

THE
OXFORD GUIDE
TO THE
ENGLISH
LANGUAGE



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I. Weiner, E. S. C. II. Hawkins, J. M.

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I

WORD FORMATION

THIS section is concerned with the ways in which the forms of English words and word elements change or vary. It deals primarily with their written form, but in many cases the choice between two or more possible written forms is also a choice between the corresponding spoken forms. What follows is therefore more than merely a guide to spelling, although it is that too. A great part is taken up with guidance on the way in which words change when they are inflected (e.g. the possessive case and plural of nouns, the past tense and past participle of verbs) or when derivational prefixes and suffixes are added (e.g. the adjectival *-able* and *-ible* suffixes, the adverbial *-ly* suffix). Because this is intended as a very basic outline, little space has been given to the description of the meanings and uses of the inflected and compounded forms of words. Instead, the emphasis is on the identification of the correct, or most widely acceptable, written form. Particular attention is given to the dropping, doubling, and alteration of letters when derivatives are formed. Space has also been given to problems of spelling that are not caused by derivation, especially the different ways of spelling the same sound in different words (e.g. *y* or *i* in *cider*, *cipher*, *gypsy*, *pygmy*, etc.). A comprehensive coverage of all words requiring hyphens or capitals would require more space than is available here. The entries for these two subjects attempt only to offer guidelines in certain difficult but identifiable cases. For a fuller treatment the reader is referred to the *Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* and *Hart's Rules for Compositors and Readers*. Wherever possible, notes are added to indicate where the conventions of American spelling differ from those recommended here.

In cases where there is widespread variation in the spelling of a particular word or form, the spelling recommended here is that preferred (as its 'house style') by the Oxford University Press.

abbreviations

It is usual to indicate an abbreviation by placing a point (full stop) after it, e.g.

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H. G. Wells, five miles S. (= south), *B.Litt., Kt., Sun.* (= Sunday),
Jan. (= January), *p. 7* (= page 7), *ft., in., lb., cm.*

However, no point is used:

1. With a sequence of capitals alone, e.g. *BBC, MA, QC, NNE, BC, AD, PLC* (and not, of course, with acronyms, e.g. *Aslef, Naafi*).
2. With the numerical abbreviations *1st, 2nd*, etc.
3. *C, F* (of temperature), chemical symbols, and measures of length, weight, time, etc. in scientific and technical use.
4. *Dr, Revd, Mr, Mrs, Ms, Mme, Mlle, St, Hants, Northants, p* (= penny or pence).
5. In words that are colloquial abbreviations, e.g. *co-op, demo, recap, trad, vac*.

-ability and -ibility

Nouns ending in these suffixes undergo the same changes in the stem as adjectives in *-able* and *-ible* (see next entry).

-able and -ible

Words ending in *-able* generally owe their form to the Latin termination *-abilis* or the Old French *-able* (or both), and words in *-ible* to the Latin *-ibilis*. The suffix *-able* is also added to words of 'distinctly French or English origin' (*OED*, s.v. *-ble*), and as a living element to English roots.

A. Words ending in *-able*. The following alterations are made to the stem:

1. Silent final *-e* is dropped (see p. 9).

Exceptions: words whose stem ends in *-ce, -ee, -ge, -le*, and the following:

<i>blameable</i>	<i>rateable</i>
<i>dyeable</i>	<i>ropeable</i>
<i>giveable</i> (but <i>forgivable</i>)	<i>saleable</i>
<i>hireable</i>	<i>shareable</i>
<i>holeable</i>	<i>sizeable</i>
<i>likeable</i>	<i>tameable</i>
<i>liveable</i>	<i>tuneable</i>
<i>nameable</i>	<i>unshakeable</i>

- Amer. spelling tends to omit *-e* in the words above.

2. Final -y becomes -i- (see p. 34).

Exception: *flyable*.

3. A final consonant may be doubled (see pp. 8f.).

Exceptions:

<i>inferable</i>	<i>referable</i>
<i>preferable</i>	<i>transferable</i>
(but <i>conferrable</i>)	

4. Most verbs of more than two syllables ending in -ate drop this ending when forming adjectives in -able, e.g. *alienable*, *calculable*, *demonstrable*, etc. Verbs of two syllables ending in -ate form adjectives in -able regularly, e.g. *creatable*, *debatable*, *dictatable*, etc.

For a list of -able words, see *Hari's Rules*, pp. 83-4.

B. Words ending in -ible. These are fewer, since -ible is not a living suffix. Below is a list of the commonest. Almost all form their negative in *in-*, *il-*, etc., so that the negative form can be inferred from the positive in the list below; the exceptions are indicated by (*un*).

<i>accessible</i>	<i>edible</i>	<i>perfectible</i>
<i>adducible</i>	<i>eligible</i>	<i>permissible</i>
<i>admissible</i>	<i>exhaustible</i>	<i>persuasible</i>
<i>audible</i>	<i>expressible</i>	<i>plausible</i>
<i>avertible</i>	<i>extensible</i>	<i>possible</i>
<i>collapsible</i>	<i>fallible</i>	<i>reducible</i>
<i>combustible</i>	(<i>un</i>) <i>feasible</i>	<i>repressible</i>
<i>compatible</i>	<i>flexible</i>	<i>reproducible</i>
<i>comprehensible</i>	<i>forcible</i>	<i>resistible</i>
<i>contemptible</i>	<i>fusible</i>	<i>responsible</i>
<i>corrigible</i>	<i>gullible</i>	<i>reversible</i>
<i>corruptible</i>	<i>indelible</i>	<i>risible</i>
<i>credible</i>	(<i>un</i>) <i>intelligible</i>	<i>sensible</i>
<i>defensible</i>	<i>irascible</i>	(<i>un</i>) <i>susceptible</i>
<i>destructible</i>	<i>legible</i>	<i>tangible</i>
<i>digestible</i>	<i>negligible</i>	<i>vendible</i>
<i>dirigible</i>	<i>ostensible</i>	<i>vincible</i>
<i>discernible</i>	<i>perceptible</i>	<i>visible</i>
<i>divisible</i>		

æ and œ

In words derived from Latin and Greek, these are now always written as separate letters, not as the ligatures *æ*, *œ*, e.g. *aeon*, *Caesar*,

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gynaecology; *diarrhoea*, *homoeopathy*, *Oedipus*. The simple *e* is preferable in several words once commonly spelt with *ae*, *oe*, especially *medieval* (formerly with *ae*) and *ecology*, *ecumenical* (formerly with initial *oe*).

● In Amer. spelling, *e* replaces *ae*, *oe* in many words, e.g. *gynecology*, *diarrhea*.

American spelling

Differences between Amer. and British spelling are mentioned at the following places: **-able and -ible** (p. 2); **ae and oe** (p. 4); **-ce or -se** (p. 7); **doubling of final consonant** (pp. 8 f.); **dropping of silent -e** (pp. 9 ff.); **hyphens** (p. 17); **I and II** (pp. 20 f.); **-oul-** (p. 22); **-our or -or** (p. 22); **past of verbs, formation of** (pp. 23 f.); **-re or -er** (pp. 30 f.); **-xion or -ction** (p. 32); **-yse or -yze** (p. 34).

See also **difficult and confusable spellings** (pp. 35 ff.) *passim*.

ante- and *anti-*

ante- (from Latin) = 'before'; *anti-* (from Greek) = 'against, opposite to'. Note especially *antechamber* and *antitype*.

-ant or *-ent*

-ant is the noun ending, *-ent* the adjective ending in the following:

<i>dependant</i>	<i>dependent</i>
<i>descendant</i>	<i>descendent</i>
<i>pendant</i>	<i>pendent</i>
<i>propellant</i>	<i>propellent</i>

independent is both adjective and noun; *dependence*, *independence* are the abstract nouns.

The following are correct spellings:

<i>ascendant</i> , -nce, -ncy	<i>relevant</i> , -nce
<i>attendant</i> , -nce	<i>repellent</i>
<i>expellent</i>	<i>superintendent</i> , -ncy
<i>impellent</i>	<i>tendency</i>
<i>intendant</i> , -ncy	<i>transcendent</i> , -nce

a or *an*

A. Before *h*.

1. Where *h* is aspirated, use *a*, e.g. *a harvest*, *hero*, *hope*.

2. Where *h* is silent, use *an*, e.g. *an heir, honour, honorarium*.
 3. In words in which the first syllable is unstressed, use *a*, e.g. *a historic occasion, a hotel*.
- The older usage was not to pronounce *h* and to write *an*, but this is now almost obsolete.

B. Before capital letter abbreviations.

Be guided by the pronunciation.

1. Where the abbreviation is pronounced as one or more letter-names, e.g.

<i>a B road</i>	<i>a UN resolution</i>
<i>a PS</i>	<i>a VIP</i>
but	
<i>an A road</i>	<i>an MP</i>
<i>an H-bomb</i>	<i>an SOS</i>

2. Where the abbreviation is pronounced as a word (an acronym), e.g.

<i>a RADA student</i>	<i>a SABENA airline typist</i>
but	
<i>an ACAS official</i>	<i>an OPEC minister</i>

But where the abbreviation would in speech be expanded to the full word, use *a* or *an* as appropriate to the latter, e.g. *a MS* 'a manuscript'.

-ative or -ive

Correct are:

(a) <i>authoritative</i>	<i>qualitative</i>
<i>interpretative</i>	<i>quantitative</i>
(b) <i>assertive</i>	<i>preventive</i>
<i>exploitive</i>	

by- prefix

'Tending to form one word with the following noun, but a hyphen is still frequently found' (ODWE).

One word: *bygone, byline, byname, bypass, bypath, bystander, byway, byword*; the others (e.g. *by-election, by-road*) are hyphenated.

- *Bye* (noun) in sport, *bye-bye* (= good-bye) are the chief words with final *-e*.

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c and ck

Words ending in *-c* interpose *k* before suffixes which otherwise would indicate a soft *c*, chiefly *-ed*, *-er*, *-ing*, *-y*, e.g.:

<i>bivouacker, -ing</i>	<i>panicky</i>
<i>colicky</i>	<i>picnicked, -er, -ing</i>
<i>frolicked, -ing</i>	<i>plasticky</i>
<i>mimicked, -ing</i>	<i>trafficked, -ing</i>

Exceptions: *arced, -ing, zined, zincify, zinging.*

Before *-ism, -ist, -ity, and -ize* *c* (chiefly occurring in the suffix *-ic*) remains and is pronounced soft, e.g. *Anglicism, physicist, domesticity, italicize.*

capital or small initials

There are four classes of word that especially give trouble.

A. Compass points. Use capitals:

1. When abbreviated, e.g. *NNE* for *north-north-east*.
2. When denoting a region, e.g. *unemployment in the North*.
3. When part of a geographical name with recognized status, e.g. *Northern Ireland, East Africa, Western Australia*.
4. In *Bridge*.

Otherwise use small initials, e.g. *facing (the) south, the wind was south, southbound, a southeaster.*

B. Parties, denominations, and organizations.

'The general rule is: capitalization makes a word more specific and limited in its reference: contrast a Christian scientist (man of science) and a Christian Scientist (member of the Church of Christ Scientist).' (*Hart's Rules*, pp. 10-11.)

So, for example, *Conservative, Socialist, Democratic* (names of parties); *Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Congregational*; but *conservative, socialist, democratic* (as normal adjectives), *catholic sympathies, orthodox views, congregational singing.*

C. Words derived from proper names.

When connection with the proper name is indirect (the meaning associated with or suggested by the proper name), use a small initial letter, e.g.

(nouns) *boycott, jersey, mackintosh, quisling*;

(adjectives) *herculean (labours), platonic (love), quixotic (temperament)*;

(verbs) *blarney, bowdlerize, pasteurize*.

When the connection of a derived adjective or verb with a proper name is immediate and alive, use a capital, e.g.

Christian, Platonic (philosophy), Rembrandtesque, Roman;

Anglicize, Christianize, Russify.

- Adjectives of nationality usually retain the capital even when used in transferred senses, e.g. *Dutch courage, go Dutch, Russian salad, Turkish delight*. The chief exceptions are *arabic (numeral), roman (numeral, type)*.

D. Proprietary names.

The name of a product or process, if registered as a trade mark, is a proprietary name, and should be given a capital initial, e.g. *Araldite, Coca-Cola, Marmite, Olivetti, Pyrex, Quaker Oats, Vaseline, Xerox*.

-cede or -ceed

Exceed, proceed, succeed; the other verbs similarly formed have *-cede*, e.g. *concede, intercede, recede*. Note also *supersede*.

-ce or -se

Advice, device, licence, and *practice* are nouns; the related verbs are spelt with *-se*: *advise, devise, license, practise*. Similarly *prophecy* (noun), *prophecy* (verb).

- Amer. spelling favours *licence, practice* for both noun and verb; but the nouns *defence, offence, pretence* are spelt with *c* in Britain, *s* in America.

co- prefix

Most words with this prefix have no hyphen (even if a vowel, other than *o*, follows the prefix). Those that have a hyphen are:

1. Words with *o* following, e.g. *co-operate* (and derivatives; but *uncooperative*), *co-opt*, *co-ordinate* (often *coordinate* in Mathematics; also *uncoordinated*).
2. Words in which the hyphen preserves correct syllabication, so

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aiding recognition, e.g. *co-latitude*, *co-religionist*, *co-respondent* (distinguished from *correspondent*).

3. Words, especially recent or nonce coinages, in which *co-* is a living prefix meaning 'fellow-', e.g. *co-author*, *co-pilot*, *co-wife*.

doubling of final consonant

1. When certain suffixes beginning with a vowel are added to nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs, the final consonant of the stem word is doubled before the suffix:

- (a) if the preceding vowel is written with a single letter (or single letter preceded by *qu*) and
- (b) if that vowel bears the main stress (hence all monosyllables are included).

So *bed*, *bedding* but *head*, *heading*; *occur*, *occurred* but *offer*, *offered*; *befit*, *befitted* but *benefit*, *benefited*.

Suffixes which cause this doubling include:

- (a) The verb inflexions *-ed*, *-ing*, e.g.

<i>begged</i> , <i>begging</i>	<i>revved</i> , <i>revving</i>
<i>equipped</i> , <i>equipping</i>	<i>trek</i> , <i>trekking</i>

- (b) The adjective and adverb suffixes *-er*, *-est*, e.g. *sadder*, *saddest*.

- (c) Various derivational suffixes, especially *-able*, *-age*, *-en*, *-er*, *-ery*, *-ish*, *-y*, e.g.

<i>clubbable</i>	<i>waggery</i>
<i>tonnage</i>	<i>priggish</i>
<i>sadden</i>	<i>shrubby</i>
<i>trapper</i>	

Exception: *bus* makes *bused*, *busing*.

2. Words of more than one syllable, not stressed on the last syllable, do not double the final consonant, unless it is *l*, when a suffix beginning with a vowel is added, e.g.

<i>biased</i>	<i>gossipy</i>	<i>wainscoted</i>
<i>blossoming</i>	<i>lettered</i>	<i>wickedest</i>
<i>combated</i>	<i>pilotage</i>	<i>womanish</i>
<i>focusing</i>		

Exception: *worship* makes *worshipped*, *-ing*.

Note that some other words in which the final syllable has a full vowel

(not obscure *e* or *i*), some of which are compounds, also double the final consonant, e.g.

<i>handicap</i>	<i>kidnap</i>	<i>periwig</i>
<i>hobnob</i>	<i>leapfrog</i>	<i>sandbag</i>
<i>horsewhip</i>	<i>nonplus</i>	<i>zigzag</i>
<i>humbug</i>		

- Amer. sometimes *kidnaped*, *kidnaping*, *worshiped*, *worshiping*.

3. Consonants that are never doubled are *h*, *w*, *x*, *y*.

4. When endings beginning with a vowel are added, *l* is *always* doubled after a single vowel wherever the stress falls, e.g.

<i>controllable</i>	<i>jeweller</i>
<i>flannelled</i>	<i>panelling</i>

Note also *woollen*, *woolly*.

Exceptions: *parallel* makes *paralleled*, *-ing*; *devil* makes *devilish*; some (rare) superlatives such as *brutalest*, *loyalest*, *civil(l)est*.

- In Amer. spelling *l* obeys the same rules as the other consonants (except *h*, *w*, *x*, *y*), e.g. *traveler*, *marvelous*, but *compelling*, *pally*.

Note also Amer. *woolen* (but *woolly*).

5. A silent final consonant is not doubled. Endings are added as if the consonant were pronounced, e.g.

<i>crocheted</i> , <i>-ing</i>	<i>rendezvouses</i> (third
<i>précised</i>	person singular)
	<i>rendezvousing</i>

dropping of silent *-e*

A. When a suffix beginning with a vowel (including *-y*) is added to a word ending in silent *-e* (including *e* following another vowel), the *-e* is dropped.

So:

1. Before suffixes beginning with *e*- (i.e. *-ed*, *-er*, *-ery*, *-est*), e.g.

<i>braver</i> , <i>bravery</i> , <i>bravest</i>	<i>hoed</i>
<i>dyed</i> , <i>dyer</i>	<i>issued</i>
<i>eeriest</i>	<i>manœuvred</i>
<i>freer</i> , <i>freest</i>	<i>queued</i>

2. Before *-able*, e.g.

<i>adorable</i>	<i>bribable</i>	<i>manœuvrable</i>
<i>analysable</i>	<i>imaginable</i>	<i>usable</i>

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Exceptions:

- (a) Words ending in *-ce* and *-ge* retain the *e* to indicate the softness of the consonant, e.g. *bridgeable*, *peaceable*.
- (b) In a number of *-able* adjectives, *e* is retained in order to make the root word more easily recognizable. See list on p. 2.
- (c) *ee* is retained, e.g. *agreeable*, *feeable*, *foreseeable*.
- (d) The few adjectives formed on verbs ending in consonant + *-le*; e.g. *handleable*.

3. Before *-age*, e.g. *cleavage*, *dotage*, *linage* (number of lines).

Exceptions: *acreage*, *mileage*.

4. Before *-ing*, e.g. *centring*, *fatiguing*, *housing*, *manœuvring*. With change of *i* to *y*: *dying*, *lying*, etc. (see p. 19).

Exceptions:

- (a) *ee*, *oe*, and *ye* remain, e.g.

<i>agreeing</i>	<i>eyeing</i>	<i>shoeing</i>
<i>canoeing</i>	<i>fleeing</i>	<i>tiptoeing</i>
<i>dyeing</i>	<i>hoeing</i>	

- (b) *blueing*, *cueing* (*gluing*, *issuing*, *queueing*, etc. are regular).

- (c) *ageing* (*raging*, *staging*, etc. are regular).

- (d) *routeing*, *singeing*, *swingeing*, *tingeing* are distinguished from *routing* 'putting to flight', *singing*, *swinging*, and *tinging* 'tinkling'.

5. Before *-ish*, e.g.

<i>bluish</i>	<i>nicish</i>	<i>roguish</i>
<i>latish</i>	<i>purplish</i>	<i>whitish</i>

Exception: *moreish*.

6. Before *-y*, e.g.

<i>bony</i>	<i>chancy</i>	<i>mousy</i>
<i>caky</i>	<i>cliquy</i>	<i>stagy</i>

Exceptions: see *-y* or *-cy* adjectives, p. 33.

b. When a suffix beginning with a consonant (e.g. *-ful*, *-ling*, *-ly*, *-ment*, *-ness*, *-some*) is added to a word ending in silent *-e*, the *-e* is retained, e.g.

<i>abridgement</i>	<i>definitely</i>	<i>judgement</i> (<i>judgment</i>
<i>acknowledgement</i>	<i>fledgeling</i>	often in legal works)
<i>amazement</i>	<i>houseful</i>	<i>useful</i>
<i>awesome</i>		<i>whiteness</i>

Exceptions: *argument*, *awful*, *duly*, *eerily*, *eeriness*, *truly*, *wholly*.

● In Amer. spelling *e* is dropped after *dg* and before a suffix beginning with a consonant, e.g. *fledgling*, *judgment*.

C. Final silent *-e* is omitted in Amer. spelling in several words in which it is found in British spelling, and so often is final silent *-ue* in the endings *-gogue*, *-logue*, e.g.

<i>ax</i>	<i>adz</i>	<i>program</i>
<i>analog</i>	<i>epilog</i>	<i>pedagog</i>

-efy or -ify

The chief words with *-efy* (*-efied*, *-efication*, etc.) are:

<i>liquefy</i>	<i>rarefy</i>	<i>torrefy</i>
<i>obstupefy</i>	<i>rubefy</i>	<i>tumefy</i>
<i>putrefy</i>	<i>stupefy</i>	

All the others have *-ify* etc. See also *-ified* or *-yified*, p. 17.

-ei- or -ie-

The rule 'i before e except after c' holds good for nearly all words in which the vowel-sound is *ee*, as *Aries*, *hygienic*, *yield*.

Exceptions where *ie* follows *c* are: *prima facie*, *specie*, *species*, *superficies*.

Note also *friend*, *adieu*, *review*, *view*.

The following words which are, or can be, pronounced with the *ee*-sound have *ei*:

<i>caffeine</i>	<i>either</i>	<i>protein</i>
<i>casein</i>	<i>forfeit</i>	<i>receipt</i>
<i>ceiling</i>	<i>heinous</i>	<i>receive</i>
<i>codeine</i>	<i>inveigle</i>	<i>seise</i>
<i>conceit</i>	<i>Madeira</i>	<i>seize</i>
<i>conceive</i>	<i>neither</i>	<i>seizure</i>
<i>counterfeit</i>	<i>perceive</i>	<i>surfeit</i>
<i>deceit</i>	<i>peripeteia</i>	<i>weir</i>
<i>deceive</i>	<i>plebeian</i>	<i>weird</i>

en- or in-

The following pairs of words can give trouble:

<i>encrust</i> (verb)	<i>incrustation</i>
<i>engrain</i> (verb) to dye in the raw state	<i>ingrain</i> (adjective) dyed in the yarn
	<i>ingrained</i> deeply rooted

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<i>enquire</i> ask	<i>inquire</i> undertake a formal investigation
<i>enquiry</i> question	<i>inquiry</i> official investigation
<i>ensure</i> make sure	<i>insure</i> take out insurance (against risk: note <i>assurance</i> of life)

-er and -est

These suffixes of comparison may require the following changes in spelling:

1. Doubling of final consonant (see p. 8).
2. Dropping of silent *-e* (see p. 9).
3. *Y* to *i* (see p. 34).

-erous or -rous

The ending *-erous* is normal in adjectives related to nouns ending in *-er*, e.g. *murderous*, *slandorous*, *thunderous*. The exceptions are:

<i>ambidextrous</i>	<i>disastrous</i>	<i>monstrous</i>
<i>cumbrous</i>	<i>leprous</i>	<i>slumbrous</i>
<i>dextrous</i>	<i>meandrous</i>	<i>wondrous</i>

final vowels before suffixes

A. For treatment of final *-e* and *-y* before suffixes, see **dropping of silent -e**, pp. 9ff., and **y to i**, pp. 34f.

B. For treatment of final *-o* before *-s* (suffix), see **plural formation**, p. 25 and **-s suffix**, p. 31.

C. In nearly all other cases, the final vowels *-a*, *-i*, *-o*, and *-u* are unaffected by the addition of suffixes and do not themselves affect the suffixes. So:

<i>hikinied</i> (girls)	<i>mascaraed</i>	(they) <i>rumbaed</i>
<i>echoed</i>	<i>mustachioed</i>	<i>taxied</i>
<i>hennaed</i>	<i>radioed</i>	
<i>echoer</i>	<i>skier</i>	<i>vetoer</i>
<i>areas</i>	<i>emus</i>	(he) <i>skis</i>
<i>cameras</i>	<i>gnus</i>	<i>taxis</i>
<i>corgis</i>	(he) <i>rumbas</i>	
<i>echoing</i>	<i>scubaing</i>	<i>taxiing</i>
<i>radioing</i>	<i>skiing</i>	<i>vetoing</i>

Exceptions: *idea'd* (having ideas); past *ski'd* from *ski* (contrast *skied* from *sky*).

D. Final *-é* in words taken from French is retained before all suffixes; the *e* of *-ed* is dropped after it, e.g.

<i>appliquéd</i>	<i>canapés</i>	<i>communiquéés</i>
<i>appliquéing</i>	<i>chasséing</i>	<i>émigrés</i>
<i>attachés</i>	<i>clichéd</i>	<i>soufflés</i>
<i>cafés</i>		

for- and fore-

The prefix *for-* 'means away, out, completely, or implies prohibition or abstention' (*MEU*). *Fore-* is the same as the ordinary word so spelt, = 'beforehand, in front'.

Note especially:

<i>forebear</i> refrain	<i>forebear</i> ancestor
<i>forgather</i>	<i>foreclose</i>
<i>forgo</i> abstain from	<i>forego</i> (esp. in <i>foregoing</i> (list), <i>foregone</i> (conclusion))
<i>forfeit</i>	

f to v

Certain nouns that end in *f* or *f* followed by silent *e* change this *f* to *v* in some derivatives. Most are familiar, but with a few derivatives there is variation between *f* and *v* or uncertainty about which consonant is correct; only these are dealt with below.

beef: plural *beeves* oxen, *beefs* kinds of beef.

calf (young bovine animal): *calfish* calflike; *calves-foot* jelly.

calf (of leg): (*enormously*) *calved* having (enormous) calves.

corf (basket): plural *corves*.

dwarf: plural *dwarfs*. ● *Dwarves* only in J. R. R. Tolkien's writings.

elf: *elfish* and *elvish* are both acceptable; *elfin* but *elven*.

handkerchief: plural *handkerchiefs*.

hoof: plural usually *hoofs*, but *hooves* is commonly found, e.g.

The useless tool for horses' hooves (Graham Greene); *Listening for Sebastian's retreating hooves* (Evelyn Waugh); adjective *hoofed* or *hooved*.

knife: verb *knife*.

leaf: *leaved* having leaves (*broad-leaved*, etc.) but *leafed* as past of *leaf* (*through a book*, etc.).

14 WORD FORMATION

life: *lifelong* lasting a lifetime; *livelong* (*day*, etc., poetic: the *i* is short); the plural of *still life* is *still lifes*.

oaf: plural *oafs*.

roof: plural *roofs*. ● *Rooves* is commonly heard and sometimes written, e.g. *Several acres of bright red rooves* (George Orwell). Its written use should be avoided.

scarf (garment): plural *scarves*; *scarfed* wearing a scarf.

scarf (joint): plural and verb *keep f*.

sheaf: plural *sheaves*; verb *sheaf* or *sheave*; *sheaved* made into a sheaf.

shelf: plural *shelves*; *shelvy* having sandbanks.

staff: plural *stuffs* but archaic and musical *staves*.

turf: plural *turfs* or *turves*; verb *turf*; *turfy*.

wharf: plural *wharfs* or *wharves*.

wolf: *wolfish* of a wolf.

-ful suffix

The adjectival suffix *-ful* may require the following changes in spelling:

1. Change of *y* to *i* (see p. 35).
2. Simplification of *-ll* (see *l* and *ll*, p. 20).

hyphens

A. Hyphens are used to connect words that are more closely linked to each other than to the surrounding syntax. Unfortunately their use is not consistent. Some pairs or groups of words are written as a single word (e.g. *motorway*, *railwayman*), others, despite their equally close bond, as separate words (e.g. *motor cycle*, *pay phone*); very similar pairs may be found with a hyphen (e.g. *motor-cyclist*, *pay-bed*). There are no hard and fast rules that will predict in every case whether a group of words should be written as one, with a hyphen, or separately. Useful lists can be found in *Hart's Rules*, pp. 76-81; numerous individual items are entered in *ODWE*.

1. Groups consisting of attributive noun + noun are probably the most unpredictable. It is the nature of English syntax to produce limitless numbers of groups of this kind. Such a group generally remains written as separate words until it is recognized as a lexical item with a special meaning, when it may receive a hyphen. Eventually it may be written as one word, but this usually happens when the two nouns are monosyllabic and there is no