

# Quick Solutions to Common Errors in English

Angela Burt

An A-Z guide

to spelling,

punctuation

and grammar

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REVISED AND UPDATED  
3<sup>RD</sup>  
THIRD EDITION

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## Introduction

*Quick Solutions to Common Errors in English* is a reference book which has been written for the student and the general reader. It aims to tackle the basic questions about spelling, punctuation, grammar and word usage that the student and the general reader are likely to ask.

Throughout the book there are clear explanations, and exemplar sentences where they are needed. When it's helpful to draw attention to spelling rules and patterns, these are given so that the reader is further empowered to deal with hundreds of related words. The aim always has been to make the reader more confident and increasingly self-reliant.

This is a fast-track reference book. It is not a dictionary although, like a dictionary, it is arranged alphabetically. It concentrates on problem areas; it anticipates difficulties; it invites cross-references. By exploring punctuation, for example, and paragraphing, it goes far beyond a dictionary's terms of reference. It is not intended to replace a dictionary; it rather supplements it.

Once, in an evening class, one of my adult students said, 'If there's a right way to spell a word, I want to know it.' On another occasion, at the end of a punctuation session on possessive apostrophes, a college student said rather angrily, 'Why wasn't I told this years ago?'

This book has been written to answer all the questions that my students over the years have needed to ask. I hope all who now use it will have their questions answered also and enjoy the confidence and the mastery that this will bring.

*Angela Burt*

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## How to use this book

For ease of reference, all the entries in this book have been listed alphabetically rather than being divided into separate spelling, usage, punctuation and grammar sections.

You will therefore find **hypocrisy** following **hyphens**; **paragraphing** following **paraffin**; **who or whom?** following **whiskey or whisky?**; and so on.

### Want to check a spelling?

Cross-referencing will help you locate words with tricky initial letters.

**aquaint**

Wrong spelling. See **ACQUAINT**.

Plural words are given alongside singular nouns, with cross-referencing to relevant rules and patterns.

**knife** (singular)

knives (plural). See **PLURALS** (v).

There is also a general section on **plurals** and another on **foreign plurals**.

If it's the complication of adding an ending that is causing you trouble, you will find some words listed with a useful cross-reference.

#### **dining or dinning?**

dine + ing = dining (as in dining room)

din + ing = dinning (noise dinning in ears)

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (i) and (ii).



There are individual entries for confusing endings like **-able/-ible**; **-ance,-ant/-ence,-ent**; **-cal/-cle**; **-ise or -ize?** and for confusing beginnings like **ante-/anti-**; **for-/fore-**; **hyper-/hypo-**; **inter-/intra-** and many others.

### Usage?

If you're hesitating between two words in a tricky pair (like **contagious or infectious?**; **disinterested or uninterested?**; **imply or infer?**; **irony or sarcasm?**), turn to whichever word is listed first alphabetically. There you will find a full explanation of the difference in meaning and usage. There will be a cross-reference from the word listed second alphabetically.

<b>misplace</b>	See <b>DISPLACE OR MISPLACE?</b> .
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### Punctuation?

The functions of the different punctuation marks are discussed under individual entries; **apostrophes** ('); **brackets** (round and square); **capital letters**; **colons** (:); **dashes** (-); **exclamation marks** (!); **full stops** (.); **hyphens** (-); **inverted commas/quotation marks/speech marks** (single ‘ and double “”); **semicolons** (;); **and question marks** (?).

Additional entries include **commands**; **contractions**; **end stops**; and **indirect/reported speech**.

As well as the general entry, **contractions**, commonly used contractions are listed individually as the punctuation of these causes so much confusion.

<b>isn't</b>
--------------

Place the apostrophe carefully. ( <i>not</i> is 'nt)
--

## Grammar?

Many grammatical queries can be listed individually or as a choice between two or three possibilities. Among these are: **as or like?**; **consist in or consist of?**; **different from/to/than**; **due to or owing to?**; **fewer or less?**; **I/me/myself**; **lay or lie?**; **passed or past?**; **shall or will?**; **should or would?**; **who or whom?**.

### **between you and I**

Incorrect.

Write: between you and me.

See **PREPOSITIONS**.

### **themselves**

Incorrect formation.

See **THEMSELVES**.

At other times, however, some grammatical points have necessarily to be grouped under general technical headings which sound rather forbidding. (The entries themselves, I hope, will make all clear!)

These entries are too long to be quoted here. I suggest that you look them up to see whether they deal with areas that cause you problems:

**comparative and superlative**

**double negatives**

**nouns**

**paragraphing**

**participles**

**possessive pronouns**

**prepositions**

**sequence of tenses**

**split infinitives**

**subjunctive**

As well as using this book as a reference text (its unwritten subtitle is *A Friend at Your Elbow!*), I hope you will sometimes be tempted to browse and to follow up cross-references. Our language is a fascinating one and well repays careful attention.

There will come a time when you no longer need the guidance this reference book offers. That will be real success!

## **Appendices**

At the end of the book there are three appendices for further reference:

Appendix A: Literary terms

Appendix B: Parts of speech

Appendix C: Planning, drafting and proofreading

## A

### **abandon**

abandoned, abandoning, abandonment (*not* -bb-)

### **abattoir**

(*not* -bb-)

### **abbreviate**

abbreviated, abbreviating, abbreviation (*not* -b-)

### **abbreviations**

See **CONTRACTIONS**.

### **-able/-ible**

Adjectives ending in -able or -ible can be difficult to spell because both endings sound identical. You'll always need to be on guard with these words and check each word individually when you are in doubt, but here are some useful guidelines:

- (i) Generally use -able when the companion word ends in -ation:

abominable, abomination  
irritable, irritation

- (ii) Generally use -ible when the companion word ends in -ion:

comprehensible, comprehension  
digestible, digestion

- (iii) Use -able after hard c and hard g:

practicable (c sounds like k)  
navigable (hard g)

- (iv) Use -ible after soft c and soft g:

forcible (c sounds like s)  
legible (g sounds like j)

See also **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii); **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

**abridgement/abridgment**

Both spellings are correct. Use either but be consistent within one piece of writing.

**abscess**

This is a favourite word in spelling quizzes.  
(*not* absess or abcess)

**absence**

absent (*not* absc-)

**absolute**

absolutely (*not* absoloute, absolutely)

**absorb**

absorption. Notice how b changes to p here.

**abstract nouns**

See NOUNS.

**accept or except?**

We **ACCEPT** your apology.

Everybody was there **EXCEPT** Stephen.

**accessary or accessory?**

If you want to preserve the traditional distinction in meaning between these two words, use **ACCESSARY** to refer to someone associated with a crime and **ACCESSORY** to refer to something that is added (a fashion accessory or car accessories). However, the distinction has now become blurred and it is perfectly acceptable to use one spelling to cover both meanings. Of the two, accessory is the more widely used, but both are correct.

**accessible**

(*not* -able)

**accidentally**

The adverb is formed by adding -ly to accidental.  
(*not* accidently)

**accommodation**

This is a favourite word in spelling quizzes and is frequently seen misspelt on painted signs.  
(*not* accomodation or accommadation)

**accross**

Wrong spelling. See **ACROSS**.

**accumulate**

(*not* -mm-)

**achieve**

achieved, achieving, achievement (*not* -ei-) See also **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii.); **EI/IE SPELLING RULE**.

**acknowledgement/acknowledgment**

Both spellings are correct but be consistent within one piece of writing.

**acquaint**

acquainted (*not* aq-)

**acquaintance**

(*not* -ence)

**acquiesce**

acquiesced, acquiescing (*not* aq-)

**acquiescence**

(*not* -ance)

**acquire**

acquired, acquiring, acquisition (*not* aq-)

**acreage**

*Note* that there are three syllables here. (*not* acrage)

**across**

(*not* accross)

**adapter or adaptor?**

Traditional usage would distinguish between these two words and reserve -er for the person (an adapter



of novels, for instance) and -or for the piece of electrical equipment. However, the distinction has become very blurred and the two spellings are considered by many authorities to be interchangeable. Use either for both meanings but be consistent within a single piece of writing.

**addendum** (singular) addenda (plural)

See FOREIGN PLURALS.

**adding endings**

Usually endings (suffixes) can be added to base words without any complications. You just add them and that is that!

e.g. iron + ing = ironing  
steam + er = steamer  
list + less = listless

However, there are four groups of words which need especial care. Fortunately, there are some straightforward rules which save your learning thousands of words individually.

(i) *The 1-1-1 rule*

This rule applies to:

words of ONE syllable  
ending with ONE consonant  
preceded by ONE vowel.  
e.g. drop, flat, sun, win

When you add an ending beginning with a consonant to a 1-1-1 word, there is no change to the base word:

drop + let = droplet  
flat + ly = flatly  
win + some = winsome

See CONSONANTS.

When you add an ending beginning with a vowel to a 1-1-1 word, you double the final letter of the base word:

---

drop + ed	= dropped
flat + est	= flattest
win + ing	= winning
sun + *y	= sunny

\*y counts as a vowel when it sounds like i or e.  
See **VOWELS**.

Treat qu as one letter:

quit + ing	= quitting
quip + ed	= quipped

Don't double final w and x. They would look very odd and so we have correctly:

tax + ing	= taxing
paw + ed	= pawed

(ii) *The magic -e rule*

This rule applies to all words ending with a silent -e.

e.g. hope, care, achieve, sincere, separate

When you add an ending beginning with a consonant, keep the -e:

hope + ful	= hopeful
care + less	= careless
sincere + ly	= sincerely
separate + ly	= separately
achieve + ment	= achievement

When you add an ending beginning with a vowel, drop the -e:

hope + ing	= hoping
care + er	= carer
sincere + ity	= sincerity
separate + ion	= separation
achieve + ed	= achieved

Do, however, keep the -e in words like **singeing** (different from singing) and **dyeing** (different





from dying) and whenever you need to keep the identity of the base word clear (e.g. shoeing, canoeing).

Do remember to keep the -e with soft c and soft g words. It's the e that keeps them soft (courageous, traceable). (See **SOFT C AND SOFT G.**)

Don't keep the -e with these eight exceptions to the rule: truly, duly, ninth, argument, wholly, awful, whilst, wisdom.

(iii) *-y rule*

This rule applies to all words ending in -y. Look at the letter before the -y in the base word.

It doesn't matter at all what kind of ending you are adding. When you add an ending to a word ending in a vowel + y, keep the y:

portray + ed	= portrayed
employ + ment	= employment

When you add an ending to a word ending in a consonant + y, change the y to i:

try + al	= trial
empty + er	= emptier
pity + less	= pitiless
lazy + ness	= laziness

Do keep the y when adding -ing. Two i's together would look very odd, despite our two words ski-ing and taxi-ing.

try + ing	= trying
empty + ing	= emptying

Don't apply the rule in these fourteen cases: daily, gaily, gaiety, laid, paid, said, slain, babyhood, shyly, shyness, dryness, slyness, wryly, wryness.

(iv) *The 2-1-1 rule*

This rule applies to:

words of	TWO syllables
ending with	ONE consonant
preceded by	ONE vowel.

With this rule, it all depends on which syllable of the word is stressed. The 2-1-1 words below are stressed on the first syllable, and both vowel and consonant endings are added without any complications:

gossip	gossiping
target	targeted
limit	limitless
eager	eagerness

But note that kidnap, outfit, worship, always double their final letter:

kidnapped, outfitter, worshipping

Take care with 2-1-1 words which are stressed on the second syllable. There is no change when you add a consonant ending:

forget + ful	= forgetful
equip + ment	= equipment

Double the final consonant of the base word when you add a vowel ending:

forget + ing	= forgetting
equip + ed	= equipped
forbid + en	= forbidden
begin + er	= beginner

This rule is really valuable but you must be aware of some exceptions:

- ◆ 2-1-1 words ending in -l seem to have a rule all of their own. Whether the stress is on the first or the second syllable, there is no change when



a consonant ending is added:

quarrel + some = quarrelsome  
instal + ment = instalment

Double the -l when adding a vowel ending:

quarrel + ing = quarrelling  
instal + ed = installed  
excel + ent = excellent

- ◆ Notice how the change of stress in these words affects the spelling:

confer	conferred	conferring	conference
defer	deferred	deferring	deference
infer	inferred	inferring	inference
prefer	preferred	preferring	preference
refer	referred	referring	reference
transfer	transferred	transferring	transference

See also -ABLE/-IBLE; -ANCE,-ANT/-ENCE,-ENT; -CAL/-CLE; -FUL;-LY.

### **address**

(*not* adr-)

**adieu** (singular) adieus or adieux (plural)

See FOREIGN PLURALS.

### **adrenalin/adrenaline**

Both spellings are correct.

### **adress**

Wrong spelling. See ADDRESS.

### **advantageous**

advantage + ous

Keep the -e in this instance.

See SOFT C AND SOFT G.

### **adverse or averse?**

These two words have different meanings.

The ferries were cancelled owing to **ADVERSE** weather conditions. (= unfavourable)

She is not **AVERSE** to publicity. (= opposed)

### **advertisement**

advertise + ment

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

### **advice or advise?**

My **ADVICE** is to forget all about it. (noun = recommendation)

What would you **ADVISE** me to do? (verb = recommend)

### **adviser or advisor?**

Adviser is the traditionally correct British spelling.

Advisor is more common in American English.

### **advisory**

(*not* -ery)

### **aerial**

Use the same spelling for the noun (a television **AERIAL**) and the adjective (an **AERIAL** photograph).

### **affect or effect?**

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Heavy drinking will **AFFECT** your liver. (verb)

The **EFFECT** on her health was immediate. (noun)

The new manager plans to **EFFECT** sweeping changes. (verb = to bring about)

### **afraid**

(*not* affraid)

### **ageing or aging?**

Both spellings are correct but many would prefer ageing as it keeps the identity of the base word (age) more easily recognised.

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

**aggravate**

Strictly speaking, **aggravate** means to make worse.

His rudeness **AGGRAVATED** an already explosive situation.

It is, however, widely used in the sense of to irritate or to annoy. Be aware that some authorities would regard this second usage as incorrect.

**aggressive**

(*not* agr-)

**agree to/agree with**

The choice of preposition alters the meaning of the verb:

**I AGREED TO** do what he advised.

**I AGREED TO** all the conditions.

**I AGREED WITH** all they said.

See **PREPOSITIONS**.

**agreeable**

(*not* agreeable)

**agreement**

For grammatical agreement, see **SINGULAR OR PLURAL?**.

**agressive**

Wrong spelling. See **AGGRESSIVE**.

**alga** (singular) **algae** (plural)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

**allege**

(*not* -dge)

**alley or ally?**

An **ALLEY** is a little lane.

An **ALLY** is a friend.

alley (singular), alleys (plural)

ally (singular), allies (plural)

See **PLURALS** (iii).

**all most or almost?**

There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

They were **ALL** (= everyone) **MOST** kind.

The child was **ALMOST** (= nearly) asleep.

**allowed or aloud?**

There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

Are we **ALLOWED** (= permitted) to smoke in here?

I was just thinking **ALOUD** (= out loud).

**all ready or already?**

There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

We are **ALL** (= everyone) **READY**.

It is **ALL** (= everything) **READY**.

She was **ALREADY** dead (= by then).

**all right or alright?**

Traditional usage would consider **ALL RIGHT** to be correct and **ALRIGHT** to be incorrect. However, the use of 'alright' is so widespread that some would see it as acceptable although the majority of educated users would take care to avoid it.

**all so or also?**

There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

You are **ALL** (= everyone) **SO** kind.

You are **ALSO** (= in addition) generous.

**all together or altogether?**

There is a difference in meaning. Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

They were **ALL** (= everybody) huddled **TOGETHER** for warmth.



His situation is **ALTOGETHER** (= totally) different from yours.

**allude or elude?**

There is a difference in meaning.

**ALLUDE** means to refer to indirectly.

**ELUDE** means to evade capture or recall.

**allusion, delusion or illusion?**

There is a difference in meaning.

An **ALLUSION** is an indirect reference.

A **DELUSION** is a false belief (often associated with a mental disorder).

An **ILLUSION** is a deceptive appearance.

**all ways or always?**

There is a difference in meaning.

These three routes are **ALL** (= each of them) **WAYS** into town.

She **ALWAYS** (= at all times) tells the truth.

**almost**

See **ALL MOST OR ALMOST?**.

**a lot**

Write as two words, not as one. Bear in mind that this construction is slang and not to be used in a formal context.

**aloud**

See **ALLOWED OR ALOUD?**.

**already**

See **ALL READY OR ALREADY?**.

**altar or alter?**

There is a difference in meaning.

The bride and groom stood solemnly before the **ALTAR**.

Do you wish to **ALTER** (= change) the arrangements?

**alternate or alternative?**

We visit our grandparents on **ALTERNATE** Saturdays. (= every other Saturday)

I **ALTERNATE** between hope and despair. (= have each mood in turn)

An **ALTERNATIVE** plan would be to go by boat. (= another possibility)

The **ALTERNATIVES** are simple: work or go hungry. (= two choices)

**alternatives**

Strictly speaking, the choice can be between only two alternatives (one choice or the other).

However, the word is frequently used more loosely and this precise definition is becoming lost.

**altogether**

See **ALL TOGETHER OR ALTOGETHER?**.

**Alzheimer's disease**

(*not* Alze-)

**amateur**

(*not* -mm-)

**ambiguity**

Always try to anticipate any possible confusion on the part of your reader. Check that you have made your meaning absolutely clear.

- (i) Bear in mind that pronouns can be very vague. Consider this sentence:

My brother told his friend that **HE** had won first prize in the local photographic exhibition.

Who is 'he', my brother or his friend?

Rewrite more clearly:





- (a) My brother congratulated his friend on winning first prize in the local photographic exhibition.
- (b) My brother, delighted to have won first prize in the local photographic exhibition, told his friend.

The other possibility is rather clumsy but is otherwise clear:

- (c) My brother told his friend that he (his friend) had won first prize.
  - (d) My brother told his friend that he (my brother) had won first prize.
- (ii) Position the adverb **ONLY** with great care. It will refer to the word nearest to it, usually the word following. This may not be the meaning you intended. See how crucial to the meaning the position of 'only' can be:

**ONLY** Sean eats fish on Fridays.

(= No one else but Sean eats fish on Fridays.)

Sean **ONLY** eats fish on Fridays.

(= Sean does nothing else to the fish on Fridays but eat it. He doesn't buy it, cook it, look at it, smell it...)

Sean eats **ONLY** fish on Fridays.

(= Sean eats nothing but fish on Fridays.)

Sean eats fish **ONLY** on Fridays.

Sean eats fish on Fridays **ONLY**.

(= Sean eats fish on this one day in the week and never on any other.)

- (iii) Take care with the positioning of **BADLY**.

This room needs cleaning **BADLY**.

Does it? Or does it not need cleaning well?

Rewrite like this:

This room **BADLY** needs cleaning.

- (iv) Beware of causing initial bewilderment by not introducing a comma to indicate a pause.

The shabby little riverside café was empty and full of wasps and flies.

Empty and full?

The shabby little riverside café was empty, and full of wasps and flies.

See **COMMAS** (ix).

- (v) Avoid the danger of writing nonsense!

**DRIVING** slowly along the road, **THE CASTLE** dominated the landscape.

The castle is driving?

Rewrite:

As we drove slowly along the road, we saw how the castle dominated the landscape.

**COOKED** slowly, the **FAMILY** will enjoy the cheaper cuts of meat.

Rewrite:

If the cheaper cuts of meat are cooked slowly, the family will enjoy them.

See **PARTICIPLES**.

- (vi) Make sure the descriptive details describe the right noun!

For sale: 1995 Peugeot 205 – one owner with power-assisted steering.

Rewrite:

For sale: 1995 Peugeot 205 with power-assisted steering – one owner.

### **amend or emend?**

Both words mean 'to make changes in order to improve'. Use **AMEND** or **EMEND** when referring to the correction of written or printed text.

Use **AMEND** in a wider context such as **AMENDING** the law or **AMENDING** behaviour.

### **ammount**

Wrong spelling. See **AMOUNT**.

### **among**

(*not* amount)

### **among/amongst**

Either form can be used.

### **among or between?**

Use **BETWEEN** when something is shared by two people. Use **AMONG** when it is shared by three or more.

Share the sweets **BETWEEN** the two of you.

Share the sweets **AMONG** yourselves.

However, **BETWEEN** is used with numbers larger than two when it means an exact geographical location or when it refers to relationships.

Sardinia lies **BETWEEN** Spain, Algeria, Corsica and Italy.

It will take a long time before the rift **BETWEEN** the five main parties heals.

### **amoral or immoral?**

There is a difference in meaning.

**AMORAL** means not being governed by moral laws, acting outside them.

(note -m-)

**IMMORAL** means breaking the moral laws.

(note -mm-)

**among**

Wrong spelling. See **AMONG**.

**amount**

(*not* ammount)

**amount or number?**

**AMOUNT** is used with non-count nouns:

a small **AMOUNT** of sugar; a surprising **AMOUNT** of gossip.

**NUMBER** is used with plural nouns: a **NUMBER** of mistakes; a **NUMBER** of reasons.

**analyse**

(*not* -yze as in American English)

**analysis** (singular) analyses (plural)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

**-ance, -ant/-ence, -ent**

Words with these endings are difficult to spell and you'll always need to be on your guard with them. Check each word individually when in doubt, but here are some useful guidelines:

- (i) People are generally -ant: attendant, lieutenant, occupant, sergeant, tenant (but there are exceptions like superintendent, president, resident . . .).
- (ii) Use -ance, -ant, where the companion word ends in -ation: dominance, dominant, domination; variance, variant, variation.
- (iii) Use -ence, -ent after qu: consequence, consequent; eloquence, eloquent.
- (iv) Use -ance, -ant after hard c or hard g: significance, significant (c sounds like k); elegance, elegant (hard g).



- (v) Use -ence, -ent after soft c or soft g: innocence, innocent (c sounds like s); intelligent, intelligence (g sounds like j).

See **SOFT C AND SOFT G**.

### **and/but**

Many of us have been taught never to begin a sentence with **AND** or **BUT**. Generally speaking this is good advice. Both words are conjunctions and will therefore be busy joining words within the sentence:

I should love to come **AND** I look forward to the party very much.

They wanted to come **BUT** sadly they had to visit a friend in hospital some miles away.

However, there are some occasions when you may need the extra emphasis that starting a new sentence with **AND** or **BUT** would give. If you have a good reason to break the rules, do so!

### **anecdote or antidote?**

An **ANECDOTE** is a short, amusing account of something that has happened.

An **ANTIDOTE** is a medicine taken to counteract a poison.

### **angsiety**

Wrong spelling. See **ANXIETY**.

### **angsious**

Wrong spelling. See **ANXIOUS**.

### **annex or annexe?**

To **ANNEX** is to take possession of a country or part of a country.

An **ANNEX** is another word for an appendix in an official document.

An **ANNEXE** is a building added to the main building.

**annoint**

Wrong spelling. See ANOINT.

**announce**

announced, announcing, announcer, announcement  
(*not* -n-)

**annoy**

annoyed, annoying, annoyance (*not* anoy or annoied)

**annul**

annulled, annulling, annulment  
See ADDING ENDINGS (iv).

**anoint**

(*not* -nn-)

**anounce**

Wrong spelling. See ANNOUNCE.

**anoy**

Wrong spelling. See ANNOY.

**ante-/anti-**

ANTE- means before.

antenatal = before birth

ANTI- means against.

antifreeze = against freezing

**antecedent**

This means earlier in time or an ancestor. (*not* anti-)  
See ANTE-/ANTI-.

**antediluvian**

This means very old-fashioned and primitive, literally  
'before the flood of Noah'. (*not* anti-)  
See ANTE-/ANTI-.

**antenna**

This word has two plurals, each used in a different  
sense:  
Use ANTENNAE to refer to insects.



Use **ANTENNAS** to refer to television aerials.

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

**ant Climax**

(*not ante-*)

See **ANTE-/ANTI-**.

**antidote**

See **ANECDOTE OR ANTIDOTE?**.

**antirrhinum**

(*not -rh-*)

**antisocial**

(*not ante-*)

See **ANTE-/ANTI-**.

**anxiety**

(*not angs-*)

**anxious**

(*not angs-*)

**apologise/apologize**

Both spellings are correct. (*not -pp*)

**apology**

apologies (plural)

See **PLURALS** (iii).

**apon**

Wrong spelling. See **UPON**.

**apostrophes**

(i) Apostrophes can be used to show that letters have been omitted:

◆ *in contractions*

didn't

o'clock

you've

won't

◆ *in poetry*  
o'er vales and hills  
where'er you walk

◆ *in dialect*  
'Ere's 'Arry.

◆ *in retail*  
pick 'n' mix  
salt 'n' vinegar

(ii) Apostrophes can be used to show ownership.  
Follow these simple guidelines and you'll never  
put the apostrophe in the wrong place.

*Singular nouns or 'owners'*

The tail of the dog

The dog's tail

Who 'owns' the tail?

the dog

Put the apostrophe after

the owner.

the dog'

Add -s.

the dog's

Add what is 'owned'.

the dog's tail

The smile of the princess

The princess's smile

Who 'owns' the smile?

the princess

Put the apostrophe after

the owner.

the princess'

Add -s.

the princess's

Add what is 'owned'.

the princess's smile

With proper names ending in -s, you have a choice,  
depending upon how the name is pronounced.

Keats' poetry or Keats's poetry

*But* St James's Square, London, SW1

St James' (two syllables)

St James's (three syllables)





*Plural nouns or 'owners'*

Don't worry about whether you use 's or s' in the plural. It will sort itself out.

The tails of the dogs

The dogs' tails

Who 'owns' the tails?                    the dogs

Put the apostrophe after  
the owners.                                the dogs'

Add -s if there isn't one.            (no need here)

Add what is 'owned'.                the dogs' tails

The laughter of the women

The women's laughter

Who 'owns' the laughter?            the women

Put the apostrophe  
after the owners.                        the women'

Add -s if there isn't one.            the women's

Add what is 'owned'.                the women's laughter

And so, when reading, you will be able to distinguish singular and plural 'owners'.

The princess's suitors.

The princesses' suitors.

The 'owner' is the word before the apostrophe.

(iii) Apostrophes are also used in condensed expressions of time.

The work of a moment.

A moment's work.

The work of three years.

Three years' work.

If you follow the guidelines in (ii) above, you will never make a mistake.

**appal**

appalled, appalling (*not* -aul-)

See also **ADDING ENDINGS** (iv).

**appearance**

(*not* -ence)

**appendix**

This word has two plurals, each used in a different sense.

Use **APPENDIXES** in an anatomical sense.

Use **APPENDICES** when referring to supplementary sections in books or formal documents.

See also **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

**appologise/-ize**

Wrong spelling. See **APOLOGISE/APOLOGIZE**.

**appology**

Wrong spelling. See **APOLOGY**.

**appraise or apprise?**

To **APPRAISE** is to evaluate.

To **APPRISE** is to inform.

**appreciate**

There are three distinct meanings of this word.

I **APPRECIATE** your kindness (= recognise gratefully).

I **APPRECIATE** that you have had a difficult time lately (= understand).

My cottage **HAS APPRECIATED** in value already (= increased).

Some people would choose to avoid the second use above (understand, realise) but the verb is now widely used in this sense and this has become acceptable.

**approach**

approached, approaching (*not* apr-)

**aquaint**

Wrong spelling. See **ACQUAINT**.

**aquaintance**

Wrong spelling. See **ACQUAINTANCE**.

**aquarium** (singular) **aquaria** or **aquariums** (plural)

See **FOREIGN PLURALS**.

**aquiesce**

Wrong spelling. See **ACQUIESCE**.

**aquiescence**

Wrong spelling. See **ACQUIESCENCE**.

**acquire**

Wrong spelling. See **ACQUIRE**.

**arange**

Wrong spelling. See **ARRANGE**.

**arbiter or arbitrator?**

An **ARBITER** is a judge or someone with decisive influence (an arbiter of fashion).

In addition, an **ARBITER** may intervene to settle a dispute (-er).

An **ARBITRATOR** is someone who is officially appointed to judge the rights and wrongs of a dispute (-or).

**arbitrator or mediator?**

An **ARBITRATOR** reaches a judgement but is not necessarily obeyed.

A **MEDIATOR** attempts to bring two opposing sides together and to settle a dispute.

**archipelago**

There are two interchangeable plural forms:  
archipelagoes, archipelagos.

**arctic**

(*not* artic, although frequently mispronounced as such)

**argument**

(*not* arguement)

**arrange**

arranged, arranging, arrangement (*not* -r-)

See **ADDING ENDINGS** (ii).

**artefact**

American: artifact

**artic**

Wrong spelling. See **ARCTIC**.

**article**

(*not* -cal)

See **-CAL/-CLE**.

**artist or artiste?**

Traditionally, an **ARTIST** is skilled in one or more of the fine arts (painting, for example, or sculpture).

Traditionally, the term **ARTISTE** is reserved for a performer or entertainer (a music-hall **ARTISTE**).

However, **ARTIST** is now being used to cover both meanings in the sense of 'skilled practitioner', and **ARTISTE** is becoming redundant.

**as or like?**

Use these exemplar sentences as a guide:

You look **AS** if you have seen a ghost.

You look **AS** though you have seen a ghost.

**AS** I expected, he's missed the train.

You look **LIKE** your mother.

**asma**

Wrong spelling. See **ASTHMA**.

**asphalt**

(*not* ashphalt, as it is frequently mispronounced)

**aspirin**

(*not* asprin, as it is frequently mispronounced)

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