



Accurate spelling helps effective communication and is expected at university and in professional contexts. Therefore, it is important to address spelling at the proofreading stage of assignment writing.

Incorrect spelling can distract the reader from the point you are trying to make. With spell-check facilities on your computer and easy access to on-line dictionaries, you can take steps to eliminate spelling errors. There are also strategies you can use to improve your spelling more generally.

Preferred spelling

Most lecturers expect that you will use standard Australian English spelling. As you research widely, you are likely to come across other forms of spelling, including American English spelling. While some lecturers accept American spelling, others require standard Australian spelling. Both these groups agree, however, that it is important to be consistent with your spelling throughout your assignment. To assist with this, set the language option on your computer to English (Australian).

Comparison of Australia and American English

The difference between standard Australian and American spellings is minimal and usually does not affect the reader's ability to understand what you have written. Some examples of common differences are given in the table below. If the name of an organisation is spelt with American spelling, keep the original spelling (e.g. World Health Organization).

Australian	American
-our: colour, labour;	-or: color, labor;
-re: centre;	-er: center;
-ce: licence, defence;	-se: license, defense;
-ise: organise, maximise;	-ize: organize, maximize;
-ll-: cancelled;	-l-: canceled;
-ae-: haemoglobin;	-e-: hemoglobin;
-oe-: foetus;	-e-: fetus;

Dictionaries

To improve your spelling and expand your academic vocabulary, choose a reputable dictionary that suits your needs.

Subject specific dictionary:

A subject-specific dictionary contains specialised words related to the area you are studying that are not available in a standard dictionary.

English learner's dictionary:

If English is not your first language, it can be worth investing in a specialised learner's dictionary.

Dictionaries are also available in the reference section of the library and many can also be accessed for free online (some versions also provide audio to help with pronouncing specialist terminology).

Spelling rules

Although there are exceptions to many of the 'rules' of spelling, being familiar with some of the more commonly used ones can assist with accuracy.

Strategies for spelling well

- It may help to see the word rather than just to spell it aloud.
- Develop a mental picture of the word.
- Use the LOOK, SAY, COVER, WRITE, CHECK method: Look at the word and write it correctly; say it aloud several times; cover it and say it again, trying to picture the word; write it; uncover and check; repeat if incorrect.
- Break words into parts (syllables, root word, suffix, prefix).
- Look for patterns or word groups (haematology, haemoglobin, haemostasis).
- Link the word to similar words you know [practise (verb), practice (noun): is (verb), ice (noun)].

Words that sound alike but are spelt differently

It is essential that you learn these words separately and fully check their meaning in the dictionary to avoid using the wrong spelling when constructing a sentence.

For example, **there**, **they're** and **their**; **fair** and **fare**.

Words with "ei" and "ie"

Rule: 'i' comes before 'e' except after 'c'.

Here are some examples of 'ie' words: **wield** and **field**.

Here are some examples of 'ei' words: **deceive**, **receive**.

There are some exceptions to this rule. For example, **leisure**, **height**, **weight**, **science**.

Prefixes

Letters added to the beginning of a word to make a new word are called prefixes.

For example,

de + code = decode

back + ground = background

Some common prefixes are 'mis', 'dis', 're', 'for', 'ant', 'ante', 'sub', 'un', and 'in'.

Suffixes

Letters added to the end of a main word are called suffixes.

For example,

harm + less = harmless

Some more suffixes are **'ed', 'ful', 'ly', 'ing', 'able', 'ance', 'ness'**.

Rules for words with a silent 'e': Rule 1

If a word ends with a silent 'e', drop the 'e' before adding an ending that begins with a vowel.

Some of the endings that begin with a vowel are **'ed', 'er', 'en', 'ing', and 'ous'**.

Here are some examples:

ripe + en = ripen

tape + ed = taped

take + ing = taking

Rules for words with a silent 'e': Rule 2

If a word ends in **'ce'** or **'ge'**, you keep the 'e' when you add **'ous'** or **'able'**.

Here are some examples:

change + able = changeable

service + able = serviceable

outrage + ous = outrageous

Doubling the last consonant

In single syllable words ending in a consonant that follows a single vowel, you double the consonant when adding **'ed', 'er', 'est', and 'ing'**.

For example,

tap + ing = tapping

rub + ing = rubbing

Remember, this is only the case when a single consonant follows a single vowel and not a double vowel.

For example,

feel + ing = feeling

Words ending with 'ful'

When **'ful'** is added to a word, drop the final **'l'**.

For example,

hand + full = handful

rest + full = restful

If you add **'ly'** to any word ending with **'ful'**, you keep the existing **'l'**.

For example,

restful + ly = restfully

Reach out for help

The Charles Sturt Academic Skills team is here to help you develop your learning skills. You can access further information about all of our available services and learning resources, including assignment writing feedback, at csu.edu.au/academicsskills.