

Common Spelling Rules

Single syllable division (typically starts in grade 1)		
Rule	Definition and explanation of why the rule works	Examples
Floss rule -ff -ll- -ss -zz	Used when there is one syllable, a short vowel and ends with /f/, /l/, /s/, and sometimes /z/, double the ending letter.	puff, doll, fuss, buzz
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Consonants following a short vowel solidify the short vowel sound. ❖ Exceptions to the Floss rule are often shortened forms of longer words (gas is short for 'gasoline'; bus is short for 'omnibus'). 	
Use of c- vs. k-	k- is used at the beginning of a word when followed by any sound represented by e, i, or y.	keep, kit, sky
	c- is used before the vowels a, o, u, and all consonants. If a consonant blend is heard, use a c with the consonant.	cat, core, clutch, crumb
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ C is used to represent /k/ in beginning blends (cl, cr) in English; "kr" is not an allowable blend in English (though we see it in names and in words from other languages). ❖ K is used before the letters e, i, and y because these letters influence the sound of the letter C. <p>"Keep the kite in the sky" is a way to remember the spellings where K is used in the initial position.</p>		
-k -ck	-ck is the common spelling for /k/ at the end of a syllable following an accented short vowel.	peck, sick, rack, sticker, chicken
	-k is used after a consonant, long vowel sound and after two vowels.	milk, rake, speak
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ -ck is only used at the end of a word; it cannot be used to begin a word. 		
Use of j vs g (soft g rule)	g- is used before any sound represented by e, i, or y, which in turn makes the /j/ sound.	gem, giant,
	J is used before everything else.	jam, jot, jury
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ This rule is less consistent for the letter G than the letter C - exceptions like gill, get, and gift occur and are often leftover from Anglo Saxon 		
C for /s/ (soft c rule)	C is used for the /s/ sound before any sound represented by e, i, or y.	cyst, celery, circle

	❖ This rule is highly consistent for the letter C - there are rarely exceptions.	
Use of /j/ spelled with - dge or -ge	-dge is used in a one-syllable base word after a short vowel, or at the end of a syllable after an accented short vowel.	edge, dodge, fudge
	-ge is used for the /j/ sound after long vowels, diphthongs, unaccented vowels, or other consonants.	cage, rage, bulge, village
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ No English word ends in j; the /g/ sound at the end of an English word is always spelled with a g. ❖ In the -dge spelling, the d acts as a consonant guardian to preserve the short vowel sound. ❖ In both -dge, and -ge spellings, the final e acts to soften the g into its /j/ sound. 	
-ch vs. -tch	-tch is used after a short vowel to represent the /ch/ sound.	stitch, fetch
	-ch is used after r-controlled, vowel teams, and consonants.	couch, mulch, porch, beach

Multisyllabic Spelling Rules (typically starts in grade 2)

Doubling rule	When a word ends in one vowel and one consonant and the final syllable is accented, the consonant is doubled before the vowel suffix is added. By doing this, it makes it possible to maintain a short vowel sound in the syllable due to it being closed.	shop---shopped, shopping, begin--- beginning pet---petted
	<p>The following letters never or rarely double in English words: h, k, y, j, v, w, x</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Language connection: The doubling of the consonant protects the short vowel in the first syllable when the ending is added. Then, syllable division rules still apply to help determine the sound of the initial vowel. Words with short vowels and more than one consonant are already protected, so no additional consonants are needed. ❖ A suffix beginning with a consonant will not affect the vowel pronunciation when the syllables are divided, so no change to the base word is needed. ❖ There are letters that are never doubled in English: h, j, y, k, v, w, i, x. These typically do not end one syllable words with a short vowel, with the exception of x. 	
Dropping rule (silent E rule)	When a word ends in an e, drop it before adding a suffix that begins with a vowel. If the suffix begins with a consonant, keep the e.	hope---hoping---- hopeful
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The purpose of the silent e is to make the vowel long, but when we add a vowel suffix we inadvertently create a vowel team. Dropping the 'e' avoids this. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Preserving the silent e when we add a suffix beginning in the consonant also preserves the long vowel sound in the base word. 	
Y rule (Y to I)	<p>If a base word ends in y with a consonant before it, change the y to i before the suffix</p> <p>If the base word ends in y with a vowel before it, just add the suffix.</p>	<p>lady--- ladies beauty---beautiful</p> <p>joy---joyful</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Changing the y to i preserves the long vowel sound in a two syllable word (if the y was left, dividing the syllables would result in the y making its consonant sound in the second syllable (example: buried: ‘bur yed”; “readied: “read yed”).) ❖ The y stays in place when adding a suffix beginning with i because to change the y would create a doubled i, which is illegal in English spelling. 	
Plural -s vs. -es	<p>If a word ends in -s, -sh, -ch, -x, or -z, add -es because these sounds are voiceless. For almost all other voiced consonants in a noun, add -s to make it plural.</p>	<p>churches, buses, foxes</p> <p>papers, cups, lights</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ -es is added to words that end in these sounds: /s/ /sh/ /ch/ /x/, and not simply -s, because of the proximity of these sounds to the -s sound when produced orally. Note that all of these are voiceless fricatives, which is then followed by another fricative to make a plural form. ❖ The addition of the vowel e creates an additional syllable and allows us to more easily produce both sounds. 	
Consonant -le doubling	<p>If a word ends in a stable syllable -le, double the consonant when there is a short vowel before it. By doing this, it makes it possible to maintain a short vowel sound in the syllable due to it being closed.</p>	<p>stubble, baffle, juggle</p>

References:

Birsh, Judith and Suzanne Carreker. *Multisensory Teaching of Basic Language Skills*. Brookes Publishing, Baltimore, 2018.

Sedita, Joan. *Keys to Beginning Reading Teacher Training Manual*. Keys to Literacy, Rowley, 2019.