Common Spelling Rules

1. Rules for Adding Prefixes

   a. When a prefix is added to a word, do not drop a letter from either the prefix or the base word (dis- + approve = disapprove; ir- + regular = irregular, mis- + spell = misspell, il- + legal = illegal).

   b. The exception to the prefix rule is for ad-, com-, and in-, which can be “absorbed” by the base word so that the last letter in the prefix changes to match the beginning consonant of the base word. This is done to make the word easier to say. For example, instead of inlegal (meaning not legal), we write illegal. Instead of adsemble (meaning toward moving together), we write assemble. Instead of commit (meaning to send together), we write commit. Other examples of words with absorbed prefixes include allot, affair, arrange, acclaim, colleague, correlate, irresponsible, immature, irrational, immortal.

2. Rules for Plurals

   **Nouns**

   a. For most nouns, add s (boy/boys, table/tables).

   b. For nouns ending in s, x, z, ch, or sh, add es (glasses, foxes, arches, wishes).

   c. For nouns ending in y when the y is preceded by a vowel, add s (turkeys, attorneys).

   d. For nouns ending in y when the y is preceded by a consonant, change the y to i and then add es (cities, spies).

   e. For some nouns ending in f or fe, add s; others change the f or fe to v and add es (roofs, beliefs, scarves, leaves).

   f. For nouns ending in o when the o is preceded by a consonant, add es (tomatoes, heroes).

   g. For nouns ending in o when the o is preceded by a vowel, add s (patios, rodes).
h. For some nouns that end in o when the o is preceded by a vowel, just add an s. This is particularly true of words that are connected to music (solas, altos, sopranos).

i. For some nouns, the plural form is a new word: teeth, mice, oxen.

**VERBS**

a. While verbs are not plural like nouns, they take the plural form to be in agreement with the subject: He does; They do. Verbs that end in o, add es; verbs that end in a consonant, add s (go/goes; win/wins).

**3. Rules for Suffixes**

a. If adding the suffix -ly or -ness, do not change the spelling of the base word unless the base word ends in y (careful/carefully; usual/usually; fond/fondness; happy/happily).

**Rules for adding a suffix to words that end in silent e**

a. If adding a suffix that begins with a vowel to a word that ends in a silent e, drop the final silent e (give/giving; safe/safest; take/taking; admire/admirable, create/creative).

b. If adding a suffix that begins with the letter a or o to a word that ends in ce or ge, keep the final e (manage/manageable; notice/noticeable; outrage/outrageous).  

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.

   1 The e must be kept at the ends of the words to keep the e and g making their “soft” sounds of /s/ and /j/. Usually e makes the /k/ sound except when followed by the letters e, i, and y. G usually makes the /g/ sound except when followed by e, i, and y.
pit/pitted; wrap/wrapper). This is sometimes called the 1-1-1 Doubling Rule (one syllable-one vowel-one consonant after the vowel).

b. If the word has two or more syllables and the last syllable is a CVC pattern (consonant-vowel-consonant) and is the accented syllable, then follow the 1-1-1 Doubling Rule (permit/permitted; refer/referring; forbid/forbidden; occur/occurred; forget/forgetting).

c. If the word has two or more syllables and the last syllable follows the CVC pattern but is unaccented, do not double the last consonant (barrel/barreling; gallop/galloping; blanket/blanketing; trumpet/trumpeting).

Rules for adding the suffixes -ible or -able

a. If the root is not a complete word (technically called a bound morpheme), add -ible. Examples: visible, horrible, terrible, possible, edible, eligible, incredible, permissible, suitable, invisible, illegible.

b. If the root is a complete word without the suffix (technically called an unbound morpheme), then add -able. Examples: fashionable, laughable, suitable, dependable, comfortable.

c. If the root is a complete word that ends in silent e, drop the silent e and then add -able. Examples: excuse/excusable, advise/advisable, desire/desirable, value/valuable, debate/debatable.

d. Exceptions to the -ible/-able rule occur when the final sound is the hard g or hard c sound; then the suffix is -able: navigable, applicable. Other exceptions include digestible, contemptible, inevitable, flexible, responsible, irritable.

Rules for adding -ion

a. If the root ends in ct, add -ion (selects/election; subtract/subtraction).

b. If the root ends in ss, add -ion (discuss/discussion; impress/impression).

c. If the root ends in te, drop the e and add -ion (educate/education; create/creation).

d. If the root ends in it, change the t to s and add -ion (permit/permission; omit/omission).

e. If the root ends Vde (vowel, letter d, letter e), drop the e, change the d to s and add -ion (explode/explosion; persuade/persuasion).

f. If the root ends in Vne, Vne, or Vze, drop the e and add -ation (declare/declaration; combine/combination; organize/organization).
4. Other Helpful Rules

a. Use the word a before words that begin with a consonant sound; use an before words that begin with a vowel sound (a car; an apple; an hour—the b is silent; a one-dollar bill—the o makes a /w/ sound).

b. Use an apostrophe to take the place of omitted letters in contractions. Examples: let’s, that’s, don’t, doesn’t, it’s, can’t, won’t, wouldn’t, shouldn’t, couldn’t, I’m, I’ve, I’d, I’ll, they’re, they’ve, they’d, they’ll, you’re, you’ve, you’d, you’ll, we’re, we’ve, we’d, we’ll, she’s, she’d, she’ll, could’ve, would’ve, should’ve.

c. Long vowel sounds will not precede a doubled consonant. Exceptions include toll, roll, droll, and troll.

d. Do not end words in the letter v or z. Add a silent e to words that end in those sounds (give, not giv; breeze, not breez; have, not hav; love, not lov; snooze, not snooz; above, not abov).

e. Only one English word ends in -sede: supersede. Three words end in -ceed: exceed, proceed, and succeed; all other verbs ending in the /sed/ sound are spelled with -cede: intercede, precede; concede.

f. Spelling the wrong word the correct way is still a spelling error. So, using right for write isn’t right. Help students to spell homophones correctly by making sure they know the meaning of each word.