



Four English Spelling Patterns Worth Learning

English spelling can be frustrating. *Laughter* and *daughter* differ by just one letter, yet sound very different. And the shared *ough* in *through* and *rough* offers little help with pronunciation.

Still, some spelling patterns are useful. Learn these four, then keep an eye out for their exceptions.

1. Use “i before e” as a clue

The familiar rhyme begins, “i before e, except after c.” It helps with many words in which the letters make a long *e* sound:

- **ie:** field, grief, thief
- **ei after c:** ceiling, receipt, receive

The rhyme continues, “or when sounded as *a*, as in *neighbor* and *weigh*.” Other examples include *reign*, *vein*, and *eight*.

Treat the rhyme as a clue, not a guarantee. Words such as *science* and *species* have **ie** after **c**; *seize*, *weird*, and *neither* also break the pattern.

2. Drop a final “e” before many vowel endings

When a word ends in a silent **e**, usually drop that **e** before adding an ending that begins with a vowel:

- hope → hoping
- scrape → scraping
- romance → romancing
- argue → argued

The ending **-ment** begins with a consonant, so this pattern does not explain *argue* → *argument*. That word is an exception to remember. So is *true* → *truly*.

3. Double a final consonant after a short vowel

Before adding **-ed** or **-ing**, double the final consonant of a one-syllable word when it follows a single short vowel:

- flap → flapped, flapping

The same pattern applies to some longer words when the final syllable is stressed:

- submit → submitted, submitting

Keep the consonant single when the final syllable is unstressed (*open* → *opening*) or when two vowels come before it (*deal* → *dealing*).

4. Change a final “y” to “i” when needed

When a word ends in a consonant followed by y, change the y to i before adding **-es** or **-ed**:

- supply → supplies
- worry → worried

Keep the y before **-ing** (*supplying*, *worrying*). Also keep it when a vowel comes before the y (*obeyed*, *saying*).

Keep practicing

Spelling patterns can help you make a good first guess. When a word breaks a pattern, check it in a dictionary and add it to your own practice list.

For more examples, explore the [Riggs Institute’s spelling rules](#) and [YourDictionary’s spelling guide](#).

Suggested image: An overhead photo of a notebook with *through*, *rough*, *hoping*, and *flapping* handwritten in two neat columns, with a pencil beside it. Use an image you have permission to publish and credit its creator.

