

What are the must-know spelling rules?

by Anna Geiger, M.Ed.



Read this blogpost on [themeasuredmom.com](https://www.themeasuredmom.com):

<https://www.themeasuredmom.com/what-are-the-must-know-spelling-rules/#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20learning%20basic,the%20end%20of%20English%20words>

Welcome back to our spelling series! In this post we'll discuss spelling rules and which ones are worth teaching.

First, I should note that I am talking about *spelling*, not reading rules. Some rules, like the FLOSS rule, make perfect sense when it comes to teaching spelling. But I don't think that we need to explicitly teach this rule for children to read words like *hill*, *miss*, and *buzz*. It's enough to demonstrate that a double letter is only pronounced once.

At the same time, I believe that phonics and spelling instruction should be aligned in the early grades, so teaching the spelling rule makes sense to me – as long as we understand that children do not need to know this rule to read. It's useful when children are *spelling*.

› Must-know spelling rules

In addition to learning basic letter-sound correspondences, children need to know alternate spellings and when to use them. They need to know rules about dropping and doubling letters. They need to know when to use a silent e. They need to know which letters are "illegal" at the end of English words.

On the following page, I list the spelling rules and patterns that I think are important for teachers and students to know.

NAME OF RULE OR PATTERN	DESCRIPTION OF RULE OR PATTERN		EXAMPLES
FLOSS Rule	When a one-syllable word ends with the /f/, /l/, /s/ or /z/ sound, double the final letter.		stuff, will, dress, fuzz Exceptions: bus, gas, pal, us, if, this
C/K Spelling Rule	When spelling /k/, use c before the vowels a, o, and u. Use k before the vowels e and i.		cat, cot, cup keep, kite
Final /k/ Rule	When a one-syllable short vowel word ends with /k/, use ck. Use k after a consonant or long vowel.		stick, duck milk, rake
The V Rule	English words do not end with plain v. When /v/ occurs at the end of a word, add a final silent e.		give, have, live
CH/TCH	When a one-syllable short vowel word ends with a short vowel and /ch/, spell it tch.		switch, latch Exceptions: much, such, rich, which
GE/DGE	When a one-syllable short vowel word ends with a short vowel and /j/, spell it dge.		bridge, badge
SILENT E RULES	1. Final silent e can make the vowel say its name. 2. Final silent e can soften the sound of c or g. 3. Final silent e gives a consonant-le syllable a printed vowel. 4. Final silent e can give a consonant a voice. 5. Final silent e can make it clear that a word is not plural. 6. Final silent e can keep a word from ending in v or u. 7. Final silent e can distinguish function from content words.		1. cake, gate 2. choice, change 3. bundle, riddle 4. breathe, soothe 5. house, goose 6. have, sue 7. or, ore
Doubling Rule	If a one-syllable word ends with a short vowel and single consonant, double the final consonant before adding a vowel suffix. Do not double when adding a consonant suffix.		sad + er = sadder sad + ly = sadly
Drop It Rule	Words ending with silent e drop the e before adding a vowel suffix. They keep the e when adding a consonant suffix.		hope + ed = hoped hope + ful = hopeful
Change It Rule	When a word ends with a consonant and y, change the y to i when adding a suffix that does not already begin with i.		tidy + er = tidier tidy + ing = tidying
Plurals	Add -es to words ending with s, ss, sh, ch, or x. Change f or fe to v and add -es.		bus + es = buses match + es = matches knife + es = knives
Prefix Rule	Never double a consonant when adding a prefix. If the prefix's final consonant and the root word's initial consonant are the same, keep them both.		mis + spell = misspell un + necessary = unnecessary
OI/OY Pattern	When spelling /oi/, oi is generally used at the beginning or middle of a syllable. Oy is generally used at the end.		oil boy
OU/OW Pattern	When spelling /ou/, ou is generally used at the beginning or middle of a syllable. Ow is generally used at the end.		pound cow
Consonant-le Doubling Rule	If a word ends with a short vowel and consonant-le, double the consonant.		bubble giggle

› Are there other spelling rules and patterns you should teach?

This is largely a matter of opinion. Here are other resources with a list of rules that is not identical to my preferred list.

- [Logic of English](#) has a longer list of spelling rules. You can learn about the rules in detail in Denise Eid's book, [Understanding the Logic of English](#).
- In her book, [Spelling for Life](#), Lyn Stone has a set of uniquely named spelling rules. (All her books are worth purchasing!)
- Silver Moon Spelling Rules is a program that focuses on a set of 21 rules. You can learn more by downloading the Progression of Skills [on this page](#).

› How to teach spelling rules

1. State the rule.

In her book with Charles Hughes, Anita Archer explains that rules are generally understood through an If-Then statement.

For example, **if** a one-syllable word ends with a short vowel and /ch/, **then** /ch/ should be spelled with *tch*.

2. Present examples and non-examples.

Examples of this rule include *catch*, *notch*, and *sketch*.

Non-examples include *bench* (because the word ends with a short vowel *plus* a consonant before the /ch/) and *beach* (because the word has a long vowel).

3. Guide students in analyzing examples and non-examples.

For example, ask your students how to analyze the word *switch*. How is /ch/ spelled in this word? Why?

A nonexample would be the word *stench*. How is /ch/ spelled in this word? Why?

4. Check students' understanding of the rule.

One way to do this is to do [spelling dictation](#) with immediate feedback. Dictate words that follow (and don't follow) the rule. After students spell each word on paper or on a dry-erase board, post the correct spelling and discuss it as needed.

› Reference

[Explicit Instruction](#), by Anita Archer

More resources for you

- Get the book, [Reach All Readers](#)
- Sign up for the [Reach All Readers online course](#)
- Join our [membership for K-3rd grade teachers](#)