The Writing Center

Online Handouts

TEN RULES FOR BETTER SPELLING

1. Take Your Words Apart

Break down your words into their component parts. For example, look at the synonym for "rivalry," which is "competition." Why is it spelled "**com**petition" rather than "**compi**tition?"

A competition is a petition of two or more people for the same thing; they seek the same objective. You get the correct spelling by dividing the word into its two parts: **com-petition.**

2. Identify Prefixes

A prefix is a letter or group of letters at the beginning of a word. When a word has a prefix, imagine that there is a hyphen between the word and the prefix, and you will generally see the correct spelling.

"Dissolve" consists of **dis-solve**. "Disappear" consists of **dis-appear**. So, a word that is combined with the prefix dis is spelled with ss if the root word originally begins with **s**, but with a single **s** if it begins with any other letter.

Examples: dis-satisfy, dis-similar, dis-appoint, dis-believe, dis-locate, dis-regard; mis-step, mis-understand; over-rated, over-extend; un-natural, un-necessary, un-interesting; under-rate, under-estimate.

3. Identify Suffixes

When a word has a suffix (a letter or group of letters at the end), you can generally apply a test similar to the prefix test. Imagine a hyphen between the word and the suffix; double the letter if the word ends and the suffix begins with the same sound; but do not double when the two letters are different.

Examples: actual-ly, drunken-ness, soul-less; sincere-ly, clever-ness, heart-less.

4. Double Consonants Before Suffixes -- Part 1

When a monosyllable (a word of one syllable) ends in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel, you double the consonant before adding **ing, ed, er, est**.

Examples: star, starring; tap, tapped; wrap, wrapper; big, biggest.

5. Double Consonants Before Suffixes -- Part 2

When a word of more than one syllable ends in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel, and when the accent is on the last syllable, you double the consonant before adding **ing, ed, er, est**.

Examples: concur, concurring; commit, committed; forbid, forbidden; compel, compelling.

If you remember Rules 4 and 5, you will see why the following words are spelled with a single instead of a double consonant: beat, beating; heat, heater; conquer, conquering, soft, softest. "Beat" and "hear" end in a single consonant, but the consonant follows two vowels instead of a single vowel; "conquer" does not have the accent on the last syllable; "soft" ends in two consonants.

6. Drop the *E*

When a word ends in a consonant followed by a silent **e**, drop the **e** before you add **ing**.

Examples: bribe, bribing; drive, driving; save, saving; urge, urging.

7. Keep the *Y* Before Adding *ING*

When a word ends in **y** preceded by a consonant. keep the **y** before adding **ing**. but change the **y** to **i** before adding **es** or **ed**.

Examples: cry. crying. cries. cried: reply. replying. replies. replied.

8. Use *I* Before *E* Except After *C*... Usually

With words in which **ei** or **ie** are pronounced like the **ee** in seem, use **ei** after **c**, and **ie** after other consonants. This will not apply if **ei** is pronounced like the **a** in late.

Examples: **receive**, per**ceive**; **field**, **believe**, **niece**, **siege**.

There are, though, a number of exceptions to the rule: finan**cier**, **neither**, **seize**, **weird**.

Other apparent exceptions are words such as: eight, freight, reign, sleigh. Note, however, that the letters **ei** are pronounced like **a** in late.

9. Know the *Sedes* and the *Ceeds*

Only one word ends in **sede**: supersede. Only three words end in **ceed**: exceed, proceed, succeed. All other words ending with this pronunciation use **cede**: concede, precede, recede, etc.

10. Learn Homophones

Common homophones (words sounding the same) are listed below. Learn their meanings.

alter, altar
threw, through
to, too, two
dew, due
flour, flower
fore, four, for
write, right
eight, ate
steak, stake
hour, our
one, won
there, their, they're
be, bee
eye, I
night, knight
blue, blew
weigh, way
not, knot
loan, lone
tied, tide
weight, wait
so, sew
wave, waive
red, read
lain, lane
ware, where, wear
vary, very
wry, rye
might, mite
sight, site, cite
wight, white
buy, bye
right, rite
brewed, brood
choose, chews
been, bin
in, inn
win, when
sail, sale
ail, ale
bail, bale
mail, male
cent, sent
lint, lent
mint, meant
loan, lone
bough, bow
beaux, bow

Spelling Sample Test

Choose the word that is spelled incorrectly. **<u>If all are correct, mark e) all are correct</u>**

1. a) absess b) absence c) abundance d) accelerate e) all are correct
2. a) accidental b) accommodate c) acquitted d) adament e) all are correct
3. a) admirable b) advertize c) agreeable d) allege e) all are correct
4. a) all right b) analyze c) ancient d) anulled e) all are correct
5. a) anoint b) anonymous c) antecedant d) appalling e) all are correct
6. a) appearence b) arguable c) argument d) arrival e) all are correct
7. a) assess b) bachelor c) battalion d) believe e) all are correct
8. a) beseige b) bookkeeper c) brief d) broccoli e) all are correct
9. a) caffeine b) collaborate c) collossal d) commitment e) all are correct
10. a) committee b) compeled c) complement d) concede e) all are correct
11. a) conceited b) concurred c) conscience d) consceintious e) all are correct
12. a) concensus b) contemptible c) coolly d) copyright e) all are correct
13. a) corraborate b) counterfeit c) criticize d) decisively e) all are correct
14. a) deficient b) demagogue c) desirable d) deterrance e) all are correct
15. a) dilema b) disagree c) disappear d) discernible e) all are correct
16. a) disheveled b) dissimilar c) dumfound d) ecstasy e) all are correct
17. a) eligable b) energy c) embarrassed d) enforceable e) all are correct
18. a) equipped b) exceed c) excize d) exercise e) all are correct
19. a) exhilarate b) facetous c) feign d) fierce e) all are correct
20. a) financeir b) foreign c) forfeit d) forty e) all are correct
21. a) governor b) grievious c) gullible d) harass e) all are correct
22. a) hemorrhage b) heresy c) hierarchy d) hypocrisy e) all are correct
23. a) indispensible b) inflexible c) innocuous d) innuendo e) all are correct
24. a) insistence b) irascible c) irresistable d) judgment e) all are correct
25. a) khaki b) adolesent c) mischief d) leisure e) all are correct
26. a) livable b) lonliness c) manageable d) maneuver e) all are correct
27. a) merchandise b) minimize c) miscellaneous d) mischievious e) all are correct
28. a) misspelling b) misstate c) moveable d) necessary e) all are correct
29. a) negligable b) newsstand c) numskull d) obscene e) all are correct
30. a) obssession b) occasional c) occurred d) occurrence e) all are correct
31. a) ommitted b) omniscient c) oppressive d) orator e) all are correct
32. a) parallel b) passable c) passtime d) perceive e) all are correct
33. a) plausible b) precede c) preference d) prefered e) all are correct
34. a) presumptous b) privilege c) proceed d) profited e) all are correct
35. a) prohibited b) quizzed c) quotient d) rarefy e) all are correct
36. a) receive b) refered c) reign d) relevance e) all are correct
37. a) relief b) repetition c) repressible d) resuscatate e) all are correct
38. a) retained b) revise c) rhthym d) sacrilegious e) all are correct
39. a) satellite b) secession c) seizure d) sensitive e) all are correct
40. a) seperate b) sergeant c) sheriff d) shield e) all are correct
41. a) shriek b) sieve c) sincerely d) skepticism e) all are correct
42. a) sovereign b) specify c) stationery d) sucumb e) all are correct
43. a) suddenness b) sufficeint c) superintendent d) supersede e) all are correct
44. a) suppress b) surprise c) susceptable d) sustenance e) all are correct
45. a) synogogue b) tariff c) thoroughly d) threshold e) all are correct
46. a) tobacco b) traceable c) tresspass d) unskillful e) all are correct
47. a) usable b) vacancy c) vacillate d) valuable e) all are correct
48. a) villain b) wierd c) wholly d) wield e) all are correct
49. a) withold b) worshiper c) yield d) youth e) all are correct

Spelling Answers

Choose the word that is spelled incorrectly. **<u>If all are correct, mark e) all are correct</u>**

1. **a) absess** b) absence c) abundance d) accelerate e) all are correct
2. a) accidental b) accommodate c) acquitted **d) adament** e) all are correct
3. a) admirable **b) advertize** c) agreeable d) allege e) all are correct
4. a) all right b) analyze c) ancient **d) anulled** e) all are correct
5. a) anoint b) anonymous **c) antecedant** d) appalling e) all are correct
6. **a) appearence** b) arguable c) argument d) arrival e) all are correct
7. a) assess b) bachelor c) battalion d) believe **e) all are correct**
8. **a) beseige** b) bookkeeper c) brief d) broccoli e) all are correct
9. a) caffeine b) collaborate **c) collossal** d) commitment e) all are correct
10. a) committee **b) compeled** c) complement d) concede e) all are correct
11. a) conceited b) concurred c) conscience **d) consceintious** e) all are correct
12. **a) concensus** b) contemptible c) coolly d) copyright e) all are correct
13. **a) corraborate** b) counterfeit c) criticize d) decisively e) all are correct
14. a) deficient b) demagogue c) desirable **d) deterrance** e) all are correct
15. **a) dilema** b) disagree c) disappear d) discernible e) all are correct
16. a) disheveled b) dissimilar c) dumfound d) ecstasy **e) all are correct**
17. **a) eligable** b) energy c) embarrassed d) enforceable e) all are correct
18. a) equipped b) exceed **c) excize** d) exercise e) all are correct
19. a) exhilarate **b) facetous** c) feign d) fierce e) all are correct
20. **a) financeir** b) foreign c) forfeit d) forty e) all are correct
21. a) governor **b) grievious** c) gullible d) harass e) all are correct
22. a) hemorrhage b) heresy c) hierarchy d) hypocrisy **e) all are correct**
23. **a) indispensible** b) inflexible c) innocuous d) innuendo e) all are correct
24. a) insistence b) irascible **c) irresistable** d) judgment e) all are correct
25. a) khaki **b) adolesent** c) mischief d) leisure e) all are correct
26. a) livable **b) lonliness** c) manageable d) maneuver e) all are correct
27. a) merchandise b) minimize c) miscellaneous **d) mischievious** e) all are correct
28. a) misspelling b) misstate c) moveable d) necessary **e) all are correct**
29. **a) negligable** b) newsstand c) numskull d) obscene e) all are correct
30. **a) obssession** b) occasional c) occurred d) occurrence e) all are correct
31. **a) ommitted** b) omniscient c) oppressive d) orator e) all are correct
32. a) parallel b) passable **c) passtime** d) perceive e) all are correct
33. a) plausible b) precede c) preference **d) prefered** e) all are correct
34. **a) presumptous** b) privilege c) proceed d) profited e) all are correct
35. a) prohibited b) quizzed c) quotient d) rarefy **e) all are correct**
36. a) receive **b) refered** c) reign d) relevance e) all are correct
37. a) relief b) repetition c) repressible **d) resuscatate** e) all are correct
38. a) retained b) revise **c) rhthym** d) sacrilegious e) all are correct
39. a) satellite b) secession c) seizure d) sensitive **e) all are correct**
40. **a) seperate** b) sergeant c) sheriff d) shield e) all are correct
41. a) shriek b) sieve c) sincerely d) skepticism **e) all are correct**
42. a) sovereign b) specify c) stationery **d) sucumb** e) all are correct
43. a) suddenness **b) sufficeint** c) superintendent d) supersede e) all are correct
44. a) suppress b) surprise **c) susceptable** d) sustenance e) all are correct
45. **a) synogogue** b) tariff c) thoroughly d) threshold e) all are correct
46. a) tobacco b) traceable **c) tresspass** d) unskillful e) all are correct
47. a) usable b) vacancy c) vacillate d) valuable **e) all are correct**
48. a) villain **b) wierd** c) wholly d) wield e) all are correct
49. **a) withold** b) worshiper c) yield d) youth e) all are correct