

# Spelling Pattern Reference Sheet

English has a reputation of being overly complicated. It is complex - but there is a predictable structure! This reference sheet gives an overview of some of the “tendencies” in English that explain why words are spelled the way they are. Note that this chart is not designed to be used directly with students - the purpose is to **support educator knowledge**.

Pattern or Tendency	Explanation	Examples and Non-Examples
Beginning c vs. k	At the beginning of a word or syllable, /k/ is usually spelled <c> if it comes before a, o, u, or a consonant. It is usually spelled <k> if it comes before an e or i.	<c> cat, cold, cut, clap <k> keep, kit
Short Vowel Ending: ck	At the end of a word or syllable, the /k/ sound is spelled <ck> when it comes right after a short vowel. If it comes after a long vowel or consonant, it tends to be spelled <k>.	<ck> brick, luck <k> pink, oak
Short Vowel Ending: FLoSS	At the end of a word or syllable, the letters f, l, s, and z are doubled when they come right after a short vowel.	<b>Examples:</b> cuff, hill, dress, buzz <b>Non-Examples:</b> last, heel
Short Vowel Ending: tch	At the end of a word or syllable, the /ch/ sound is spelled <tch> when it comes right after a short vowel. If it comes after a long vowel or consonant, it tends to be spelled <ch>.	<tch> catch, sketch <ch> bench, beach
Short Vowel Ending: dge	At the end of a word or syllable, the /j/ sound is spelled <dge> when it comes right after a short vowel. If it comes after a long vowel or consonant, it tends to be spelled <ge>.	<dge> edge, budge <ge> hinge, huge
Soft c	C tends to soften to the /s/ sound when it comes before e, i, or y.	<b>Soft c:</b> city, cent, cycle <b>Hard c:</b> cap, cot, cut
Soft g	G tends to soften to the /j/ sound when it comes before e, i, or y, though this is less regular than the soft c pattern.	<b>Soft g:</b> gem, giraffe, gym <b>Hard g:</b> gate, go, gum Exceptions include give, get

Pattern or Tendency	Explanation	Examples and Non-Examples
aw vs. au	<au> tends to be used at the beginning or in the middle of words or syllables, while <aw> tends to come at the end, or before a final l, n or k.	<b>&lt;au&gt;</b> August, launch <b>&lt;aw&gt;</b> claw, fawn, hawk, crawl
oi vs. oy	<oi> tends to be used at the beginning or in the middle of words or syllables, while <oy> tends to come at the end.	<b>&lt;oi&gt;</b> oil, boil <b>&lt;oy&gt;</b> toy, oyster
ai vs. ay	<ai> tends to be used at the beginning or in the middle of words or syllables, while <ay> tends to come at the end.	<b>&lt;ai&gt;</b> paint, aim <b>&lt;ay&gt;</b> pay, playful
ow vs. ou	<ou> tends to be used at the beginning or in the middle of words or syllables, while <ow> tends to come at the end, or before a final l, or n.	<b>&lt;ou&gt;</b> ouch, round <b>&lt;ow&gt;</b> how, howl, brown
IJUV	English words typically don't end with i, j, u, or v. Other spellings are often used when these sounds are at the end of a word.	<b>Examples:</b> sky, huge, blue, love
2 sounds of -y	At the end of a one-syllable word, a final -y is usually pronounced as a long i. At the end of a two-syllable word, it is usually pronounced as a long e.	<b>long i</b> - sky <b>long e</b> - happy
3 sounds of -ed	The suffix -ed has 3 different sounds - /id/, /d/, and /t/.	<b>/id/</b> melted <b>/d/</b> smelled <b>/t/</b> jumped
Suffix Base Changes: Doubling (1-1-1)	When adding a suffix that starts with a vowel (ing, y, ed, er, etc.), double the last consonant of the base if it is a 1-syllable word with 1 vowel and 1 final consonant.	<b>Examples:</b> run - running, hop - hopping <b>Non-Examples:</b> melt - melting, soak - soaked
Suffix Base Changes: E-drop	When adding a suffix that starts with a vowel (ing, y, ed, er, etc.) to a base that ends with e, drop the final e.	<b>Example:</b> hope - hoping <b>Non-Example:</b> hope - hopeful
Suffix Base Changes: Y-to-I	When adding a suffix that doesn't start with i to a base that ends in y, change the final y of the base to an i.	<b>Examples:</b> baby - babies, happy - happiness <b>Non-Example:</b> carry - carrying