sense (= having no interest in, apathetic), and it is interesting that this meaning is being revived in popular speech.

	Avoid this use in formal contexts, however, for it is widely perceived as being incorrect.
disiple	Wrong spelling. See DISCIPLE .
disk	See DISC OR DISK? .
displace or misplace?	To displace is to move someone or something from its usual place: A DISPLACED hip; a DISPLACED person. To misplace something is to put it in the wrong place (and possibly forget where it is): A MISPLACED apostrophe; MISPLACED kindness.
dissappear	Wrong spelling. See DISAPPEAR .
dissappoint	Wrong spelling. See DISAPPOINT .
dissapprove	Wrong spelling. See DISAPPROVE .
dissatisfied	(dis + satisfied)
dissociate	See DISASSOCIATE OR DISSOCIATE? .
distroy	Wrong spelling. See DESTROY .
divers or diverse	The first is rarely used nowadays except jokingly or in mistake for the second. DIVERS means 'several', 'of varying types': DIVERS reference books. DIVERSE means 'very different': DIVERSE opinions, DIVERSE interests.
does or dose?	DOES he take sugar? He DOES. (pronounced 'duz'). Take a DOSE of cough mixture every three hours.
doesn't	(<i>not</i> does'nt) See CONTRACTIONS.

domino (singular)

dominoes (plural)

See **PLURALS** (iv).

don't

(*not* do't)

See **CONTRACTIONS**.

dose

See **DOES OR DOSE?**.

double meaning

See **AMBIGUITY**.

double negatives

The effect of two negatives is to cancel each other out. This is sometimes done deliberately and can be effective:

I am not ungenerous. (= I am very generous.)

He is not unintelligent. (= He is quite intelligent.)

Frequently, however, it is not intentional and the writer ends up saying the opposite of what is meant:

I haven't had no tea. (= I have had tea.)

You don't know nothing. (= You know something.)

Be particularly careful with 'barely', 'scarcely', 'hardly'. These have a negative force.

I wasn't **SCARCELY** awake when you rang. (= I was very awake.)

Be careful too with constructions like this:

I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't come.

Say either: I wouldn't be surprised if he came.

or: I would be surprised if he didn't come.

Sometimes writers put so many negatives in a sentence that the meaning becomes too complicated to unravel:

Mr Brown denied vehemently that it was

unlikely that no one would come to the concert.

Does Mr Brown think that the concert will be popular or not?

Rewrite as either:

Mr Brown was certain the concert would be well attended.

Or: Mr Brown feared that no one would come to the concert.

doubling rule

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (i) and (iv).

doubt

(*not* dout)

The word is derived from the Latin word *dubitare*, to doubt. It may help you to remember why the silent b is there.

Down's Syndrome

(*not* Downe's)

downstairs

(one word)

draft or draught?

A **DRAFT** is a first or subsequent attempt at a piece of written work before it is finished.

A **DRAUGHT** is a current of cool air in a room.

One also refers to a **DRAUGHT** of ale, a game of **DRAUGHTS** and a boat having a shallow **DRAUGHT**.

drawers or draws?

DRAWS is a verb.

She **DRAWS** very well for a young child.

DRAWERS is a noun.

The **DRAWERS** of the sideboard are very stiff.

dreamed/dreamt

Both spellings are correct.

drier or dryer?

DRIER is generally used for the comparative form (**DRIER** = more dry).

DRYER is generally used for a drying machine (hair **DRYER**, clothes **DRYER**).



However, both spellings are interchangeable.

drunkenness

drunken + ness

dryness

(exception to the -y rule)

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iii).

dual or duel?

DUAL means two (e.g. **DUAL** controls, **DUAL** carriageway).

DUEL means fight or contest.

duchess

(*not* dutchess)

due to/owing to

Strictly speaking, 'due to' should refer to a noun:

His *absence* was **DUE TO** sickness. (noun)

The *delay* was **DUE TO** leaves on the line. (noun)

'Owing to', strictly speaking, should refer to a verb:

The march *was cancelled* **OWING TO** the storm. (verb)

OWING TO an earlier injury, he *limped* badly. (verb)

However, in recent years, the use of 'due to' where traditionally 'owing to' would be required has become widespread.

Nevertheless, some careful writers continue to preserve the distinction and you may wish to do so too in a formal context.

duel

See **DUAL OR DUEL?**

duly

(*not* duely)

This is an exception to the magic -e rule.

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

dutchess

Wrong spelling. See **DUCHESS**.

dwelled/dwelt

Both spellings are correct.

dyeing or dying?

DYEING comes from the verb to dye.

She was **DYEING** all her vests green.

DYING comes from the verb to die.

She cursed him with her **DYING** breath.

E

earnest or Ernest?	EARNEST = serious and sincere ERNEST = masculine first name																						
echo (singular)	echoes (plural) See PLURALS (iv).																						
economic or economical?	ECONOMIC = related to the economy of the country, or industry or business ECONOMICAL = thrifty, avoiding extravagance																						
ecstasy (singular)	ecstasies (plural) See PLURALS (iv).																						
Ecstasy	illegal drug																						
eczema																							
-ed or -t?	These can be either: <table><tr><td>burned</td><td>burnt</td></tr><tr><td>dreamed</td><td>dreamt</td></tr><tr><td>dwelled</td><td>dwelt</td></tr><tr><td>kneeled</td><td>knelt</td></tr><tr><td>leaned</td><td>leant</td></tr><tr><td>leaped</td><td>leapt</td></tr><tr><td>learned</td><td>learnt</td></tr><tr><td>smelled</td><td>smelt</td></tr><tr><td>spelled</td><td>spelt</td></tr><tr><td>spilled</td><td>spilt</td></tr><tr><td>spoiled</td><td>spoilt</td></tr></table>	burned	burnt	dreamed	dreamt	dwelled	dwelt	kneeled	knelt	leaned	leant	leaped	leapt	learned	learnt	smelled	smelt	spelled	spelt	spilled	spilt	spoiled	spoilt
burned	burnt																						
dreamed	dreamt																						
dwelled	dwelt																						
kneeled	knelt																						
leaned	leant																						
leaped	leapt																						
learned	learnt																						
smelled	smelt																						
spelled	spelt																						
spilled	spilt																						
spoiled	spoilt																						
erie or eyrie?	EERIE = strange, weird, disturbing EYRIE = an eagle's nest																						
effect	See AFFECT OR EFFECT? .																						
effective, effectual or efficient?	EFFECTIVE = able to produce a result an EFFECTIVE cure an EFFECTIVE speech																						

EFFECTUAL = likely to be completely successful:

EFFECTUAL prayer

EFFECTUAL legislation

EFFICIENT = working well without wasting time, money or effort:

an **EFFICIENT** secretary

an **EFFICIENT** engine

ei/ie spelling rule

Remember the jingle:

i before **e**

except after **c**

or when sounded like **a**

as in 'neighbour' and 'weigh'.

Here are some examples which follow the rule. There are plenty of others.

ie

achieve

believe

chief

field

friend

hygiene

priest

relief

retrieve

shield

shriek

thief

ei after c

ceiling

conceited

conceive

perceive

receive

ei sounding like a

eight

reign

reindeer

skein

sleigh

vein

18 exceptions

caffeine

codeine

counterfeit

either

Fahrenheit

foreign

forfeit

heifer

height

leisure

neither

protein

seize

sheikh

sovereign

surfeit

weir

weird



Proper names (e.g. of people or countries) don't follow the rule: Deirdre, Keith, Neil, Sheila, Madeira, etc.

eighth

(*notice* -hth)

See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.

either

(*not* -ie-) An exception to the EI/IE SPELLING RULE.

either ... or

- (i) Take care with singular and plural verbs.

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Either Jack or Tom *was* there.
(singular verb to match Jack (singular) and Tom (singular))

Either Jack or his brothers *were* there.
(plural verb to match 'brothers' (plural) which is closer to it than 'Jack' (singular))

Either his brothers or Jack *was* there.
(singular verb this time because 'Jack' (singular) is closer to the verb than 'brothers')

- (ii) Be careful to place each part of the 'either ... or' construction correctly.
- ⑥ I have decided either that I have to build an extension or I have to move.
- ② I have decided that either I have to build an extension or I have to move.

In the example above, there are these two possibilities:

I have to build an extension.

I have to move.

'Either' precedes the first one and 'or' precedes the second.

The second one could be shortened:

I have decided that either I have to build an extension or (I have to) move.

- ② I have decided that either I have to build an extension or move.

It is important that the two constructions following 'either' and 'or' should be parallel ones:

either meat or fish
either green or red
either to love or to hate
either with malice or with kindness.

If the second construction is shortened to avoid repetition, this is fine. The missing words are obvious and can be supplied readily.

elf (singular)

elves (plural)

See **PLURALS** (v).

eligible or legible?

ELIGIBLE = suitably qualified

LEGIBLE = able to be read

eloquent

elude

See **ALLUDE OR ELUDE?**.

embargo (singular)

embargoes (plural)

See **PLURALS** (iv).

embarrass

embarrassed, embarrassing (*not* -r-)

embarrassment

emend

See **AMEND OR EMEND?**.

emergency (singular)

emergencies (plural)

See **PLURALS** (iv).

emigrant or immigrant?

An **EMIGRANT** leaves his or her country to live in another.

An **IMMIGRANT** moves into a country to live permanently.

eminent or imminent? **EMINENT** = famous
IMMINENT = about to happen

emperor

emphasise/emphasize Both spellings are correct.

encyclopaedia/encyclopedia Both spellings are correct.

endeavour

end stops There are three end stops: a full stop (.), an exclamation mark (!), and a question mark (?).

Use a full stop to end a statement.

There are five eggs in the fridge.

Use an exclamation mark with a command or an exclamation.

Get out!

Use a question mark to end a question.

Where do you live?

See **EXCLAMATION MARKS**.

FULL STOPS.

QUESTION MARKS.

endings See **ADDING ENDINGS**.

enemy (singular) enemies (plural)
See **PLURALS** (iv).

enormity This means a grave sin or a crime, or describes something that is a grave sin or a crime or a disaster on a huge scale.

We gradually realised the full **ENORMITY** of the tragedy.

It is often used in popular speech to mean 'enormousness', 'hugeness', 'immensity'. This should be avoided in a formal context.

enquiry or inquiry?	Both spellings are correct and there is no difference in meaning. British English favours the first and American English the second. Some writers reserve the first for a general request for information and the second for a formal investigation, but this is by no means necessary.
enrol	enrolled, enrolling (British English – enrol; American English – enroll)
enrolment	(British English – enrolment; American English – enrollment)
ensure or insure?	to ENSURE = to make sure to INSURE = to arrange for financial compensation in the case of loss, injury, damage or death
enthusiasm	(<i>not</i> -ou-)
enthusiastic	
envelop	enveloped, enveloping, envelopment (stress on second syllable)
envelope (singular)	envelopes (plural) (stress on third syllable)
environment	(<i>not</i> enviroment)
epigram or epitaph?	EPIGRAM = a short witty saying EPITAPH = an inscription on a tombstone
equip	equipped, equipping, equipment See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
Ernest	See EARNEST OR ERNEST? .
erratum (singular)	errata (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
erring	err + ing (<i>not</i> -r-)
erupt	(<i>not</i> -rr-)

especially or specially? The two words are very close in meaning and sometimes overlap. However, use these exemplar sentences as a guide to exclusive uses:

I bought the car **ESPECIALLY** for you (= for you alone).

We are awaiting a **SPECIALLY** commissioned report (= for a special purpose).

estuary (singular)

estuaries (plural)

See **PLURALS** (iv).

etc.

(*not* e.t.c. or ect.)

- (i) etc. is an abbreviation of the Latin *et cetera* which means 'and other things'. It is therefore incorrect to write 'and etc.'.
- (ii) Avoid using 'etc.' in formal writing. Either list all the items indicated by the vague and lazy 'etc.', or introduce the given selection with a phrase like 'including', 'such as' or 'for example'.

eventually

eventual + ly (*not* eventually)

exaggerate

(*not* exagerate)

examination

exhausted

Wrong spelling. See **EXHAUSTED**.

excellent

(*not* -ant)

except

See **ACCEPT OR EXCEPT?**.

**exceptionable or
exceptional?**

EXCEPTIONABLE = open to objection
EXCEPTIONAL = unusual

exercice

Wrong spelling. See **EXERCISE**.

excite

excited, exciting, excitement
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

exclaim

exclaimed, exclaiming

exclamation	(<i>not</i> -claim-)
exclamation mark	Use an exclamation mark: (i) with exclamations Ouch! Oh! Hey! (ii) with vehement commands Stop thief! Help! Jump! See COMMANDS .
exercise	(<i>not</i> excercise)
exhausted	(<i>not</i> exausted)
exhausting or exhaustive?	EXHAUSTING = tiring EXHAUSTIVE = thorough, fully comprehensive
exhibition	
exhilarated	(<i>not</i> -er-)
expedition	(<i>not</i> expidition) The second syllable is derived from the Latin word <i>pes, pedis</i> (foot, of the foot). This may help you to remember -ped-. The words pedal, pedestrian, pedometer all come from this same Latin root.
expendable	(<i>not</i> -ible)
expense	
expensive	
experience	(<i>not</i> expierience, <i>not</i> -ance) The second syllable is derived from the Latin word <i>per</i> , meaning through. (Experience is what we gain from going 'through' something.)
explain	explained, explaining
explanation	(<i>not</i> -plain-)
explicit or implicit?	EXPLICIT = stated clearly and openly IMPLICIT = implied but not actually stated

EXPENSE

expense	Wrong spelling. See EXPENSE .
expensive	Wrong spelling. See EXPENSIVE .
extremely	Wrong spelling. See EXTREMELY .
extraordinary	extra + ordinary
extravagance	(<i>not</i> -ence)
extravagant	(<i>not</i> -ent)
extremely	extreme + ly
extrordnary	Wrong spelling. See EXTRAORDINARY .
exuberance	(<i>not</i> -ence)
exuberant	(<i>not</i> -ent)
eyrie	See EERIE OR EYRIE? .

F

facetious	(All five vowels occur in this word once only and in alphabetical order.)
facilities or faculties?	FACILITIES = amenities FACULTIES = mental or physical aptitudes
facinate	Wrong spelling. See FASCINATE .
factory (singular)	factories (plural) See PLURALS (iv).
Fahrenheit	(<i>not</i> -ie-) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
faithfully	faithful + ly See SINCERELY for guidelines when punctuating a complimentary close to a letter (fully blocked and also traditional layout).
familiar	(<i>not</i> fammiliar)
family (singular)	families (plural) (<i>not</i> -mm-)
farther or further?	Both words can be used to refer to physical distance although some writers prefer to keep 'farther' for this purpose. I can walk FARTHER than you. I can walk FURTHER than you. FURTHER is used in a figurative sense: Nothing was FURTHER from my mind. FURTHER is also used in certain expressions: FURTHER education until FURTHER notice
fascinate	(<i>not</i> facinate)

FAVOURITE

favourite	(<i>not</i> -ate)
feasible	(<i>not</i> -able)
February	<i>Notice</i> the word has four syllables and not three as it is often mispronounced.
fewer or less?	FEWER is the comparative form of 'few'. It is used with plural nouns: FEWER vegetables FEWER responsibilities FEWER children LESS is the comparative form of 'little'. It is used in the sense of 'a small amount' rather than 'a fewer number of': LESS enthusiasm LESS sugar LESS petrol LESS THAN is used with number alone, and expressions of time and distance: LESS THAN a thousand LESS THAN ten seconds LESS THAN four miles It is considered incorrect to use 'less' instead of 'fewer' although such confusion is frequent in popular speech. As a rule of thumb, remember: FEWER = not so many LESS = not so much
fiancé or fiancée?	FIANCÉ = masculine FIANCÉE = feminine <i>Note</i> the accent in both words.
fictional or fictitious?	FICTIONAL = invented for the purpose of fiction, related to fiction FICTIONAL texts FICTIONAL writing

FICTITIOUS = false, not true

a **FICTITIOUS** report

a **FICTITIOUS** name and address

Either word can be used to describe a character in a work of fiction: a **FICTITIONAL** or **FICTITIOUS** character.

fiery (*not* firey)

fifteen fifteenth

fifth

fifty fiftieth

finally final + ly (*not* -aly)

finish finished, finishing (*not* -nn-)

firey Wrong spelling. See **FIERY**.

flamingo (singular) flamingoes or flamingos (plural)

flammable or **inflammable** Both words mean 'easily bursting into flame'. People often think that inflammable is the negative form but the prefix 'in' here means 'into'.

The opposite of these two words is non-flammable or non-inflammable.

flee they fled, have fled, are fleeing

flexible (*not* -able)

flu or flue? **FLU** = influenza (*not* 'flu although an abbreviation)

FLUE = a pipe or duct for smoke and gases

fluorescent (*not* flourescent)

fly they flew, have flown, are flying

focus focused or focussed (both correct)
focusing or focussing (both correct)

for- or fore-? A useful rule of thumb is to remember the usual meaning of the prefixes:



FOR- = not, or something negative
(forbid, forfeit, forget, forsake)

FORE- = before
(foreboding, forecast, forefathers)

See individual entries for

FORBEAR OR FOREBEAR?

FOREWORD OR FORWARD?

forbear or forebear?

FORBEAR (stress on second syllable) =
restrain oneself

FOREBEAR or **FOREBEAR** (stress on first
syllable) = ancestor

forbid

forbad or forbade (both correct),
forbidden, forbidding

forcible

(*not* -able)

forecast

(*not* forcast)

forefend/forfend

Either spelling can be used.

foregather/forgather

Either spelling can be used.

forego/forgo

Either spelling can be used.

foreign

An exception to the rule.

See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

foreign plurals

Some foreign words in English have retained their foreign plurals. Some have both foreign and English plurals. Take care, however, with the words that are asterisked below because the foreign plural of these is used in a different sense from the English plural. Check these words under individual entries for the distinction in meaning.

<i>singular -a</i>	<i>foreign plural</i>	<i>English plural</i>
alga	algae	—
antenna	antennae	antennas*
formula	formulae	formulas*
larva	larvae	—
nebula	nebulae	nebulas
vertebra	vertebrae	vertebras

singular -eau foreign plural English plural
-eu

adieu	adieux	adieux
bureau	bureaux	bureaus
chateau	chateaux	—
milieu	milieux	milieus
plateau	plateaux	plateaus
tableau	tableaux	—

singular -ex
-ix

appendix	appendices	appendixes*
index	indices	indexes*
matrix	matrices	matrixes
vortex	vortices	vortexes

singular -is

analysis	analyses	—
axis	axes	—
crisis	crises	—
diagnosis	diagnoses	—
hypothesis	hypotheses	—
parenthesis	parentheses	—
synopsis	synopses	—

singular -o

graffito	graffiti	—
libretto	libretti	librettos
tempo	tempi	tempos
virtuoso	virtuosi	virtuosos

singular -on

automaton	automata	automatons
criterion	criteria	—
ganglion	ganglia	ganglions
phenomenon	phenomena	—

singular -um

aquarium	aquaria	aquariums
bacterium	bacteria	—
curriculum	curricula	curriculums
datum	data	—
erratum	errata	—
memorandum	memoranda	memorandums
millennium	millennia	millenniums
referendum	referenda	referendums
stratum	strata	—
ultimatum	ultimata	ultimatums



<i>singular -um</i>	<i>foreign plural</i>	<i>English plural</i>
ovum	ova	–
<i>singular -us</i>		
bacillus	bacilli	–
cactus	cacti	cactuses
fungus	fungi	funguses
hippopotamus	hippopotami	hippopotamuses
nucleus	nuclei	–
radius	radii	radiuses
stimulus	stimuli	–
syllabus	syllabi	syllabuses
terminus	termini	terminuses
tumulus	tumuli	–

The Hebrew plural -im is found in these three words:

cherub	cherubim	cherubs
kibbutz	kibbutzim	–
seraph	seraphim	–

This list is by no means comprehensive but it does contain most of the words that are commonly used.

foresake

Wrong spelling. See **FORSAKE**.

forest

(*not* forrest)

foreword or forward?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

The Poet Laureate had written a **FOREWORD** for the new anthology.
I am looking **FORWARD** to the holiday.
Will you please **FORWARD** this letter?

forfeit

(*not* -ie-, exception to the rule)
See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

forfend

See **FOREFEND/FORFEND**.

forgather

See **FOREGATHER/FORGATHER**.

forgo

See **FOREGO/FORGO**.

formally or formerly?

FORMALLY = in a formal manner
FORMERLY = previously, at an earlier time

formula	(singular) There are two plurals. Use formulae in a scientific or mathematical context. Use formulas in all other cases.
forrest	Wrong spelling. See FOREST .
forsake	(<i>not</i> fore-) See FOR OR FORE? .
fortunately	fortunate + ly (<i>not</i> -atly) See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
forty	(<i>not</i> fourty)
forward	See FOREWORD OR FORWARD? .
frantic	
frantically	frantic + ally (<i>not</i> frantically)
freind	Wrong spelling. See FRIEND .
frequent	(<i>not</i> -ant) Use as an adjective (stress on first syllable): There were FREQUENT interruptions. Use as a verb (stress on second syllable): They FREQUENT the most terrible pubs.
fresco (singular)	frescoes or frescos (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
friend	(<i>not</i> -ei-)
frieze	(<i>not</i> -ei-) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
frighten	frightened, frightening (<i>not</i> frightend, frightning)
frolic	frolicked, frolicking, frolicsome See SOFT C AND SOFT G .
fuchsia	(named after Leonhard Fuchs, German botanist)

-FUL

-ful	When full is used as an ending to a word, it is always spelt -ful: beautiful careful wonderful hopeful, etc.
fulfil	fulfilled, fulfilling, fulfilment See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
full stops	See END STOPS . See COMMAS (b).
fungus (singular)	fungi or funguses (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
further	See FARTHER OR FURTHER? .
fuschia	Wrong spelling. See FUCHSIA .

G

gaiety	gay + ety – an exception to the y rule See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
gaily	gay + ly – an exception to the y rule See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
gallop	galloped, galloping (<i>not</i> -pp-) See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
ganglion (singular)	ganglia or ganglions (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
gaol	An alternative spelling is 'jail'.
garage	
gastly	Wrong spelling. See GHASTLY .
gateau (singular)	gateaus or gateaux (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
gauge	(<i>not</i> guage)
genealogical	(<i>not</i> geneo-)
generosity	(<i>not</i> -ous-)
generous	
get	they get, have got, are getting
ghastly	(<i>not</i> gastly)
gipsy/gypsy	Both spellings are correct. gipsies or gypsies (plural) See PLURALS (iii).
glamorous	(<i>not</i> -our-)
glamour	
good will or goodwill?	Always write as one word when referring to the prestige and trading value of a business.

He bought the **GOODWILL** for five thousand pounds.

Use either two words or one word when referring to general feelings of kindness and support.

As a gesture of **GOOD WILL**, she cancelled the fine.

gorgeous

(*not* -gous)

See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

gorilla or guerilla?

A **GORILLA** is an animal.

A **GUERILLA** is a revolutionary fighter.

gossip

gossiped, gossiping (*not* -pp)

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

gourmand or gourmet?

A **GOURMAND** is greedy and over-indulges where fine food is concerned. A **GOURMET** is a connoisseur of fine food.

government

(*not* goverment as it is often mispronounced)

governor

(*not* -er)

gradual

gradually

gradual + ly (*not* gradully)

graffiti

This is increasingly used in a general sense (like the word 'writing') and its plural force is forgotten when it comes to matching it with a verb:

There *was* **GRAFFITI** all over the wall.

A few conservative writers would like a plural verb (There were **GRAFFITI** all over the wall).

graffito (singular)

graffiti (plural)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

grammar	(<i>not</i> -er)
gramophone	(<i>not</i> grama-)
grandad/granddad	Both spellings are correct.
grandchild	
granddaughter	
grandfather	
grandma	
grandmother	
grandparent	
grandson	
grate or great?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: The fire was burning brightly in the GRATE . GRATE the potato coarsely. Christopher Wren was a GREAT architect.
grateful	(<i>not</i> grateful)
grief	(<i>not</i> -ei-)
grievance	(<i>not</i> -ence)
grievous	(<i>not</i> -ious)
grotto (singular)	grottoes or grottos (plural)
guage	Wrong spelling. See GAUGE.
guarantee	
guardian	
guess	
guest	
guttural	(<i>not</i> -er-)

H

hadn't	(<i>not</i> had'nt)
haemorrhage	(<i>not</i> -rh-)
half (singular)	halves (plural) See PLURALS (v).
halo (singular)	haloes or halos (plural) See PLURALS (iv).
handkerchief (singular)	handkerchiefs (plural) (<i>not</i> -nk-) See PLURALS (v).
hanged or hung?	People are HANGED . Things like clothes and pictures are HUNG .
happen	happened, happening (<i>not</i> -nn-)
harass	(<i>not</i> -rr-)
hardly	See DOUBLE NEGATIVES .
hasn't	(<i>not</i> has'nt)
haven't	(<i>not</i> have'nt)
headquarters	(<i>not</i> headquaters)
hear or here?	You HEAR with your ear. Use HERE to indicate place: Come over HERE .
heard or herd?	We HEARD their voices outside. We photographed the HERD of deer.
heifer	See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
height	See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
heinous	See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
herd	See HEARD OR HERD? .

here	See HEAR OR HERE? .
hero (singular)	heroes (plural) See PLURALS (iv).
heroin or heroine?	HEROIN is a drug. A HEROINE is a female hero.
hers	No apostrophe is needed. This is mine; this is HERS . HERS has a yellow handle.
hiccough or hiccup?	Both words are pronounced 'hiccup' and either spelling can be used. The second spelling (hiccup) is more usual.
hiccup	hiccuped, hiccuping (<i>not</i> -pp-)
hieroglyphics	
high-tech or hi-tec?	Both spellings are correct for the adjective derived from high technology: A HI-TEC factory A HIGH-TECH computer system Without the hyphen, each word can be used as a noun replacing 'high technology': A generation familiar with HIGH TECH The latest development in HI TEC
hindrance	(<i>not</i> hinderance)
hippopotamus (singular)	hippopotami or hippopotamuses (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
historic or historical?	HISTORIC means famous in history, memorable, or likely to go down in recorded history: a HISTORIC meeting HISTORICAL means existing in the past or representing something that could have happened in the past:

a **HISTORICAL** novel

a **HISTORICAL** fact

Note It would not be wrong to say or write *an* historic meeting, *an* historical novel, *an* historical fact. However, this usage of *an* before words like hotel, historic and historical is becoming much less common, now that the h beginning these words is usually voiced.

hoard or horde?

To **HOARD** is to save something in a secret place.

A **HOARD** is a secret store.

A **HORDE** is a large group of people, insects or animals.

hoarse or horse?

HOARSE means croaky, sore or rough (a **HOARSE** whisper).

HORSE is an animal.

hole or whole?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

She ate the **WHOLE** cake by herself.

You have a **HOLE** in your sock.

**homeopathy/
homeopathy**

Both spellings are correct.

honest

(*not* onnist or honist)

honorary

(*Note*: this word has four syllables not three.)

An **HONORARY** secretary of an association is one who works voluntarily and receives no payment.

honour

honourable

hoof (singular)

hoofs or hooves (plural)

See **PLURALS** (v).

hoping or hopping?

hope + ing = hoping

hop + ing = hopping

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (i) and (ii).

horde

See **HOARD OR HORDE?**.

horrible	(<i>not</i> -able)
horse	See HOARSE OR HORSE? .
human or humane?	HUMAN beings are naturally competitive. There must be a more HUMANE way of slaughtering animals.
humour	humorous (<i>not</i> humourous) humourless
hundred	(<i>not</i> hundered)
hung	See HANGED OR HUNG? .
hygiene	(<i>not</i> -ei-) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
hyper- or hypo-?	The prefix 'hyper' comes from a Greek word meaning 'over', 'beyond'. Hence we have words like these: hyperactive (= abnormally active) hypermarket (= a very large self-service store) hypersensitive (= unusually sensitive) The prefix 'hypo' comes from a Greek word meaning 'under'. Hence we have words like these: hypochondria (the melancholy associated with obsession with one's health was originally believed to originate in the organs beneath the ribs) hypodermic (= under the skin)
hypercritical or hypocritical?	HYPERCRITICAL = excessively critical HYPOCRITICAL = disguising one's true nature under a pretence of being better than you really are See HYPER- OR HYPO-? .
hyperthermia or hypothermia?	HYPERTHERMIA = having an abnormally high body temperature HYPOTHERMIA = having an abnormally low body temperature See HYPER- OR HYPO-? .

hyperventilate or hypoventilate

HYPERVENTILATE = to breathe at an abnormally rapid rate

HYPOVENTILATE = to breathe at an abnormally slow rate

See **HYPER-** OR **HYPO-**?

hyphens

- (i) Hyphens are used to indicate word-breaks where there is not space to complete a word at the end of a line.

Take care to divide the word at an appropriate point between syllables so that your reader is not confused and can continue smoothly from the first part of the word to the second part.

There are dictionaries of hyphenation available that will indicate sensible places to break words. They don't always agree with each other! You will also notice a difference in practice between British English and American English.

Increasingly, however, the trend is towards American English practice, i.e. being guided by the way the word is pronounced. Break the word in such a way as to preserve the overall pronunciation as far as possible. It is really a matter of common sense. For this reason you will avoid breaking:

father	into	fat-her
legend	into	leg-end
therapist	into	the-rapist
manslaughter	into	mans-laughter
notable	into	not-able
		and so on!

Note: that the hyphen should be placed at the end of the first line (to indicate that the word is to be continued). It is not repeated at the beginning of the next.

The children shouted enthusiastically as they raced towards the sea.

If you are breaking a word that is already hyphenated, break it at the existing hyphen:

Both my parents are extremely absent-minded.

Breaking a word always makes it look temporarily unfamiliar. You will notice that in printed books for very young readers word-breaks are always carefully avoided. Ideally, you also will try to avoid them. Anticipate how much space a word requires at the end of a line and start a new line if necessary. Whatever happens, avoid breaking a word very close to its beginning or its end, and never break a one-syllabled word.

- (ii) Hyphens are used to join compound numbers between 21 and 99:

twenty-one	twenty-five
fifty-five	fifty-fifth
ninety-nine	ninety-ninth

Hyphens are also used to join fractions when they are written as words:

three-quarters
five-ninths

- (iii) Hyphens are used to join compound words so that they become one word:

my son-in-law
a twenty-pound note
her happy-go-lucky smile

You will sometimes need to check in a dictionary whether a word is



hyphenated or not. Sometimes words written separately in a ten-year-old dictionary will be hyphenated in a more modern one; sometimes words hyphenated in an older dictionary will now be written as one word.

Is it washing machine or washing-machine, wash-basin or washbasin, print-out or printout?

Such words need to be checked individually.

- (iv) Hyphens are used with some prefixes:

co-author, ex-wife, anti-censorship

Check individual words in a dictionary
If you are in doubt.

Always use a hyphen when you are using a prefix before a word that begins with a capital letter:

pro-British, anti-Christian, un-American

Sometimes a hyphen is used for the sake of clarity. There is a difference in meaning between the words in these pairs:

re-cover and recover

re-form and reform

co-respondent and correspondent

- (v) Hyphens are also used to indicate a range of figures or dates:

There were 12 - 20 people in the room.

He was killed in the 1914 - 18 war.

hypocrisy

(*not* -asy)

hypocrite

hypocritical

See HYPERCRITICAL OR HYPOCRITICAL?.

hypothermia

See HYPERTHERMIA OR HYPOTHERMIA?.

hypothesis (singular)

hypotheses (plural)
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

hypoventilate

See **HYPERVENTILATE OR HYPOVENTILATE?**.

TEAMFLY

I/me/myself

These three words are pronouns and cause a great deal of confusion.

- (i) Most people use the pronoun 'I' correctly when it is used on its own:

I love cats.

I like chocolate.

I mow the lawn every Sunday.

I am trying to lose weight.

I have two sisters.

Confusion generally arises with phrases like 'my husband and I' and 'my husband and me'. Which should it be?

The simplest method is to break the sentence into two and see whether 'I' or 'me' sound right:

My husband likes chocolate.

I like chocolate.

MY HUSBAND AND I like chocolate.

- (ii) Most people use the pronoun 'me' correctly when it is used on its own:

The burglar threatened **ME**.

It was given to **ME**.

Once again confusion arises when a pair is involved. The advice remains the same. Break the sentence into two and see whether 'I' or 'me' sounds right:

The burglar threatened my husband.

The burglar threatened **ME**.

The burglar threatened **MY HUSBAND AND ME**.

It was given to my husband.
It was given to **ME**.
It was given to **MY HUSBAND AND ME**.

(iii) The pronoun 'myself' has two distinct functions.

- It can be used in constructions like this where it is essential to the sense:

I cut **MYSELF** yesterday.
I did it by **MYSELF**.

- It can be used to help emphasise a point. In these cases, it can be omitted without changing the overall sense:

I'll wrap the parcel **MYSELF**.
MYSELF, I would disagree.

'Myself' should never be used as a substitute for 'I' or 'me'.

- ⑥ My friend and myself had a wonderful time in Austria.
- ② My friend and I had a wonderful time.
- ⑥ They presented my brother and myself with a silver cup.
- ② They presented my brother and me with a silver cup.
- ⑥ This is from Henry and myself.
- ② This is from Henry and me.

See **-ABLE/-IBLE**.

-ible

idea or ideal?

Bristolians have particular difficulty distinguishing between these two because of the intrusive Bristol 'I'. These exemplar sentences should help:

Your **IDEA** is brilliant.
This is an **IDEAL** spot for a picnic.
His **IDEALS** prevent him from eating meat.

IDIOSYNCRASY

idiosyncrasy	(<i>not</i> -cy)
-ie-	See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.
illegible or ineligible?	ILLEGIBLE = not able to be read INELIGIBLE = not properly qualified
illusion	See ALLUSION, DELUSION OR ILLUSION?.
imaginary or imaginative?	IMAGINARY = existing only in the imagination IMAGINATIVE = showing or having a vivid imagination, being creative, original
information	Wrong spelling. See INFORMATION .
immediately	(<i>not</i> immeadiately or immediatly)
immense	immensely (<i>not</i> immensely)
immigrant	See EMIGRANT OR IMMIGRANT?.
imminent	See EMINENT, OR IMMINENT?.
immoral	See AMORAL OR IMMORAL?.
implicit	See EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT?.
imply or infer?	To IMPLY something is to hint at it: She IMPLIED that there were strong moral objections to his appointment but didn't say so in so many words. To INFER is to draw a conclusion: Am I to INFER from what you say that he is unsuitable for the post?
impossible	(<i>not</i> -able)
imposter/impostor	Both spellings are correct. The second form (-or) is, however, more common.
impractical or impracticable?	IMPRACTICAL = could be done but not worth doing IMPRACTICABLE = incapable of being done

incidentally	incidental + ly (<i>not</i> incidently)
incredible	(<i>not</i> -able)
indefensible	(<i>not</i> -able)
indelible	(<i>not</i> -able)
independence	(<i>not</i> -ance)
independent	(<i>not</i> -ant)
index (singular)	indexes or indices (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS . See INDEXES OR INDICES? .
indexes or indices?	Both are acceptable plural forms of 'index' but they are used differently. Use INDEXES to refer to alphabetical lists of references in books. Use INDICES in mathematical, economic and technical contexts.
indirect speech/ reported speech	Unlike direct speech where the words actually spoken are enclosed within inverted commas, indirect speech requires no inverted commas. <i>Direct:</i> 'I am exhausted,' said Sheila. <i>Indirect:</i> Sheila said that she was exhausted. <i>Note</i> how direct questions and commands become straightforward statements when they are reported in indirect speech. A full stop at the end is sufficient. <i>Direct:</i> 'What is your name?' Mr Brown asked the new boy. <i>Indirect:</i> Mr Brown asked the new boy his name. <i>Direct:</i> 'Fire!' commanded the officer. <i>Indirect:</i> The officer commanded his men to fire.
indispensable	(<i>not</i> -ible)

individual

(five syllables)

This noun should correctly be used to distinguish one person from the rest of a group or community:

the rights of the **INDIVIDUAL** in society

Informally it is also used in the sense of 'person':

an untrustworthy **INDIVIDUAL**

Avoid this use in formal contexts.

industrial or industrious?

INDUSTRIAL = associated with
manufacturing

INDUSTRIOUS = hard-working

ineffective or ineffectual?

INEFFECTIVE = not producing the
desired effect

an **INEFFECTIVE** speech

INEFFECTUAL = not capable of
producing the desired effect.

an **INEFFECTUAL** speaker

ineligible

See **ILLEGIBLE OR INELIGIBLE?**.

inexhaustible

in fact

(two words)

infectious

See **CONTAGIOUS OR INFECTIOUS?**.

infer

See **IMPLY OR INFER?**. See also next entry.

infer

inferred, inferring, inference

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

inflammable

See **FLAMMABLE OR INFLAMMABLE?**.

See also next entry.

inflammable or inflammatory?

INFLAMMABLE = easily bursting into
flames

INFLAMMATORY = tending to arouse
violent feelings.

information

(*not* im-)

in front	two words (<i>not</i> frount)
ingenious or ingenuous?	INGENIOUS = skilful, inventive, original INGENUOUS = innocent, unsophisticated
inhuman or inhumane?	INHUMAN = lacking all human qualities INHUMANE = lacking compassion and kindness
innocent	innocence
innocuous	
innuendo (singular)	innuendoes or innuendos (plural) See PLURALS (iv).
inoculate	(<i>not</i> -nn-)
inquiry	See ENQUIRY OR INQUIRY? .
instal/install	Both spellings are correct. installed, installing, installment/instalment
insurance	See ASSURANCE OR INSURANCE? .
intelligence	(<i>not</i> -ance)
intelligent	(<i>not</i> -ant)
intentions	(<i>not</i> intensions)
inter-/intra-	The prefix INTER- means between or among (e.g. international). The prefix INTRA- means within, on the inside (e.g. intravenous).
interesting	(four syllables, <i>not</i> intresting)
interrogate	(<i>not</i> -r-)
interrupt	(<i>not</i> -r-)
invent	See DISCOVER OR INVENT? .
inverted commas	Inverted commans can be double (“ ”) or single (‘ ’). Use whichever you wish as long as you are consistent, In print, single inverted commas are generally used; in handwriting, double inverted commas are frequently used for enclosing direct speech



and single inverted commas for enclosing titles and quotations. There are no hard-and-fast rules.

Direct speech

Inverted commas should enclose the actual words of speech that are being quoted.

'You are very welcome,' she said.
She said, 'You are very welcome.'
'You are,' she said, 'very welcome.'

Note the punctuation conventions in the sentences above. These will be examined more closely now.

► Speech first and narrative second.

'You are very welcome,' she said.
'Are you tired?' she asked.
'Not at all!' he exclaimed.

Notice that the appropriate punctuation is enclosed with the words spoken.

Note that the narrative continues with an initial small letter: she/he.

► Narrative first and speech second.

Brian said, 'You're very late.'
Brian asked, 'What kept you?'
Sarah snapped, 'Don't cross-question me!'

Notice that a comma always divides the narrative from the direct speech.

Note that the direct speech always begins with a capital letter.

Note that the appropriate punctuation mark is enclosed within the inverted commas with the words spoken and no further end stop is required.

- Speech interrupted by narrative.

‘We have all been hoping,’ said my mother, ‘that you will join us on Christmas Day.’

Note that the two parts of the interrupted spoken sentence are enclosed by inverted commas.

Note that a comma (within the inverted commas) marks the break between speech and narrative, and that another comma (after the narrative and before the second set of inverted commas) marks the resumption of the direct speech.

Note that the interrupted sentence of speech is resumed without the need for a capital letter.

- Longer speeches and the layout of dialogue.

‘I should love to join you on Christmas Day,’ said Sean.

The children were ecstatic. They cried together, ‘That’s wonderful!’

‘Indeed it is,’ said my mother. ‘When will you be able to get to us?’

‘By 10 o’clock.’

‘Really? That’s splendid!’

The rule is ‘a new line for a new speaker’ even if the speech is only a word or two. In addition, each new speech should ideally be indented a little to make it easier for the reader to follow the cut and thrust of dialogue.

Note how a speech of two or more sentences is punctuated.

‘Indeed it is,’ said my mother. ‘When will you be able to get to us?’



If this were lengthened further, the close of the second pair of inverted commas would be delayed accordingly:

‘Indeed it is,’ said my mother. ‘When will you be able to get to us? Need I say “the earlier the better”? You know that we’ll be up at the crack of dawn.’

- Inverted commas are used to enclose titles.

Have you read ‘Angela’s Ashes’ by Frank McCourt?

Alternatively, the title can be underlined or, in print, italicised. Inverted commas will not then be needed.

- Inverted commas are used to enclose quotations.

Like Coriolanus, I often feel that ‘there is a life elsewhere’.

Note that the final full stop comes outside the inverted commas enclosing the quotation. Incorporating a quotation in a sentence is different from punctuating direct speech.

See **INDIRECT/REPORTED SPEECH**.

See **TITLES**.

invisible

(*not* -able)

irrational

Wrong spelling. See **IRRATIONAL**.

iridescent

(*not* -rr-)

irony or sarcasm?

IRONY is subtle, amusing, often witty. **SARCASM** is deliberately hurtful and intentionally cruel.

Irony comes from a Greek word meaning ‘pretended ignorance’.

Sarcasm comes from a Greek word meaning 'to tear the flesh with one's teeth'.

Irony relies on those with insight realising that what is said is the opposite of what is meant.

Mr Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* frequently makes ironical remarks which only his more perceptive listeners will understand. When he tells one of his less musical daughters that she has delighted the company with her piano playing for long enough, she takes his remarks at face value. Jane and Elizabeth, two of her sisters, know exactly what he really meant.

Sarcasm sometimes uses this technique of irony and says in a very cutting way (which will be very clearly understood) the opposite of what is really meant.

When a teacher says, 'Brilliant!', to a pupil who fails yet again, he is being sarcastic and ironical at the same time. When a teacher says, 'Have you lost your tongue?' to a pupil, he is being sarcastic.

irrational

(*not* -r-)

irrelevant

(*not* irrelevant: think of 'does not relate')

irreparable

irreplaceable

See **SOFT C** AND **SOFT G**.

irrepressible

irresistible

irresponsible

irrevelant

Wrong spelling. See **IRRELEVANT**.

irreversible

irridescant

Wrong spelling. See **IRIDESCENT**.

-ise or -ize?

Most words ending with this suffix can be spelt -ise or -ize in British English.

American English is more prescriptive and insists on -ize whenever there is a choice.

House-styles in Britain vary from publisher to publisher and from newspaper to newspaper. (You may have noticed that in this book I favour -ise.)

When making your choice, bear these two points in mind:

- ▶ These nineteen words *have* to be -ise: advertise, advise, apprise, arise, chastise, circumcise, comprise, compromise, despise, devise, disguise, enfranchise, excise, exercise, improvise, revise, supervise, surprise, televise.
- ▶ Only one verb of more than one syllable has to be -ize: capsize.
(One syllabled verbs like 'seize' still need care, of course.)

Whatever you decide, be consistent within one piece of writing and be consistent with derivatives. If you use 'realize' in one paragraph, you must use 'realization' and not 'realisation' at another point in the same piece. If you use 'sympathize', then you must refer to 'sympathizers' and not to 'sympathisers' elsewhere.

Many authorities prefer to use -ize when there is a choice. In practice, many writers prefer to use -ise because this choice is relatively trouble-free.

The decision is yours!

isn't

Place the apostrophe carefully. (*not* is'nt)

itinerary

(five syllables, not four as it is often mispronounced and misspelt)

its or it's?

ITS is a possessive adjective like 'her' and 'his':

The book has lost **ITS** cover.

ITS beauty has faded.

IT'S is a contraction of 'it is' or 'it has':

IT'S very cold today. (= it is)

IT'S been a long winter. (= it has)

If you are ever in doubt, see if you can expand 'its/it's' to 'it is' or 'it has'. If you can, you need an apostrophe. If you can't, you don't.

Remember too that contractions like 'it's' are fine in informal contexts but should be avoided in formal writing. When it's inappropriate to use slang, it is inappropriate to use these contractions. You have to write the forms in full.

J

jealous	(<i>not</i> jelous)
jealousy	
jeopardise/jeopardize	Both spellings are correct.
jeopardy	
jewelry/jewellery	Both spellings are correct. (<i>not</i> jewelery as the word is often mispronounced)
jodhpurs	
journey (singular)	journeys (plural) See PLURALS (iii).
judgement/judgment	Both spellings are correct.
judicial or judicious?	JUDICIAL = pertaining to courts of law and judges JUDICIOUS = showing good judgment, wise, prudent The words are not interchangeable. There is a clear distinction in meaning, as you can see. A JUDICIAL decision is one reached in a law court. A JUDICIOUS decision is a wise and discerning one.

K

keenness	keen + ness
kerb	See CURB OR KERB? .
kernel	See COLONEL OR KERNEL? .
kibbutz (singular)	kibbutzim (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
kidnap	kidnapped, kidnapping, kidnapper An exception to the 2-1-1 rule. See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
kneel	kneeled or knelt, kneeling
knew or new?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: I KNEW the answer. Nanette has NEW shoes.
knife (singular)	knives (plural) See PLURALS (v).
know or no?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: I KNOW the answer. NO , they cannot come. We have NO milk left.
knowledge	
knowledgeable/ knowledgable	Both spellings are correct.

L

laboratory (singular)	laboratories (plural) See PLURALS (iii).
labour	laborious
laid	See ADDING ENDINGS (iii) (exception to rule). See LAY OR LIE? .
lain	See LAY OR LIE? .
lama or llama?	LAMA = a Buddhist priest LLAMA = an animal of the camel family
landscape	(<i>not</i> lanscape)
language	(<i>not</i> langage)
larva (singular)	larvae (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
later or latter?	LATER is the comparative of 'late'. (late, later, latest) I will see you LATER . You are LATER than I expected. LATTER is the opposite of 'former'. Cats and dogs are wonderful pets but the LATTER need regular exercise. <i>Note:</i> use 'latter' to indicate the second of two references; use 'last' to indicate the final one of three or more.
lay or lie?	The various tenses of these verbs cause a great deal of unnecessary confusion. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: to lay: I LAY the table early every morning. I AM LAYING the table now. I HAVE LAID it already.

I WAS LAYING the table when you phoned.

I LAID the table before I went to bed.

My hen **LAYS** an egg every morning.

She **IS LAYING** an egg now.

She **HAS LAID** an egg already.

She **WAS LAYING** an egg when you phoned.

She **LAID** an egg every day last week.

to lie (down)

I LIE down every afternoon after lunch.

I AM LYING down now.

I HAVE LAIN down every afternoon this week.

I WAS LYING down when you phoned.

I LAY down yesterday afternoon.

to lie (= tell a lie)

I LIE regularly.

I AM LYING to you now.

I HAVE LIED all my life.

I WAS LYING to you last week.

I LIED to you yesterday as well.

laying

See **LAY OR LIE?**.

lead or led?

LEAD is the present tense.

LED is the past tense.

Go in front and **LEAD** us home.

He went in front and **LED** us home.

leaf (singular)

leaves (plural)

See **PLURALS** (v).

leaned/leant

Both spellings are correct.

leaped/leapt

Both spellings are correct.

learned/learnt

Both spellings are correct.

leftenant

Wrong spelling. See **LIEUTENANT**.

legend or myth?

Both are traditional tales but legends usually have some basis in fact (e.g.



Robert the Bruce and the spider, King Alfred and the cakes, Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest). Myths are supernatural tales, often involving gods or giants, which serve to explain natural events or phenomena (e.g. Pandora's Box and the coming of evil into the world, The Seven Pomegranate Seeds and the seasons of the year and so on).

legible	See ELIGIBLE OR LEGIBLE? .
leisure	(<i>not</i> -ie-) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
lend	See BORROW OR LEND? .
less	See FEWER OR LESS? .
liaise	<i>liaison</i> (<i>not</i> <i>liase/liason</i>)
libel or slander?	Both refer to statements damaging to a person's character: LIBEL is written; SLANDER is spoken.
library	(<i>not</i> <i>library</i>)
libretto (singular)	<i>libretti</i> or <i>librettos</i> (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
licence or license?	LICENCE is a noun. We can refer to a licence or the licence or your licence: Do you have your driving LICENCE with you? LICENSE is a verb: The restaurant is LICENSED for the consumption of alcohol.
licorice/liquorice	Both spellings are correct.
lie	See LAY OR LIE? .
lied	See LAY OR LIE? .
liesure	Wrong spelling. See LEISURE .

lieutenant

life (singular) lives (plural)
See **PLURALS** (v).

lighted/lit Both forms are correct.

lightening or lightning? **LIGHTENING** comes from the verb ‘to lighten’ and so you can talk about:

LIGHTENING a heavy load or
LIGHTENING the colour of your hair.

LIGHTNING is the flash of light we get in the sky during a thunderstorm.

likable/likeable Both spellings are correct.

like See **AS OR LIKE?**.

likelihood

liqueur or liquor? A **LIQUEUR** is a sweet, very strong, alcoholic drink usually taken in small glasses after a meal.
LIQUOR refers to any alcoholic drink.

liquorice See **LICORICE/LIQUORICE**.

literally Beware of using ‘literally’ to support a fanciful comparison:

- ⑥ My eyes **LITERALLY** popped out of my head when I saw her in a bikini. (They didn’t!)
- ② My eyes popped out of my head when I saw her in a bikini.

Everybody will understand that you are speaking figuratively (i.e. it was as if ...).
See **METAPHOR**.
See **SIMILE**.

literati (*Not* litterari)

This word is used to describe well-read and well-educated people who love literature.

literature (four syllables)

livelihood

loaf (singular)

loaves (plural)
See **PLURALS** (v).

loath, loathe or loth?

LOATH and **LOTH** are interchangeable spellings and mean unwilling or reluctant:

I was **LOATH/LOTH** to hurt his feelings.

LOATHE means to detest:

I **LOATHE** snobbery.

loathsome

loathe + some = loathsome
This word means detestable.

loaves

See **LOAF**.

lonely

(*not* lonley)

loose or lose?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

I have a **LOOSE** tooth. (rhymes with moose)

Don't **LOSE** your temper. (rhymes with snooze)

loping or lopping?

lope + ing = loping

He was **LOPING** along with long strides.

lop + ing = lopping

LOPPING the trees will just encourage them to grow taller.

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (i) and (ii).

a lot

(*never* alot)

Remember that this is a slang expression and should never be used in a formal context. Substitute 'many' or recast the sentence altogether.

lovable/loveable

Both spellings are correct.

luggage

(*not* lugage)

**luxuriant or
luxurious?**

LUXURIANT = growing abundantly
LUXURIANT vegetation

LUXURIOUS = rich and costly,
sumptuous
a **LUXURIOUS** hotel

luxury

-ly

Take care when adding this suffix to a
word already ending in -l. You will have
double -l:

real + ly = really
ideal + ly = ideally
special + ly = specially
usual + ly = usually

lying

See **LAY OR LIE?**.

M

machinery

(*not* -ary)

madam or madame?

Use **MADAM**:

- ▶ as a polite term of respect:
Can I help you, madam?
- ▶ in letter writing:
Dear Madam (note capital letter)
- ▶ as a formal title of respect:
Thank you, Madam Speaker (note capital letter)

Use **MADAME** as the French equivalent:

- ▶ We are going to Madame Tussaud's.
- ▶ The famous French physicist, Madame Curie, was born in Poland.

magic -e

Also known as silent -e and mute -e.
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

mahogany

maintain

maintenance

(*not* maintainance)

manageable

See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

manager

(*not* manger, as is so often written!)

mango (singular)

mangoes or mangos (plural)
See **PLURALS** (iv).

manoeuvre

mantelpiece

(*not* mantle-)

mantelshelf

(*not* mantle-)

margarine

(*not* margerine)

- marihuana/marijuana** Both spellings are correct.
- marriage**
- marvel** marvelled, marvelling
- marvellous**
- masterful or masterly?** **MASTERFUL** = dominating
MASTERLY = very skilful
- mathematics** (*not* mathmatics)
- mating or matting?** mate + ing = mating
mat + ing = matting
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (i) + (ii).
- matrix** (singular) matrices or matrixes (plural)
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.
- may** See **CAN OR MAY?**.
- may or might?**
- (i) Use may/might in a present context and might in a past context:

If I receive a written invitation, I **MAY/MIGHT** accept. (still possible)
If I had received a written invitation, I **MIGHT HAVE** accepted. (possibility over now)
If I don't hurry, I **MAY/MIGHT** miss the bus. (possibility exists)
If I hadn't hurried, I **MIGHT HAVE** missed the bus. (risk now over)
 - (ii) Convert 'may' to 'might' when changing direct speech to indirect or reported speech:

'**MAY** I come in?' she asked.
She asked if she **MIGHT** come in.
'You **MAY** be lucky,' she said.
She said that I **MIGHT** be lucky.
 - (iii) There is a slight difference between the meaning of 'may' and 'might' in the present tense when they are used in the sense of 'asking permission':

MAY I suggest that we adjourn the meeting? (agreement assured)

MIGHT I suggest that we adjourn the meeting? (suggestion more tentative)

me

See **I/ME/MYSELF**.

meant

(*not* ment, *not* mean't)

medal or meddle?

MEDAL = a small metal disc given as an honour

to **MEDDLE** = to interfere

mediaeval/medieval

Both spellings are correct.

medicine

(*not* medecine) medicinal

mediocre

Mediterranean

medium (singular)

media or mediums (plural)

Note, however, that the two plurals differ in meaning.

The **MEDIA** hounded him to his death.
(= radio, television, newspaper journalists)
She consulted a dozen **MEDIUMS** in the hope of making contact with her dead husband. (= people through whom the spirits of the dead are said to communicate)

mediums

See **MEDIUM**.

meet, meet up, meet up with, or meet with?

British English distinguishes between the first and last of these:

You **MEET** a person.

You **MEET WITH** an accident.

Avoid using 'meet up' and 'meet up with'. They are clumsy expressions.

⑥ When shall we **MEET UP?**

② When shall we **MEET?**

⑥ We **MET UP** with friends in town.

② We **MET** friends in town.

memento (singular)	mementoes or mementos (plural) See PLURALS (iv).
memorandum (singular)	memoranda or memorandums (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
memory (singular)	memories (plural) See PLURALS (iii).
ment	Wrong spelling. See MEANT .
mention	mentioned, mentioning.
Mesdames	(i) Plural of French <i>Madame</i> . (ii) Used as a plural title before a number of ladies' names: Mesdames Smith, Green, Brown and Kelly won prizes. Always used with an initial capital letter.
message	
messenger	(<i>not</i> messenger)
metaphor	(<i>not</i> metaphore) A metaphor is a compressed comparison: He <i>wolfed</i> his food. (<i>note</i> the apparent identification with a wolf's eating habits) Compare SIMILE .
meteorology	(six syllables)
meter or metre?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: Put these coins in the parking METER . You'll need a METRE of material to make a skirt. Sonnets are always written in iambic METRE .
might	See MAY OR MIGHT? .
might of	This is an incorrect construction. See COULD OF .

milage/mileage	Both spellings are correct.
milieu (singular)	milieus or milieux (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
militate or mitigate?	To MILITATE (against) comes from the Latin verb meaning ‘to serve as a soldier’ and it has the combative sense of having a powerful influence on something. Despite his excellent qualifications, his youthful criminal record MILITATED against his appointment as school bursar. To MITIGATE comes from the Latin adjective meaning ‘mild’ and it means to moderate, to make less severe. Don’t condemn the young man too harshly. There are MITIGATING circumstances.
millennium (singular)	millennia or millenniums (plural) (<i>not</i> -n-) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
millepede/millipede	Both spellings are correct.
mimic	mimicked, mimicking See SOFT C AND SOFT G .
miniature	
minuscule	(<i>not</i> miniscule)
minute	(<i>not</i> minuit)
miracle	
miscellaneous	miscellany
mischief	See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
mischievous	(<i>not</i> mischievious, as it is often mispronounced)
misplace	See DISPLACE OR MISPLACE? .
misrelated participles	See PARTICIPLES .

misspell	mis + spell
misspelled/misspelt	Both spellings are correct.
mistletoe	
moccasin	
modern	(<i>not</i> modren)
moment	(<i>not</i> momment)
momentary or momentous?	MOMENTARY = lasting for only a very short time MOMENTOUS = of great significance
monastery (singular)	monasteries (plural) (<i>not</i> monastry/monastries) See PLURALS (iii).
mongoose (singular)	mongooses (plural) (<i>not</i> mongeese)
monotonous	
moping or mopping?	mope + ing = moping mop + ing = mopping See ADDING ENDINGS (i) + (ii).
moral or morale?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: Denise is guided by strong MORAL principles. My MORALE suffered badly when I failed my exams and I lost all faith in myself for years.
Morocco	
mortgage	(<i>not</i> morgage as it is pronounced)
mosquito (singular)	mosquitoes (plural) See PLURALS (iv).
motto (singular)	motatoes or mottos (plural) See PLURALS (iv).
mould	
mouldy	

moustache

mucous or mucus?

MUCOUS is an adjective, as in **MUCOUS** membrane.

The name of the thick secretion of the mucous membrane is called **MUCUS**.

murmur

murmured, murmuring (*not* murmer-)

mustn't

This is the contracted form of 'must not'. Take care to place the apostrophe carefully.

must of

This is an incorrect construction. See **COULD OF**.

mute -e

Also known as magic -e and silent -e. See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

mutual

reciprocal

Our dislike was **MUTUAL**.

Their marriage is based on **MUTUAL** respect.

Some would avoid the use of 'mutual' in expressions such as 'our mutual friend' because a third person is then introduced and the feelings of each person for the other two are not necessarily identical. It might be best here to describe the friend as one 'we have in common'.

myself

See **I/ME/MYSELF**.

myth

See **LEGEND OR MYTH?**.

N

naive/naïve

Both forms are correct.

**naiveté/naïveté/
naivety/naïvety**

All these forms are correct.

**nationalise or
naturalise?**

to **NATIONALISE** = to transfer
ownership from the private sector to the
state
to **NATURALISE** = to confer full
citizenship on a foreigner

nebula (singular)

nebulae or nebulas (plural)
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

necessary

necessity

negatives

See **DOUBLE NEGATIVES**.

neighbour

See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

neither

See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

neither . . . nor

Compare **EITHER . . . OR**.

nephew

-ness

Take care when adding this suffix to a
word already ending in -n. You will have
double n:

cleanness
openness
suddenness

neumonia

Wrong spelling. See **PNEUMONIA**.

new

See **KNEW OR NEW?**.

niece

See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

nine

ninth

nineteen

nineteenth

ninety

ninetieth

no

See **KNOW OR NO?**.

no body or nobody?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

It was believed that he had been murdered but **NO BODY** was ever found, and so nothing could be proved. (= no corpse)

NOBODY likes going to the dentist.
(= no one)

none

The problem with 'none' is deciding whether to use with it a singular or a plural verb.

Strictly speaking, a singular verb should accompany 'none':

NONE of the passengers **WAS** hurt.
(= not one)

NONE of the milk **WAS** spilt. (= not any)

Colloquially, a singular verb is always used with expressions of quantity but a plural verb is often used when plural nouns follow the 'none of...' construction:

NONE of the passengers **WERE** hurt.
NONE of my friends **LIKE** pop music.
NONE of the children **WANT** an ice-cream.

Some would reserve plural verbs in these cases for informal occasions; others would see them as perfectly acceptable formally as well.

no one

'No one' is singular and requires a singular verb:

NO ONE likes meanness.

'No one' should be written as two words and not hyphenated.

nosey/nosy

Both spellings are correct.
Note: for informal use only.

noticeable

(*not* noticable)
 See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

not only...but also

Take care with the positioning of each part of this pair:

- ⑥ Denise not only enjoys composing but also conducting.

Denise enjoys two musical activities:
 composing, conducting.

Put 'not only' in front of the first
 and 'but also' in front of the second,
 and let 'enjoys' refer to both.

- ② Denise enjoys **NOT ONLY** composing
BUT ALSO conducting.

Compare **BOTH...AND; EITHER...OR;**
NEITHER...NOR.

nouns

There are four kinds of nouns: common, proper, abstract and collective.

► Take care with the punctuation of *proper nouns*. Because they are the special individual names of people, towns, countries, newspapers, days of the week, businesses, and so on, they require initial capital letters:

Dennis Blakely
 Ipswich
 Sweden
The Times
 Wednesday
 Blazing Fireplaces Ltd.

Note that months of the year begin with a capital letter but the seasons generally do not:

April, the spring, but the Spring term.



- Do not confuse proper and *common nouns*.

labrador – common noun

Tinker – proper noun (needs initial capital)

There is a certain flexibility in sentences like this:

Bishop Flynn will be arriving at three o'clock. The bishop/Bishop would like to meet the confirmation candidates before the service begins.

- *Abstract nouns* are the names of ideas, emotions, states of mind, and so on.

The correct form can sometimes be difficult to remember. Do check in a dictionary when you are uncertain. Abstract nouns can have a huge variety of endings:

optimism, pride, complexity, failure, diffidence, depth, bravery, kindness, excitement, exhilaration, and so on

Unsophisticated writers often add -ness to an adjective in the hope that it will then be converted to an abstract noun. Sometimes this works; often it doesn't.

- *Collective nouns* (audience, flock, herd, congregation) are treated as singular nouns if regarded as a single whole:

The audience **WAS** wildly enthusiastic.

They are treated as plural nouns when regarded as a number of units making up the whole:

The jury **WERE** divided over his guilt.

nucleus (singular)

nuclei (plural)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

nuisance

number

See **SINGULAR OR PLURAL?**.

numbers

Should numbers be written in figures or in words? In mathematical, scientific, technical and business contexts, figures are used, as you would expect.

The problem arises in straightforward prose (an essay, perhaps, or a short story or a letter).

The rule of thumb is that small numbers are written as words and large numbers are written as figures.

What are small numbers? Some people would say numbers up to ten; others numbers up to twenty; others numbers up to one hundred. If you're not bound by the house-style of a particular organisation, you can make up your own mind. Numbers up to one hundred can be written in one or two words and this is why this particular cut-off point is favoured.

There were eight children at the party.

There were eighty-four/84 people in the audience.

Remember to hyphenate all compound numbers between twenty-one and ninety-nine when they are written as words.

Round numbers over one hundred, like two thousand, five million, and so on, are also usually written in words.

Write dates (21 October 2001) and sums of money (£10.50) and specific measurements (10.5 cm) in figures.

Time can be written in words or figures (three o'clock/3 o'clock) but 24-hour clock



times are always written in figures (08.00).

Centuries can be written in words or figures (the 18th century/the eighteenth century).

It is important to be consistent within one piece of writing.

nursery (singular)

nurseries (plural)

See PLURALS (iii).



oasis (singular)	oases (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
obedience	(<i>not</i> -ance)
obedient	(not -ant)
occasion	occasional (<i>not</i> -ss-)
occasionally	occasional + ly
occur	occurred, occurring, occurrence See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
o'clock	Take care with the punctuation of this contraction. The apostrophe represents the omission of four letters: o'clock = of the clock Do <i>not</i> write: o'Clock, O'Clock or o,clock.
of or off?	These exemplar sentences may help: He is the youngest OF four children. (pronounced <i>ov</i>) Jump OFF the bus. (rhymes with cough) Avoid the clumsy construction: ⑥ Jump off of the bus. ② Jump off the bus.
official or officious?	OFFICIAL = authorised, formal an OFFICIAL visit an OFFICIAL invitation OFFICIOUS = fussy, self-important, interfering an OFFICIOUS secretary an OFFICIOUS waiter

often (*not* offen)

omission

omit omitted, omitting
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

one This can be a useful impersonal pronoun:

ONE never knows.

However, it can be difficult to keep up in a long sentence:

ONE never knows if **ONE'S** husband is likely to approve of **ONE'S** choice but that is a risk **ONE** has to take.

Use 'one' sparingly and beware the risk of pomposity.

only The position of 'only' in a sentence is crucial to meaning.

See **AMBIGUITY** (ii).

onnist Wrong spelling. See **HONEST**.

onto or on to? There are circumstances when the words must always be written separately. We will consider these first.

- Always write the words separately if 'to' is part of an infinitive (e.g. to eat, to speak, to be, to watch, etc.):

She drove **ON TO** test the brakes.

As a matter of interest you can double-check the 'separateness' of the two words by separating them further:

She drove **ON** because she wanted **TO** test the breaks.

- Always write the words separately when 'to' means 'towards':

We cycled **ON TO** Oxford.

Once again, the two words can be further separated:

We cycled **ON** the few remaining miles **TO** Oxford.

- It is permissible to write 'onto' or 'on to' when you mean 'to a position on':

The acrobat jumped **ONTO** the trapeze.

The acrobat jumped **ON TO** the trapeze.

It should be borne in mind, however, that many careful writers dislike 'onto' and always use 'on to'.

'Onto' is more common in American English but with the cautions expressed above.

ophthalmologist

(*not* ophth-)

opinion

(*not* oppinion)

opposite

oral

See **AURAL OR ORAL?**.

organise/organize

Both spellings are correct.

original

originally

original + ly

ought

'Ought' is always followed by an infinitive (to visit, to read, to do, etc).

We **OUGHT** to write our thank-you letters.

The negative form is 'ought not'

We **OUGHT NOT** to hand our work in late.

The forms 'didn't ought' and 'hadn't ought' are *always* wrong.

- ⑥ You didn't ought to say this.
② He **OUGHT NOT** to say this.
⑥ He hadn't ought to have hit her.
② He **OUGHT NOT** to have hit her.

ours

There are eight possessive pronouns:
mine, thine, his, hers, its, ours, yours,
theirs. They never need an apostrophe:
This house is **OURS**.

outfit

outfitted, outfitting, outfitter
(exception to 2-1-1 rule).
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

out of

Avoid using 'of' unnecessarily:
⑥ He threw it **OUT OF** the window.
② He threw it **OUT** the window.

outrageous

(*not* outrageous)
See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

over-

Take care when adding this prefix to a
word already beginning with r-. You will
have -rr-:

overreact
overripe
overrule, etc.

overreact

over + react

ovum (singular)

ova (plural)
See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

owing to

See **DUE TO/OWING TO**.

P

packed	⑥ We took a pack lunch with us. ② We took a PACKED lunch with us.
paid	(exception to the -y rule; <i>not</i> payed) See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
paiment	Wrong spelling. See PAYMENT .
pajamas	American spelling. See PYJAMAS .
palate, palette, pallet	PALATE = the top part of the inside of your mouth PALETTE = a small board with a hole for the thumb which an artist uses when mixing paints PALLET = a platform used to lift and to carry goods
panic	panicked, panicking, panicky See SOFT C AND SOFT G .
paparazzo (singular)	paparazzi (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
paraffin	
paragraphing	There is no mystery about paragraphing although many students find it difficult to know when to end one paragraph and begin another. A paragraph develops a particular point that is relevant to the overall subject. If you wish to write a letter or an essay that develops five or six points, then each point will have its own paragraph and you will add two more, one by way of an introductory paragraph and another at the end as a conclusion. There are no rules about how long a paragraph should be. Some paragraphs,



often the introduction or the conclusion, may be a single sentence; other paragraphs may be a page or more long. Too many short paragraphs in succession can be very jerky; too many very long ones can look forbidding. It is best to mix long and short paragraphs, if you can.

You may also find that a paragraph which is becoming very long (a page or more) will benefit from being subdivided. The topic of the paragraph may be more sensibly developed as two or three subsidiary points.

Clear paragraphing is not possible without clear thinking. Think of what you want to say before you begin to write. List the topics or points you want to make in a sensible order. Then develop each one in turn in a separate paragraph.

A paragraph usually contains within it one sentence which sums up its topic. Sometimes the paragraph will begin with this sentence (called a topic sentence) and the rest of the paragraph will elaborate or illustrate the point made. Sometimes the topic sentence occurs during the paragraph. It can be effective, from time to time, to build up to the topic sentence as the last sentence in a paragraph.

Careful writers will try to move smoothly from one paragraph to the next, using link words or phrases such as: on the other hand; however; in conclusion.

In handwriting and in typing, it is usual to mark the beginning of a paragraph either by indenting it by 2cm or so, or by leaving a clear line between paragraphs. The only disadvantage of the latter method is that it is not always clear, when a sentence begins on a new page, whether a new paragraph is also intended.

Compare also the paragraphing of speech.

See **INVERTED COMMAS**.

paralyse/paralyze

Both spellings are correct.

paralysis

paraphernalia

parent

(*not* perant)

parenthesis (singular)

parentheses (plural)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

parliament

parliamentary

parrafin

Wrong spelling. See **PARAFFIN**.

partake or participate?

PARTAKE = to share with others (especially food and drink)

PARTICIPATE = to join in an activity; to play a part in

They **PARTOOK** solemnly of lamb, herbs and salt.

Will you be able to **PARTICIPATE** in the firm's pension scheme?

partener

Wrong spelling. See **PARTNER**.

participles

Participles help to complete some tenses. Present participles end in -ing:

I am **COOKING**.

They were **WASHING**.

You would have been **CELEBRATING**.

Past participles generally end in -d or -ed but there are many exceptions:

I have **LABOURED**.

You are **AMAZED**.

It was **HEARD**.

We should have been **INFORMED**.

Care needs to be taken with the irregular



forms of the past participle. They can be checked with a good dictionary.

to choose chosen

to teach taught

to begin begun

The past participle is the word that completes the construction:

having been?

Participles can also be used as verbal adjectives (that is, as describing words with a lot of activity suggested):

a **HOWLING** baby

a **DESECRATED** grave

As verbal adjectives, they can begin sentences:

HOWLING loudly, the baby woke everyone up.

DESECRATED with graffiti, the tombstone was a sad sight.

Take care that the verbal adjective describes an appropriate noun or pronoun. A mismatch can result in unintended hilarity.

See **AMBIGUITY** (v).

particle

particular

particularly

partner

passed or past?

particular + ly

(*not* partener)

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

You **PASSED** me twice in town yesterday.

In the **PAST**, women had few rights.

In **PAST** times, women had few rights.

I walk **PAST** your house every day.

passenger	(<i>not</i> passanger)
past	See PASSED OR PAST?
pastime	(<i>not</i> -tt-)
payed	Wrong spelling. See PAID.
payment	(<i>not</i> paiment) See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
peace or piece?	There were twenty-one years of PEACE between the two wars. Would you like a PIECE of pie?
peculiar	(<i>not</i> perc-)
pedal or peddle?	a PEDAL = a lever you work with your foot PEDDLE = to sell (especially drugs)
penicillin	
peninsula or peninsular?	PENINSULA is a noun meaning a narrow piece of land jutting out from the mainland into the sea. It is derived from two Latin words: <i>paene</i> (almost) and <i>insula</i> (island). Have you ever camped on the Lizard PENINSULA ? PENINSULAR is an adjective, derived from the noun: The PENINSULAR War (1808–1814) was fought on the Iberian PENINSULA between the French and the British. <i>Note:</i> It may be useful in a quiz to know that the P&O shipping line was in 1837 The Peninsular Steam Navigation Company (it operated between Britain and the Iberian Peninsula). In 1840, when its operation was extended to Egypt, it became the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (hence P&O).

PEOPLE

people	(<i>not</i> peple)
perant	Wrong spelling. See PARENT .
perculiar	Wrong spelling. See PECULIAR .
perhaps	(<i>not</i> prehaps)
period	(<i>not</i> pieriod)
permanent	(<i>not</i> -ant)
permissible	
perseverance	(<i>not</i> perser-)
personal or personnel?	Sarah has taken all her PERSONAL belongings with her. She was upset by a barrage of PERSONAL remarks. All the PERSONNEL will be trained in first aid. Write to the PERSONNEL office and see if a vacancy is coming up. (<i>Note</i> the spelling of personnel with -nn-) <i>Note:</i> Personnel Officers are now often called Human Resources Officers.
perspicacity or perspicuity?	PERSPICACITY = discernment, shrewdness, clearness of understanding PERSPICUITY = lucidity, clearness of expression
phenomenon (singular)	phenomena (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS.
physical	
physically	
physique	
Piccadilly	
piccalilli	
picnic	picnicked, picnicking, picnicker See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

piece	See PEACE OR PIECE? .								
period	Wrong spelling. See PERIOD .								
pigmy/pygmy (singular)	pigmies/pygmies (plural)								
pinning or pinning?	pine + ing = pinning pin + ing = pinning See ADDING ENDINGS (i), (ii).								
plateau (singular)	plateaus or plateaux (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .								
plausible									
pleasant	(<i>not</i> plesant)								
pleasure									
plural	See SINGULAR OR PLURAL? .								
plurals	(i) Most words form their plural by adding -s: door doors; word words; bag bags; rainbow rainbows; shop shops; car cars (ii) Words ending in a sibilant (a hissing sound) add -es to form their plural. This adds a syllable to their pronunciation and so you can always hear when this has happened: bus buses; box boxes; fez fezes/fezzes; bench benches; bush bushes; hutch hutches. (iii) Words ending in -y are a special case. Look at the letter that precedes the final -y. If the word ends in vowel + y, just add -s to form the plural (vowels: a, e, i, o, u): <table> <tr> <td>day</td><td>days</td></tr> <tr> <td>donkey</td><td>donkeys</td></tr> <tr> <td>boy</td><td>boys</td></tr> <tr> <td>guy</td><td>guys</td></tr> </table>	day	days	donkey	donkeys	boy	boys	guy	guys
day	days								
donkey	donkeys								
boy	boys								
guy	guys								



If the word ends in consonant + y,
change the y to i, and add -es:

lobby	lobbies
opportunity	opportunities
body	bodies
century	centuries

This rule is well worth learning by heart. There are no exceptions. Remember an easy example as a key like boy/boys.

- (iv) Words ending in -o generally add -s to form the plural:

piano	pianos
banjo	banjos
studio	studios
soprano	sopranos
photo	photos
kimono	kimonos

There are nine exceptions which add -es:

domino	dominoes
echo	echoes
embargo	embargoes
hero	heroes
mosquito	mosquitoes
no	noes
potato	potatoes
tomato	tomatoes
torpedo	torpedoes

About a dozen words can be either -s or -es and so you'll be safe with these. Interestingly, some of these words until recently have required -es (words like cargo, mango, memento, volcano). The trend is towards the regular -s ending and some words are in a transitional stage.

- (v) Words ending in -f and -fe generally add -s to form the plural:

roof	roofs
cliff	cliffs
handkerchief	handkerchiefs
carafe	carafes
giraffe	giraffes

There are 13 exceptions which end in -ves in the plural. You can always hear when this is the case, but here is the complete list for reference:

knife/knives; life/lives; wife/wives;
elf/elves; self/selves; shelf/shelves;
calf/calves; half/halves; leaf/leaves;
sheaf/sheaves; thief/thieves; loaf/loaves;
wolf/wolves.

Four words can be either -fs or -ves:

hoofs/hooves; scarfs/scarves;
turfs/turves; wharfs/wharves.

- (vi) Some nouns are quite irregular in the formation of their plural.

Some words don't change:

aircraft, cannon, bison, cod, deer,
sheep, trout

Some have a choice about changing or staying the same in the plural:

buffalo or buffaloes

Eskimo or Eskimos

Other everyday words have very peculiar plurals which perhaps we take for granted:

man	men	ox	oxen
woman	women	mouse	mice
child	children	louse	lice
foot	feet	die	dice
goose	geese		



After goose/geese, mongoose/
mongooses seems very strange but is
correct.

See also **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

pneumonia

possability

Wrong spelling. See **POSSIBILITY**.

possible

Wrong spelling. See **POSSIBLE**.

possess

possessed, possessing

possession

possessive apostrophes See **APOSTROPHES** (ii), (iii).

possessive pronouns

No apostrophes are needed with
possessive pronouns:

That is **MINE**.

That is **OURS**.

That is **THINE**.

That is **YOURS**.

That is **HERS**.

That is **THEIRS**.

That is **HIS**.

That is **ITS**.

possessor

possibility

possible

(*not* -able)

possible or probable?

POSSIBLE = could happen

PROBABLE = very likely to happen

potato (singular)

potatoes (plural)

See **PLURALS** (iv).

**practical or
practicable?**

A **PRACTICAL** person is one who is good
at doing and making things.

A **PRACTICAL** suggestion is a sensible,
realistic one that is likely to succeed.

A **PRACTICABLE** suggestion is merely
one that will work. The word 'practicable'
means 'able to be put into practice'. It
does not carry all the additional meanings
of 'practical'.

practice or practise?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

PRACTICE makes perfect.

An hour's **PRACTICE** every day will yield returns.

The young doctor has built up a busy **PRACTICE**.

In the examples above, 'practice' is a noun.

You should **PRACTISE** every day.
PRACTISE now!

In these examples, 'practise' is a verb.

precede or proceed?

PRECEDE = to go in front of

PROCEED = to carry on, especially after having stopped

prefer

preferred, preferring, preference

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

prehaps

Wrong spelling. See **PERHAPS**.

prejudice

preparation

prepositions

Prepositions are small words like 'by', 'with', 'for', 'to', which are placed before nouns and pronouns to show how they connect with other words in the sentence:

They gave the flowers **TO** their mother.

Let him sit **NEAR** you.

Two problems can arise with prepositions.

- (i) Take care to choose the correct preposition. A good dictionary will help you:

comply with

protest at

deficient in

ignorant of

similar to, and so on.



- (ii) Don't take too seriously the oft-repeated advice not to end a sentence with a preposition. Use your discretion, and word your sentence however it sounds best to you.

Do you prefer the first or the second sentence here?

(a) **WITH** whom are you?

(b) Who are you **WITH**?

Which do you prefer here?

(c) She's a politician **FOR** whom I have a great deal of respect.

(d) She's a politician I have a great deal of respect **FOR**.

present (*not* -ant)

presume See **ASSUME OR PRESUME?**.

priest See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

primitive (*not* -mat-)

principal or principle? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Rebuilding the school is their **PRINCIPAL** aim. (= chief)

The **PRINCIPAL** announced the results. (= chief teacher)

His guiding **PRINCIPLE** was to judge no one hastily. (= moral rule)

privilege (*not* privelege or privileged)

probable See **POSSIBLE OR PROBABLE?**.

probably (*not* propably)

procedure (*not* proceedure)

proceed See **PRECEDE OR PROCEED?**.

proclaim

proclamation (*not* -claim-)

profession	(<i>not</i> -ff-)
professional	
professor	
profit	profited, profiting See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
prognosis	See DIAGNOSIS OR PROGNOSIS? .
prognosis (singular)	prognoses (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
program or programme?	Use PROGRAM when referring to a computer program. Use PROGRAMME on all other occasions.
prominent	(<i>not</i> -ant)
pronounceable	(not pronounceable) See SOFT C AND SOFT G .
pronouns	See I/ME/MYSELF . See WHO/WHOM .
pronunciation	(<i>not</i> pronunciation)
propably	Wrong spelling. See PROBABLY .
propaganda	(<i>not</i> propo-)
proper nouns	See NOUNS .
prophecy or prophesy?	These two words look very similar but are pronounced differently. The last syllable of PROPHECY rhymes with 'sea'; the last syllable of PROPHESY rhymes with 'sigh'. Use the exemplar sentences as a guide: Most of us believed her PROPHECY that the world would end on 31 December. (prophecy = a noun) In the example above, you could substitute the noun 'prediction'.

	We all heard him PROPHESEY that the world would end at the weekend. (prophesy = a verb)
	In the example above, you could substitute the verb 'predict'.
propoganda	Wrong spelling. See PROPAGANDA .
protein	See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
psychiatrist	
psychiatry	
psychologist	
psychology	
publicly	(<i>not</i> publically)
punctuation	See under individual entries: APOSTROPHES; BRACKETS; CAPITAL LETTERS; COLONS; COMMAS; DASHES; EXCLAMATION MARKS; HYPHENS; INVERTED COMMAS; SEMICOLONS; QUESTION MARKS. See also END STOPS .
pyjamas	(American English: pajamas)

Q

quarrel

quarrelled, quarrelling
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

quarrelsome

quarter

question marks

A question mark is the correct end stop for a question. *Note* that it has its own built-in full stop and doesn't require another.

Has anyone seen my glasses?

Note that indirect questions do not require question marks because they have become statements in the process and need full stops.

He asked if anyone had seen his glasses.

See **INDIRECT SPEECH/REPORTED SPEECH**.

questionnaire

(*not* -n-)

questions (direct and indirect)

See **QUESTION MARKS**.

See **INDIRECT SPEECH/REPORTED SPEECH**.

queue

queued, queuing or queueing

quiet or quite?

The children were as **QUIET** as mice.
(quiet = two syllables)
You are **QUITE** right. (quite = one syllable)

quotation or quote?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

- ② Use as many **QUOTATIONS** as you can.
- ⑥ Use as many quotes as you can.
(quotation = a noun)

QUOTATION MARKS

quotation marks

- ② I can **QUOTE** the whole poem. (quote
= a verb)
See **INVERTED COMMAS**.

R

radiator	(<i>not</i> -er)
radically	radical + ly
radius (singular)	radii or radiuses (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
raise or rise?	Let us look at these two words first as verbs (doing words): My landlord has decided to RAISE the rent. He RAISED the rent a year ago. He has RAISED the rent three times in four years. My expenses RISE all the time. They ROSE very steeply last year. They have RISEN steadily this year. Now let us look at them as nouns (a raise, a rise): ② You should ask your employer for a RISE. ⑥ You should ask your employer for a RAISE. An increase in salary is called 'a rise' in the UK and 'a raise' in America.
raping or rapping?	rape + ing = raping rap + ing = rapping See ADDING ENDINGS (i), (ii).
rapt or wrapped?	RAPT = enraptured (RAPT in thought) WRAPPED = enclosed in paper or soft material
raspberry	(<i>not</i> rasberry)
ratable/rateable	Both spellings are correct.

realise/realize	Both spellings are correct.
really	real + ly
reason	
reasonable	
reccomend	Wrong spelling. See RECOMMEND .
receipt	See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
receive	See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
recent or resent?	RECENT = happening not long ago RESENT = to feel aggrieved and be indignant
recipe	
recognise/recognize	Both spellings are correct.
recommend	
recover or re-cover?	Bear in mind the difference in meaning that the hyphen makes: RECOVER = get better, regain possession RE-COVER = to cover again See HYPHENS (iv).
ridiculous	Wrong spelling. See RIDICULOUS .
refectory	(<i>not</i> refrectory)
refer	referred, referring, referee, reference See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
referee or umpire?	REFEREE = football, boxing UMPIRE = baseball, cricket, tennis
refrigerator	(abbreviation = fridge)
regal or royal?	REGAL = fit for a king or queen; resembling the behaviour of a king or queen ROYAL = having the status of a king or queen, or being a member of their family
regret	regretted, regretting, regrettable, regretful See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

rehearsal

rehearse

relevant (not revelant)

relief See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.

remember (not rember)

repellent or repulsive? Both words mean 'causing disgust or aversion'. **REPULSIVE**, however, is the stronger of the two; it has the sense of causing 'intense disgust', even horror in some circumstances.

REPELLENT can also be used in the sense of being able to repel particular pests (a mosquito repellent) and in the sense of being impervious to certain substances (water-repellent).

repetition (not -pit-)

repetitious or repetitive? Both words are derived from 'repetition'. Use **REPETITIOUS** when you want to criticise something spoken or written for containing tedious and excessive repetition. 'Repetitious' is a derogatory term.

Use **REPETITIVE** when you want to make the point that speech, writing or an activity involves a certain amount of repetition (e.g. work on an assembly line in a factory). 'Repetitive' is a neutral word.

reported speech See INDIRECT SPEECH/REPORTED SPEECH.

representative

repulsive See REPELLENT OR REPULSIVE?.

resent See RECENT OR RESENT?.

reservoir From 'reserve'. (not resevoir)

resistance

reson	Wrong spelling. See REASON .
resonable	Wrong spelling. See REASONABLE .
responsibility	(<i>not</i> -ability)
responsible	(<i>not</i> -able)
restaurant	
restaurateur	(<i>not</i> restaurateur)
resuscitate	(<i>not</i> resuscitate)
revelant	Wrong spelling. See RELEVANT .
revenge	See AVENGE OR REVENGE? .
reverend or reverent?	REVEREND = deserving reverence; title for a cleric. The Revd. C. Benson The Rev. C. Benson REVERENT = showing reverence REVERENT pilgrims
reversible	(<i>not</i> -able)
rheumatism	
rhubarb	
rhyme	
rhythm	
ridiculous	(<i>not</i> rediculous) The word comes from the Latin <i>ridere</i> , meaning 'to laugh'.
rigorous or vigorous?	RIGOROUS = exhaustive, very thorough, exacting physically or mentally VIGOROUS = full of energy
robing or robbing?	robe + ing = robing rob + ing = robbing See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).
rococo	

Romania/Rumania

Both spellings are correct.

A third variant, Roumania, is now considered old-fashioned and should be avoided.

roof (singular)

roofs (plural) (*not* rooves)

royal

See **REGAL OR ROYAL?**.

S

sacrifice	(<i>not</i> sacra-)
sacrilege	(<i>not</i> sacra-)
safely	safe + ly
said	(exception to the -y rule) See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
salary	
salmon	
sanatorium (singular)	sanatoria or sanatoriums (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
sandwich	(<i>not</i> sanwich)
sarcasm	See IRONY OR SARCASM? .
sat	See SIT .
satellite	
Saturday	
saucer	
scan	Scan has a number of meanings in different subject areas: ▶ It can mean to analyse the metre of a line of poetry. ▶ It can mean ‘to look at all parts carefully in order to detect irregularities’ (as in radar SCANNING and body SCANNING). ▶ It can mean to read intently and quickly in order to establish the relevant points. When we talk of ‘just SCANNING the headlines’, we shouldn’t mean ‘glancing

	quickly over them without taking them in'. Scanning is a very intensive and selective process.
scarcely	This word needs care both in spelling and in usage. See DOUBLE NEGATIVES .
scarf (singular)	scarfs or scarves (plural) See PLURALS (v).
scaring or scarring?	scare + ing = scaring scar + ing = scarring See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).
scarsly	Wrong spelling. See SCARCELY .
scenery	(<i>not</i> -ary)
sceptic or septic?	A SCEPTIC is one who is inclined to doubt or question accepted truths. SEPTIC is an adjective meaning 'infected by bacteria' (a SEPTIC wound). It also describes the drainage system in country areas which uses bacteria to aid decomposition (SEPTIC drainage, a SEPTIC tank).
schedule	
scheme	
scissors	
Scotch, Scots or Scottish?	Use SCOTCH only in such phrases as SCOTCH broth, SCOTCH whisky, SCOTCH eggs, SCOTCH mist and so on. When referring to the people of Scotland, call them the SCOTS or the SCOTTISH . The term SCOTCH can cause offence. The words SCOTS is often used in connection with aspects of language: He has a strong SCOTS accent.

The **SCOTS** language is quite distinct from English.

What is the **SCOTS** word for 'small'?

We also talk about **SCOTS** law being different from English law.

In connection with people, we have the rather formal terms **Scotsman/Scotsmen** and **Scotswoman/Scotswomen**.

Remember also the **Scots Guards**.

SCOTTISH is used rather more generally to refer to aspects of landscape and culture:

SCOTTISH history, **SCOTTISH** dancing, **SCOTTISH** traditions, **SCOTTISH** universities, the **SCOTTISH** Highlands

search

seasonable or seasonal?

SEASONABLE = normal for the time of year (**SEASONABLE** weather)

SEASONAL = happening at a particular season (**SEASONAL** employment)

secretary (singular)

secretaries (plural) (*not* secer-)

See **PLURALS** (iii).

seize

(*not* -ie-; an exception to the **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**)

self (singular)

selves (plural)

See **PLURALS** (v).

Sellophane

Wrong spelling. See **CELLOPHANE**.

Sellotape

(*not* cellotape)

semicolons

Semicolons have two functions:

- (i) They can replace a full stop by joining two related sentences.

Ian is Scottish. His wife is Irish.

Ian is Scottish; his wife is Irish.

- (ii) They can replace the commas in a list which separate items. Semicolons are

particularly useful with longer items where commas might be needed for other reasons.

Emily has bought some lovely things for her new flat: five huge, brightly coloured floor cushions; some woven throws, in neutral colours and of wonderful textures; an Afghan rug; a brilliant blue glass vase; and a wine-rack, very elegant, shaped like two Ss on their backs.

sensual or sensuous?

SENSUAL = appealing to the body (especially through food, drink and sex)
SENSUOUS = appealing to the senses aesthetically (especially through music, poetry, art)

sentence

(*not* -ance)

sentiment or sentimentality?

SENTIMENT = a sincere emotional feeling
SENTIMENTALITY = over-indulgent, maudlin wallowing in emotion (sometimes with the suggestion of falseness and exaggeration)

sentimental

This adjective comes from both 'sentiment' and 'sentimentality' and so can be used in a fairly neutral way as well as a pejorative way:

SENTIMENTAL value (from sentiment)
for **SENTIMENTAL** reasons (from sentiment)
sickly **SENTIMENTAL** songs (from sentimentality)

separate

(*not* seperate)
Remember that there is A RAT in sep/A/RAT/e.

separate

separated, separating, separation
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

septic

See SCEPTIC OR SEPTIC?.

sequence of tenses

This means that tenses must match within a sentence. You have to keep within a certain time-zone:

- ⑥ I telephoned everyone on the committee and tell them exactly what I thought.
- ② I telephoned everyone on the committee and **TOLD** them exactly what I thought.
- ⑥ He said that he will ask her to marry him.
- ② He said that he **WOULD** ask her to marry him.
- ⑥ I should be grateful if you will send me an application form.
- ② I should be grateful if you **WOULD** send me an application form.
- ⑥ Fergal smiles at us, waves goodbye and was gone.
- ② Fergal smiles at us, waves goodbye and **IS** gone.

sergeant

(*not* sergant)

See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

serial

See CEREAL OR SERIAL?.

servere

Wrong spelling. See SEVERE.

serviceable

(*not* servicable)

See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

sesonable

Wrong spelling. See SEASONABLE OR SEASONAL?.

sesonal

Wrong spelling. See SEASONABLE OR SEASONAL?.

several

(three syllables)

severe

(*not* servere)

severely

severe + ly

sew or sow?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Sarah can **SEW** and knit beautifully.

She is **SEWING** her trousseau now.

She **SEWED** my daughter's christening gown by hand.

She has **SEWN** all her life.

The best time to **SOW** broad beans is in the autumn.

He's out now **SOWING** parsley and sage.

He **SOWED** seed that he saved from the year before.

He has **SOWN** the last of the lettuce seed.

sewage or sewerage?

SEWAGE = the waste products carried off by means of sewers

SEWERAGE = the provision of a drainage system

shall or will?

The simple future tense uses 'shall' with I and we and 'will' with the other pronouns:

I shall drive

you (singular) will drive

he/she/it will drive

we shall drive

you (plural) will drive

they will drive

By reversing 'shall' and 'will' you introduce a note of determination.

I will drive

you shall drive

he/she/it shall drive

we will drive

you shall drive

they shall drive

This distinction is lost in the contraction:

I'll drive. However, in speech, the tone of voice will indicate which is intended.

shaming or shamming? shame + ing = shaming
sham + ing = shamming
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (i) and (ii).

shan't This contraction for 'shall not' would at one time have been punctuated with two apostrophes to indicate where letters have been omitted (sha'n't).

Use just one apostrophe nowadays (shan't).

See **CONTRACTIONS**.

sheaf (singular) sheaves (plural)
See **PLURALS** (v).

shear or sheer? **SHEAR** is a verb (a doing word) and means to cut off.
SHEER is an adjective and means very thin (**SHEER** material), almost perpendicular (a **SHEER** cliff) or whole-hearted (**SHEER** delight).

sheikh (also sheik, shaikh, shaykh – but these are less usual spellings)

shelf (singular) shelves (plural)
See **PLURALS** (v).

sheriff (*not* -rr-)

shining or shinning? shine + ing = shining
shin + ing = shinning
(See **ADDING ENDINGS** (i) and (ii).)

shoe These are the tricky tenses of the verb 'to shoe':

The blacksmith **SHOES** the horse.

He is **SHOEING** the horse now.

He **SHOD** the horse last week.

He has **SHOD** the horse regularly.

should or would? 'Should' and 'would' follow the pattern of 'shall' and 'will'.

I should work (if I had the choice)

you (singular) would work

he/she/it would work
we should work
you (plural) would work
they would work

The correct construction often needed in a formal letter is:

I **SHOULD** be grateful if you **WOULD** send me . . .

In the sense of 'ought to', use 'should' in all cases:

I know I **SHOULD** apologise.
You **SHOULD** write to your parents.
She **SHOULD** understand if you explain.
He **SHOULD** understand.
We **SHOULD** repair the shed.
You all **SHOULD** work harder.
They **SHOULD** resign.

shouldn't

(*note* the position of the apostrophe)

should of

This is an incorrect construction.
See **COULD OF**.

shriek

(*not* shreik)
See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

shy

shyer, shyest
Follows the -y rule.
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iii).

shyly

(exception to the -y rule)
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iii).

shyness

(exception to the -y rule)
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iii).

siege

(*not* -ci)
See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

sieve

See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

sieze

Wrong spelling. See **SEIZE**.

sight

See **CITE, SIGHT OR SITE?**.

silent -e

Also known as magic -e and mute -e.
See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

silhouette

silicon or silicone?

SILICON = element used in electronics industry (**SILICON** chip)
SILICONE = compound containing silicon and used in lubricants and polishes and in cosmetic surgery (**SILICONE** implants)

similarly

similar + ly

simile

(*not* similie)

A simile is a comparison, usually beginning with 'like' or 'as'/'as if'.

You look *as if you've seen a ghost*.
Her hair was *like silk*.

Compare **METAPHOR**.

sincerely

sincere + ly (*not* sincerly)

Note the punctuation required when 'sincerely' is used as part of a complimentary close to a letter.
Traditional layout:

Yours sincerely,
Aisling Hughes

Fully blocked layout:

Yours sincerely
Aisling Hughes

singeing or singing?

singe + ing = singeing
sing + ing = singing
See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

singular or plural?

(i) Always match singular subjects with singular verbs. Always match plural subjects with plural verbs.

The dog (singular) is barking (singular).
The dogs (plural) are barking (plural).

These pronouns are always singular:

everyone, everybody, everything
anyone, anybody, anything
someone, somebody, something
no one, nobody, nothing
either, neither, each

Everybody (singular) loves (singular) a sailor.

Remember that double subjects
(compound subjects) are plural.

The Alsatian and the Pekinese (two
dogs = plural subject) are barking
(plural).

- (ii) 'Either . . . or' and 'neither . . . nor' are followed by a singular verb.

Either James or Donal is lying and that's certain. (singular)

- (iii) The choice between 'there is' (singular) and 'there are' (plural) will depend on what follows.

There is (singular) a good reason (singular) for his bad behaviour.

- (iv) Take care to match nouns and pronouns.

⑥ Ask any teacher (singular) and they (plural) will tell you what they (plural) think (plural) about the new curriculum.

② Ask any teacher (singular) and he or she (singular) will tell you what he or she (singular) thinks (singular) about the new curriculum.

- (v) Don't be distracted by any additional details attached to the subject.

- ⑥ The variety (singular) of courses available at the colleges were (plural) impressive.
- ② The variety (singular) of courses available at the colleges was (singular) impressive.
- ② The addition (singular) of so many responsibilities makes (singular) the job very stressful.
- (vi) Collective nouns are singular when considered as a whole but plural when considered as combined units.
 - ⑥ The audience (singular) was divided (singular) in its (singular) response.
 - ② The audience (here seen as a crowd of single people) were divided (plural) in their (plural) response.

sirocco/scirocco

Both spellings are correct.

sit

Don't confuse the grammatical formation of tenses:

We **SIT** by the fire in the evening and relax.

We **ARE SITTING** by the fire now.

We **ARE SEATED** by the fire.

We **HAVE BEEN SITTING** here all evening.

We **HAVE BEEN SEATED** here all evening.

We **SAT** by the fire yesterday.

We **WERE SITTING** by the fire when you phoned.

We **WERE SEATED** by the fire when you phoned.

Never write or say:

⑥ We were sat.

say ② We were sitting/we were seated.

site

See CITE, SIGHT OR SITE?.

siting or sitting?	site + ing = siting sit + ing = sitting See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).
sizable/sizeable	Both spellings are correct.
skein	See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
skilful	
skilfully	skilful + ly
slain	(exception to -y rule) See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
slander	See LIBEL OR SLANDER? .
slily/slyly	Both spellings are correct but the second is more commonly used.
sloping or slopping?	slope + ing = sloping slop + ing = slopping
sly	slyer, slyest
slyly	See SLILY/SLYLY .
slyness	
smelled/smelt	Both spellings are correct.
sniping or snipping?	snipe + ing = sniping snip + ing = snipping
sobriquet/soubriquet	Both spellings are correct.
social or sociable?	SOCIAL = related to society. a SOCIAL worker , a SOCIAL problem, SOCIAL policy, SOCIAL housing SOCIABLE = friendly a very SOCIABLE person These two words are quite distinct in meaning even though they may be used with the same noun: a SOCIAL evening = an evening organised for the purpose of recreation



a **SOCIABLE** evening = a friendly evening where everyone mixed well

With any luck the social evening was also a sociable one!

soft c and soft g

The letter c has two sounds. It can be hard and sound like k or it can be soft and sound like s.

The letter g has two sounds. It can be hard and sound like g in got and it can be soft and sound like j.

Usually, but not always, c and g sound hard when they precede a, o, u:

cat	cot	cut
gap	got	gut

They are generally soft when they precede e and i (and y):

cell	cider	cyberspace
germ	gin	gyrate

Sometimes an extra e is inserted into a word before a, o, u, so that the c or g in the word can sound soft:

noticeable	(<i>not</i> noticable)
manageable	(<i>not</i> managable)

Sometimes an extra k is inserted into a word between c and a, o, u, so that c can sound hard:

picnicking	(<i>not</i> picnicing)
trafficking	(<i>not</i> trafficking)

soldier

Take care with the spelling of this word. (soldiers of the Queen, not soliders!)

soliloquy

somebody

(*not* somebody)

somersault

something	(<i>not</i> something)
some times or sometimes?	Use the exemplar sentences as a guide: There are SOME TIMES when I want to leave college. (= some occasions) SOMETIMES I want to leave college. (= occasionally)
soubriquet	See SOBRIQUET/SOUBRIQUET .
souvenir	
sovereign	(exception to the -ie- rule) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
sow	See SEW OR SOW? .
spaghetti	
speach	Wrong spelling. See SPEECH .
speak	
specially	See ESPECIALLY OR SPECIALLY? .
speech	(<i>not</i> speech)
speech marks	See INVERTED COMMAS .
spelled/spelt	Both spellings are correct.
spilled/spilt	Both spellings are correct.
split infinitive	The infinitive of a verb is made up of two words: to eat, to speak, to begin, to wonder If a word (or a group of words) comes between the two words of an infinitive, the infinitive is said to be 'split'. It is not a serious matter at all! You may sometimes find it is effective to split an infinitive. Do so. On other occasions to split the infinitive may seem clumsy. Avoid doing so on those occasions. Use your own judgement. Here are some examples of split infinitives:

to boldly go where no man has gone before
to categorically and emphatically deny any wrongdoing
to sometimes wonder how much will be achieved

They can easily be rewritten:

to go boldly
to deny categorically and emphatically
to wonder sometimes

spoiled/spoilt

Both spellings are correct.

stand

Don't confuse the grammatical formation of tenses.

We **STAND** by the window after breakfast.

We **ARE STANDING** now.

We **HAVE BEEN STANDING** for an hour.

We **STOOD** by the window yesterday.

We **WERE STANDING** there when you called.

Never write or say:

⑥ We were stood.

say ② We were standing.

stationary or stationery?

STATIONARY = standing still (a **STATIONARY** car)

STATIONERY = notepaper and envelopes

stiletto (singular)

stilettos (plural)

See **PLURALS** (iv).

stimulant or stimulus?

Both words are related to 'stimulate' but there is a difference in meaning:

A **STIMULANT** is a temporary energiser like drink or drugs.

A **STIMULUS** is something that motivates (like competition).

stimulus (singular)	stimuli (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
stomach ache	
stood	See STAND .
storey (plural storeys) or story (plural stories)?	STOREY = one floor or level in a building A bungalow is a single- STOREY structure. A tower block can have twenty STOREYS . STORY = a tale I read a STORY each night to my little brother. Children love STORIES .
strategem or strategy?	STRATEGEM = a plot, scheme, sometimes a trick, which will outwit an opponent or overcome a difficulty STRATEGY = the overall plan for conducting a war or achieving a major objective
strategy or tactics?	STRATEGY = the overall plan or policy for achieving an objective TACTICS = the procedures necessary to carry out the strategic policy
stratum (singular)	strata (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
subjunctive	The subjunctive form of the verb is used to express possibilities, recommendations and wishes: If he WERE a gentleman (and he's not) he would apologise on bended knee. (Ⓢ If he was a gentleman...) If I WERE rich (and I'm not), I would help you. (Ⓢ If I was rich...)

I wish I **WERE** going with you (and sadly I'm not!).

(⑥ I wish I was going with you.)

I recommend that he **BE** sacked immediately.

(⑥ ... he is sacked)

I propose that the treasurer **LEAVE** the room.

(⑥ ... leaves)

It is vital that these questions **BE** answered.

(⑥ ... are answered)

The subjunctive is also used in these expressions but there is no change to the verb.

God **SAVE** the Queen.

God **BLESS** you.

Heaven **FORBID**.

submit

submitted, submitting

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

subtle

subtlety

subtly

success (singular)

successes (plural)

See **PLURALS** (ii).

successful

successfully

successful + ly

sufferance

suffixes

See **ADDING ENDINGS**.

suggest

(*not* surjest)

superlative

See **COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE**.

supersede

(*not* -cede)

supervise	(<i>not</i> -ize)
surfeit	(<i>not</i> -ie-, exception to rule) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE.
surjest	Wrong spelling. See SUGGEST.
surprise	(<i>not</i> suprise or surprize)
surprising	
surreptitious	
survivor	(<i>not</i> -er)
swam or swum?	<i>Note</i> these tenses of 'to swim': I SWAM the Channel last year. I have SWUM the Channel five times.
swinging or swingeing?	swing + ing = swinging swinge + ing = swingeing See SOFT C AND SOFT G.
swum	See SWAM OR SWUM?.
syllabus (singular)	syllabuses or syllabi (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS.
synchronise/ synchronize	Both spellings are correct.
synonym	
synonymous	
synopsis (singular)	synopses (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS.

T

tableau (singular)	tableaux (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
tactics	See STRATEGY OR TACTICS? .
taping or tapping?	tape + ing = taping tap + ing = tapping
tariff	(<i>not</i> -rr-)
taught or taut?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: Mrs Jenkins TAUGHT maths. Hold the line TAUT . Pull it tight.
technical	
tee shirt/T-shirt	Both versions are correct.
temperature	(four syllables)
tempo (singular)	tempi or tempos (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
temporarily	
temporary	(four syllables)
temprature	Wrong spelling. See TEMPERATURE .
tendency	(<i>not</i> -ancy)
tenses	See SEQUENCE OF TENSES . See entries for individual verbs.
terminus (singular)	termini or terminuses (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
terrible	(<i>not</i> -able)
testimonial or testimony?	TESTIMONIAL = formal statement in the form of an open letter bearing witness to someone's character, qualifications and relevant experience

TESTIMONY = formal written or spoken statement of evidence, especially in a court of law

**thank you or
thank-you?**

(never thankyou!)

I should like to **THANK YOU** very much for your help.

THANK YOU for your help.

I have written all my **THANK-YOU** letters.

You will see that 'thank you' is NEVER written as one word. It is hyphenated only when used as a compound adjective describing 'letter' or another noun.

Those who care about such things can never bring themselves to buy otherwise attractive thank-you cards that have **THANKYOU** or **THANK-YOU** printed on them!

their, there or they're? Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

They have sold **THEIR** house.

He is waiting for you over **THERE**.

THERE is no point in lying to me.

THEY'RE going to Krakow for Christmas.
(= they are)

theirs

(no apostrophe)

This is my dog; **THEIRS** has a white patch on his forehead.

themselves

Incorrect formation. See **THEMSELVES**.

themselves

They blame **THEMSELVES** for the crash.
They **THEMSELVES** were there.

there

See **THEIR, THERE OR THEY'RE?**.

there is/there are

See **SINGULAR OR PLURAL?** (iii).

thesis (singular)

theses (plural)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

they're

See **THEIR, THERE OR THEY'RE?**.

THIEF

thief (singular)

thieves (plural)

See **PLURALS** (v).

thorough

thoroughly

thorough + ly

threshold

(*not* -hh-)

tingeing

See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

tiny

(*not* -ey)

tired

(*not* I am tiered)

I feel very **TIRED** today.

titbit

(*not* tidbit)

titles

When punctuating the title of a book, film, poem, song, etc., take care to begin the first word and all subsequent key words with a capital letter.

Have you read 'To Kill a Mockingbird' by Harper Lee?

Titles can be italicised (in print and word-processing) or underlined or enclosed in inverted commas (single or double).

The film *Schindler's List* is based on the book by Thomas Keneally called *Schindler's Ark*.

I'm so pleased that A Diary of a Nobody is being serialised.

Have you seen the new production of 'Macbeth' at the Barbican?

to, too or two?

You should give this **TO** the police.

Do you know how **TO** swim?

(part of infinitive = to swim)

I was **TOO** embarrassed to say anything.
(= excessively)

Can we come **TOO?** (= also)

They have **TWO** houses, one in London and one in France.

tolerant	(<i>not</i> tollerant or tolerent)
tomato (singular)	tomatoes (plural) (an exception to rule) See PLURALS (iv).
tomorrow	(<i>not</i> tommorrow)
tonsillitis	
tornado (singular)	tornadoes or tornados (plural) See PLURALS (iv).
torpedo (singular)	torpedoes (plural) (an exception to rule) See PLURALS (iv).
tortuous or torturous?	TORTUOUS = full of twists and turns, complex, convoluted TORTUROUS = painful, agonising, excruciating
total	
totally	total + ly
toupee	(<i>not</i> toupée)
traffic	trafficked, trafficking, trafficker See SOFT C AND SOFT G .
tragedy	(<i>not</i> tradgedy)
tragic	(<i>not</i> tradgic)
transfer	transferred, transferring, transference See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
transpire	Strictly speaking, this verb has two meanings: ▶ to give off moisture (of plant or leaf) ▶ to come slowly to be known, to leak out (of secret information) It is often used loosely in the sense of 'to happen'. Why not use 'to happen' instead of this rather pompous word?

travel	travelled, travelling, traveller See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
trivia	This is a plural noun and should be matched with a plural verb. Such TRIVIA are to be condemned.
troop or troupe?	TROOP refers to the armed forces or to groups of people or particular animals: a TROOP of scouts a TROOP of children a TROOP of monkeys TROUPE refers to a group of touring actors, dancers, musicians or other entertainers.
trooper or trouper?	TROOPER = cavalry soldier or member of an armoured unit He swears like a TROOPER at nine years old. TROUPER = a touring entertainer Jack Densley is a grand old TROUPER .
truly	(<i>not</i> truely, an exception to the -y rule) See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).
try	tried, trying See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
tumulus (singular)	tumuli (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
turf (singular)	turfs or turves (plural) See PLURALS (v).
twelfth	(<i>not</i> twelth, as it is often mispronounced)
twentieth	See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
twenty	
typical	
typically	typical + ly

U

ultimatum (singular)	ultimata or ultimatus (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS.
umbrella	(<i>not</i> umberella)
umpire	See REFEREE OR UMPIRE?.
un-	Remember that when un- is added to a word beginning with n-, you will have -nn-: un + natural = unnatural un + nerve = unnerve
unconscious	
under-	Remember that when you add under- to a word beginning with r-, you will have -rr-: under + rate = underrate
underlay or underlie?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: to UNDERLAY = to lay or place under You should UNDERLAY the carpet with felt if your floorboards are very uneven. I UNDERLAID this carpet with very thick felt because the floorboards were so uneven. This carpet IS UNDERLAID with felt. to UNDERLIE = to be situated under (esp. rocks) Granite UNDERLIES the sandstone here. Granite UNDERLAY the sandstone, as we soon discovered. The sandstone here IS UNDERLAIN by granite.

UNDERRATE

also:

The **UNDERLYING** problem is poverty.

Compare **LAY OR LIE?**.

underrate

under + rate

undoubtedly

unequivocally

unequivocal + ly (*not* unequivocably)

**unexceptionable or
unexceptional?**

UNEXCEPTIONABLE = inoffensive, not likely to cause criticism or objections

UNEXCEPTIONAL = ordinary, run-of-the-mill

Compare **EXCEPTIONABLE OR EXCEPTIONAL?**.

unget-at-able

(*not* un-get-at-able)

uninterested

See **DISINTERESTED OR UNINTERESTED?**.

unique

Remember, that 'unique' is absolute. It means 'the only one of its kind'.

Something is either unique or it's not. It can't be 'quite unique' or 'very unique'.

unmanageable

(*not* unmanageable)

See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

**unmistakable/
unmistakeable**

Both spellings are correct.

unnatural

un + natural

unnecessary

un + necessary

unparalleled

until

(*not* untill)

unusually

unusual + ly

upon

(*not* apon)

upstairs

(one word)

urban or urbane?

URBAN = relating to a town or city

URBAN population

URBANE = suave, courteous

used to

② I **USED TO** like him very much
The negative form is:

② I **USED NOT TO** like him very much.

⑥ I didn't used to like him.

useful

useless

usurper

(*not -or*)

V

vase	
vechicle	Wrong spelling. See VEHICLE .
vegetable	(<i>not</i> vegtable)
vegetation	
vehicle	(<i>not</i> vechicle)
veil	See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
vengeance	(<i>not</i> vengance) See SOFT C AND SOFT G .
ventilation	(<i>not</i> venta-)
veracity or voracity?	VERACITY = truthfulness VORACITY = greed
veranda/verandah	Both spellings are correct.
vertebra (singular)	vertebrae (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
veterinary	(five syllables!)
vice versa	
vicious	
view	
vigorous	(<i>not</i> vigourous) See also RIGOROUS OR VIGOROUS? .
vigour	
villain	
violent	
virtuoso (singular)	virtuosi or virtuosos (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
visible	(<i>not</i> -able)

visitor	(<i>not</i> -er)
vocabulary	(five syllables)
volcano (singular)	volcanoes or volcanos (plural) See PLURALS (iv).
voluntary	
volunteer	volunteered, volunteering
voracity	See VERACITY OR VORACITY? .
vortex (singular)	vortexes or vortices (plural) See FOREIGN PLURALS .
vowels	Five letters of the alphabet are always vowels: a e i o u The letter y is sometimes a vowel and sometimes a consonant. It is a vowel when it sounds like e or i: pretty, busy sly, pylon Y is a consonant at the beginning of syllables and words and has a different sound: yellow, beyond

W

waist or waste?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: Tie this rope around your WAIST . Don't WASTE paper. What do you do with WASTE paper? Industrial WASTE causes pollution.
waive or wave?	WAIVE = to give something up or not exact it I shall WAIVE the fine on this occasion. WAVE = to move something to and fro WAVE to the Queen.
wander or wonder?	I love to WANDER through the forest. (rhymes with girl's name, Wanda) I WONDER what has happened to him. (rhymes with 'under')
wasn't	Place the apostrophe carefully.
waste	See WAIST OR WASTE? .
wave	See WAIVE OR WAVE? .
weak or week?	WEAK = feeble WEEK = seven days
weather or whether?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: The WEATHER this winter has been awful. I don't know WHETHER I can help. (= if)
Wednesday	(<i>not</i> Wensday)
week	See WEAK OR WEEK? .
weir	(exception to the -ie- rule) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .

weird	(exception to the -ie- rule) See EI/IE SPELLING RULE .
Wensday	Wrong spelling. See WEDNESDAY .
were or where?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: We WERE walking very fast. (rhymes with 'her') WHERE are you? (rhymes with 'air') Do you know WHERE he is? This is the house WHERE I was born.
weren't	Place the apostrophe carefully.
wharf (singular)	wharfs or wharves (plural) Both spellings are correct.
where	See WERE OR WHERE? .
whether	See WEATHER OR WHETHER? .
whilst	(exception to magic -e rule) See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).
whiskey or whisky?	WHISKEY is distilled in Ireland. WHISKY is distilled in Scotland.
who or whom?	The grammatical distinction is that 'who' is a subject pronoun and 'whom' is an object pronoun. (i) Use this method to double-check whether you need a subject pronoun or an object pronoun when who/whom begins a question: Ask yourself the question and anticipate the answer. If this could be one of the subject pronouns (I, he, she, we or they), then you need 'who' at the beginning of the question: Who/whom is there? The answer could be: <i>I</i> am there. (2) WHO is there?

If the answer could be one of the object pronouns (me, him, her, us or them), then you need 'whom' at the beginning of the question:

Who/whom did you meet when you went to London?

The answer could be: I met *him*.

② **WHOM** did you meet?

(ii) Use this method if who/whom comes in the middle of a sentence:

Break the sentence into two sentences and see whether a subject pronoun (I, he, she, we, they) is needed in the second sentence or an object pronoun (me, him, her, us, them).

Here is the man who/whom can help you.

Divide into two sentences:

Here is the man. *He* can help you.

② Here is the man **WHO** can help you.

He is a writer who/whom I have admired for years.

Divide into two sentences:

He is a writer. I have admired *him* for years.

② He is a writer **WHOM** I have admired for years.

whole

See **HOLE OR WHOLE?**.

wholly

(exception to the magic e- rule)

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

who's or whose?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

WHO'S been eating my porridge? (= who has)

WHO'S coming to supper? (= who is)

	WHOSE calculator is this? (= belonging to whom) There's a girl WHOSE cat was killed.
wierd	Wrong spelling. See WEIRD .
wife (singular)	wives (plural) See PLURALS (v).
wilful	(<i>not</i> willful)
will	See SHALL OR WILL? .
wining or winning?	wine + ing = wining win + ing = winning See ADDING ENDINGS (i) and (ii).
wisdom	(exception to magic -e rule) See ADDING ENDINGS (ii).
withhold	(<i>not</i> withhold)
wolf (singular)	wolves (plural) See PLURALS (v).
woman (singular)	women (plural) See PLURALS (vi).
wonder	See WANDER OR WONDER? .
won't	See CONTRACTIONS .
woollen	(<i>not</i> woolen)
worship	worshipped, worshipping, worshipper (exception to 2-1-1 rule) See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).
would	See SHOULD OR WOULD? .
wouldn't	Take care to place the apostrophe correctly.
would of	Incorrect construction. See COULD OF .
wrapped	See RAPT OR WRAPPED? .

wreath or wreathe?	Use these exemplar sentences as a guide: She lay a WREATH of lilies on his grave. (= noun) Look at him WREATHED in cigarette smoke. (verb, rhymes with 'seethed')
write	Use these sentences as a guide to tenses: I WRITE to her every day. I AM WRITING a letter now. I WROTE yesterday. I have WRITTEN every day.
writer	(<i>not</i> writter)
wry	wrier or wryer, wriest or wryest
wryly	(exception to the y- rule) See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).
wryness	(exception to the -y rule) See ADDING ENDINGS (iii).

Y

-y rule

See **ADDINGS ENDINGS** (iii).

See **PLURALS** (iii).

yacht

yield

See **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

**yoghurt/youghourt/
yogurt**

All these spellings are correct.

yoke or yolk?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

The **YOKE** of the christening gown was beautifully embroidered.

The oxen were **YOKED** together.

She will eat only the **YOLK** of the egg.

your or you're?

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

YOUR essay is excellent. (= belonging to you)

YOU'RE joking! (= you are)

yours

This is **YOURS**.

No apostrophe needed!

Z

zealot

zealous

zealously

Zimmer frame

zloty (singular)

zloties or zlotys (plural)
See **PLURALS** (iii).

zoological

zoology

Appendix A

Literary Terms

Here are a few of the most widely used literary devices. You will probably be familiar with them in practice but perhaps cannot always put a name to them.

alliteration the repetition of sounds at the beginning of words and syllables.

- ▶ Around the rugged rocks the ragged rascals ran.

climax ▶ I came; I saw; I conquered!

epigram a short pithy saying.

- ▶ Truth is never pure, and rarely simple. (Oscar Wilde)

euphemism an indirect way of referring to distressing or unpalatable facts.

- ▶ I've *lost* both my parents. (= they've died)
- ▶ She's rather *light-fingered*. (= she's a thief)

hyperbole exaggeration.

- ▶ Jack cut his knee rather badly and lost *gallons* of blood.
- ▶ What's for lunch? I'm *starving*.
- ▶ I loved Ophelia. *Forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum.* (Shakespeare: 'Hamlet')

irony saying one thing while clearly meaning the opposite.

- ▶ For Brutus is an *honourable* man. (Shakespeare: 'Julius Caesar')

litotes understatement.

- ▶ He was *not exactly polite*. (= very rude)
- ▶ I am a citizen of *no mean city*. (= St Paul boasting about Tarsus and hence about himself)

metaphor a compressed comparison.

- ▶ Anna *flew* downstairs. (i.e. her speed resembled the speed of a bird in flight)
- ▶ Sleep that *knits up the ravelled sleeve of care*. (Shakespeare: 'Macbeth')

- ▶ No man is *an island, entire of itself*. (John Donne)

metonymy the substitution of something closely associated.

- ▶ The *bottle* has been his downfall. (= alcohol)
- ▶ The *kettle's* boiling. (= the water in the kettle)
- ▶ The *pen* is mightier than the *sword*.

onomatopoeia echoing the sound.

- ▶ Bees *buzz*; sausages *sizzle* in the pan; ice-cubes *tinkle* in the glass.

Frequently, alliteration, vowel sounds and selected consonants come together to evoke the sounds being described:

- ▶ Only the monstrous anger of the guns
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
(Wilfred Owen: 'Anthem for Doomed Youth')

oxymoron apparently contradictory terms which make sense at a deeper level.

- ▶ The *cruel mercy* of the executioner bought him peace at last.

paradox a deliberately contradictory statement on the surface which challenges you to discover the underlying truth.

- ▶ If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing badly. (G. K. Chesterton)

personification describing abstract concepts and inanimate objects as though they were people.

- ▶ Death *lays his icy hand* on kings. (James Shirley)

Often human feelings are also attributed. This extension of personification is called the **pathetic fallacy**.

- ▶ The wind *sobbed* and *shrieked in impotent rage*.

pun a play on words by calling upon two meanings at once.

- ▶ Is life worth living? It depends on the *liver*.

rhetorical question no answer needed!

- ▶ Do you *want* to fail your exam?

simile a comparison introduced by 'like', 'as', 'as if' or 'as though'.

- ▶ *O, my Luve's like a red red rose
That's newly sprung in June.* (Robert Burns)
- ▶ I wandered lonely *as a cloud*. (William Wordsworth)

- ▶ You look *as if you've seen a ghost*.

synecdoche referring to the whole when only a part is meant, or vice versa.

- ▶ *England* has lost the Davis Cup. (= one person)
- ▶ *All hands* on deck!

transferred epithet the adjective is moved from the person it describes to an object.

- ▶ She sent an *apologetic* letter.
- ▶ He tossed all night on a *sleepless* pillow.

zeugma grammatical play on two applications of a word.

- ▶ She *swallowed* her pride and three dry sherries.
- ▶ She went straight home *in* a flood of tears and a sedan chair.
(Charles Dickens: 'The Pickwick Papers')

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Appendix B

Parts of Speech

Each part of speech has a separate function.

Verbs are 'being' and 'doing' words.

It *seems*.

She *is laughing*.

All the pupils *have tried* hard.

Note also these three verb forms: the infinitive (*to seem*); the present participle (*trying*); the past participle (*spoken*).

Adverbs mainly describe verbs.

He spoke *masterfully*. (= how)

She *often* cries. (= when)

My grandparents live *here*. (= where)

Nouns are names (of objects, people, places, emotions, collections, and so on).

common noun: *table*

proper noun: *Emma*

abstract noun: *friendship*

collective noun: *swarm*

Pronouns take the place of nouns.

He loves me. *This* is *mine*. *Who* cares? *I* do.

Adjectives describe nouns and pronouns.

a *hard* exercise a *noisy* class *red* wine

Conjunctions are joining words.

co-ordinating: fish *and* chips; naughty *but* nice; now *or* never

subordinating: We trusted him *because* he was honest.

She'll accept *if* you ask her.

Everyone knows *that* you are doing your best.

Prepositions show how nouns and pronouns relate to the rest of the sentence.

Put it *in* the box. Phone me *on* Thursday. Give it *to* me. Wait *by* the war memorial. He's the boss *of* Tesco.

Interjections are short exclamations.

Hi! *Ouch!* *Hurray!* *Ugh!* *Oh!* *Shh!* *Hear, hear!*

The articles: definite (*the*)

indefinite (*a*; *an* – singular; *some* – plural)

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Appendix C

Planning, Drafting and Proofreading

PLANNING

Whenever you have an important essay, letter, report or article to write, it's well worth taking time to work out in advance exactly what you want to say. Consider also the response you hope to get from those who read the finished document and decide on the tone and style which would be most appropriate.

- ▶ Next, jot down, as they come into your head, all the points that you want to include. Don't try to sort them into any order. Brainstorm. (It's better to have too much material at this stage than too little.)
- ▶ Then, read through these jottings critically, rejecting any that no longer seem relevant or helpful.
- ▶ Group related points together. These will form the basis of future paragraphs.
- ▶ Sequence these groups of points into a logical and persuasive order.
- ▶ Decide on an effective introduction and conclusion.

DRAFTING

Now you are ready to write the first draft.

- ▶ Concentrate on conveying clearly all that you want to say, guided by the structure of your plan.
- ▶ Choose your words with care. Aim at the right level of formality or informality.
- ▶ Put to one side any doubts about spelling, punctuation, grammar or usage. These can be checked later. (If you wish, you can pencil queries in the margin, or key in a run of question marks – ?????.)
- ▶ When you have finished this first draft, read it critically, concentrating initially on content. (It can help to read aloud.) Have you included everything? Is your meaning always clear? Should some points be expanded? Should some be omitted? Have you repeated yourself unnecessarily?

- ▶ Read the amended text again, this time checking that you have maintained the appropriate tone. Make any adjustments that may be needed.
- ▶ Examine the paragraphing. Does each paragraph deal adequately with each topic? Should any paragraphs be expanded? Should any be divided? Should the order be changed? Does each paragraph link easily with the next? Are you happy with the opening and closing paragraphs? (Sometimes they work better when they are reversed.) Should any paragraphs be jettisoned?
- ▶ Are you happy with the layout and the presentation?
- ▶ If you have made a lot of alterations, you may wish to make a neat copy at this stage. Read through again, critically, making any adjustments that you feel necessary. You may find third and fourth drafts are needed if you are working on a really important document. Don't begrudge the time and effort. Much may depend on the outcome.

PROOFREADING

When you are happy with the content, style and tone, you are ready to proofread. Proofreading means scrutinising the text for spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage and typographical errors.

- ▶ Make yourself read very slowly. Best of all, read aloud. Read sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph. Read what is actually there, not what you *meant* to write.
- ▶ Check anything that seems doubtful. Check all the queries you tentatively raised earlier. Don't skip this vital penultimate stage. Don't rely wholly on a computer spellcheck; it will take you only so far (and, in some cases, introduce errors of its own).
- ▶ If you know you have a particular weakness (spelling, perhaps, or not marking sentence boundaries – commas are not substitutes for full stops!), then devote one read-through exclusively to this special area.
- ▶ When you are satisfied that you have made this important document as good as you possibly can, you are ready to make the final neat version. If, in the process, you make any small errors, don't simply cross them out and don't use correction fluid. Rewrite. When the last word is written, you can be

satisfied that you have done your very best. Good luck!

Note: If you have a form to fill in, it is well worth making a few photocopies before you start. Practise what you want to say on the photocopies. Fit what you want to say carefully in the space available. Then complete the original form. It's well worth the extra time taken.