

“Typical Spelling Patterns for Consonant Sounds”

Consonants are easier than vowels in terms of spelling. A consonant sound is often represented by the same consonant letter in writing: bed [bed], pin [pin], kind [kaind], take [teik], mark [ma:rk], false [fo:ls], first, joke, government, skeleton, distribute, tremble, inventive, horrible, wonderful.

But there are several consonant sounds that are represented by different consonant letters or letter combinations in writing, for example, [k], [s], [g], [j], [f], [sh]. There are also consonant letters and letter combinations that have several variants of pronunciation, for example, c, ch, g, gh, x, xh. This often presents some difficulty for language learners. Spelling notes on difficult consonants are given below.

1. SOUND [s]: letters s, c, sc, ps. SOUND [z]: letters s, z

The letter S represents two common English sounds [s] and [z].

The letter S has the sound [s] at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the word before or after a vowel or a consonant: same, seem, sit, sore, suit, sky, slim, sneak, stray, swim; sausage, master, absent, answer, listen; case, loose, sense, glimpse, serious, basis.

Double S is also pronounced [s] and is found in the middle or at the end of the word: lesson, assume, pessimist, oppressive; class, cross, address, hopeless. Exceptions: dessert [di'zərt], possess [pə'zes], scissors ['sizərz].

The letter C represents the sound [s] in the position before E, I, Y: center, ceremony, circus, civil, cylinder, cyber. Students often have a problem choosing between C and S in this case, because C and S

occur in the same positions before the vowels E, I, Y and have the same pronunciation. Compare: cent – sent, cell – sell, sense – absence, assess – excess, cinema – sing, privacy – fantasy. Write such words in two columns for comparison, with pronunciation and meaning, and it will help you to memorize their spelling easier. Also, many words of Latin origin with the letter C exist in Russian and have the Russian sound [ts] in them: center, circus, cycle.

The combination SC has the sound [s] before E, I, Y: scent, science, fascinate, scythe.

In several words, the sound [s] is represented in writing by the combination PS, where P is a silent letter: psalm, pseudonym, psychology.

The sound [z] is usually represented by the consonant S: rose, cause, always, his, wise, was, present, poison, reason, clumsy, organism, realism, advertise, advise, comprise, raise. But the letter S never has the sound [z] at the beginning of the word, so expect the letter Z there: zone, zero, zip. (The consonant Z is described at the end of this article.)

The ending S/ES

The ending S/ES of nouns and verbs has three different variants of pronunciation depending on the sound or letter after which it stands. (The mute letter E at the end of the word is not taken into consideration in this rule.)

[s] after a voiceless consonant: parks, takes, streets, writes, cuffs, myths, jumps, laughs;

[z] after a voiced consonant or a vowel: kids, rides, legs, girls, rooms, chairs, robs, leaves, learns, clothes, boys, cows, goes, ties, studies;

[iz] after the letters s, z, x, ch, tch, ge, dge, sh: classes, roses, prizes, quizzes, matches, oranges, bridges, dishes, fixes. In this case, the ending ES is added if the word doesn't have the mute letter E at the end, and the ending S is added if mute E is there. Compare: rise, rises; kiss, kisses; cage, cages; flash, flashes.

2. COMBINATION TH

The combination TH may sometimes present a problem because it represents the voiced sound [ð] and the voiceless sound [θ], and there is no rule on where and which of the two sounds to pronounce. But if you just write words with these sounds in two columns, look at them attentively, and read them aloud several times, it will take care of the problem.

The sound [ð]: the, this, that, these, those, then, they, their, there, though, other, mother, father, brother, weather, neither, bathe, breathe, clothes, soothe, northern, southern.

The sound [θ]: thin, thick, thank, think, thought, theater, theory, therapy, thermometer, thorough, thunder, three, through, method, author, bath, breath, cloth, teeth, truth, health, north, south.

3. SOUND [k]: k, ck, c, ch, que

The sound [k] is represented in writing by the letters and combinations k, ck, c, ch, que.

Initial letter K representing the sound [k] is not very common in English words: keep, keen, kerchief, kernel, kettle, key, kick, kid,

kill, kind, king, kiss, kit, kitchen, kitten. Some of the words beginning with the letter K are of foreign origin: kaleidoscope, Kabul, kangaroo, karma, kerosene, kilogram, kinetic, kleptomania, Korea. In some words, initial K is silent: knee, knife, knit, knock, knot, know.

A number of English names begin with the letter K: Kathleen, Karen, Kimberly, Keith, Kenneth, Kent, Kevin, Kelvin. Some of the names beginning with the letter K are variants of spelling with the letter C: Catherine, Katherine; Caroline, Karoline; Chris, Kris; Carl, Karl.

The letter K in English words is often found after another consonant: skate, skeleton, skill, skin, sky, bank, pink, blanket, napkin, mask, park. The letter K stands alone after a long vowel, a diphthong, or a combination of vowels: seek, break, take, joke, soak, like, look.

Single K at the end of the word after a short vowel sound is rare in English: sputnik, beatnik, Nikky. The letter combination CK is used instead of K in such cases: pack, sick, neck, Nick, jacket, rocket, cracker.

In several words, the final sound [k] is represented by QUE in writing: unique, technique, antique, physique, clique, grotesque. The combination QU has the sound [kw] at the beginning and in the middle of many English words: queen, quarter, quite, quiet, question, squad, squirrel, require, inquire.

4. LETTER C: sounds [s], [k]

The letter C represents two sounds: [s] and [k], and there are strict rules on where and which of the two sounds is pronounced.

Letter C: sound [s]

The letter C has the sound [s] before the vowels E, I, Y.

The sound [s]: celebrate, center, certainly, ceremony, cemetery, receive, race, price.

The sound [s]: cider, cigarette, civil, circus.

The sound [s]: cycle, cylinder, Cyprus.

Letter C: sound [k]

The letter C has the sound [k] before the vowels A, O, U and before consonants.

The sound [k]: cat, cabin, cake, call, care, carry, cancel, cast, delicate, intricate.

The sound [k]: come, complete, cord, cost, country, acoustic, decorate.

The sound [k]: cut, custom, cute, current, curious, cucumber, calculate.

The sound [k]: clean, clip, claim, cloud, craft, cream, credit, crown.

Combination SC

The combination SC follows the same rule: SC has the sound [s] before the vowels E, I, Y, but SC has the sound [sk] before the vowels A, O, U and before consonants.

The sound [s]: scent, science, fascist, scythe, miscellaneous.

The sound [sk]: scan, scale, escape, scope, scorch, scuba, school.

Exception: sceptic ['skeptik], sceptical, scepticism. (In AmE, mostly skeptic, skeptical, skepticism.)

Combination CC

The combination CC follows the same rule: CC has the sound [ks] before the vowels E, I, Y, but CC has the sound [k] before the vowels A, O, U and before consonants.

The sound [ks]: accent, access, accept, eccentric, succeed, accident, coccyx.

The sound [k]: accommodations, accordingly, account, accuse, occur, acclaim.

Letter C in the suffixes

The letter C in the suffix -ic is always pronounced [k]: panic, traffic, magic, static, systematic, democratic, economic, economical, historic, historical, practical, politics.

The letter C in the suffixes -ice, ence, ance, cy is always pronounced [s]: notice, practice, service; competence, audience, silence; resistance, reluctance, arrogance; agency, democracy, efficiency, policy.

5. COMBINATION CH

The combination CH represents the sound [ch] in typically English words: chair, chess, child, chief, choke, achieve, reach, rich, which, church, such, bunch.

The combination CH represents the sound [k] in words of Greek or Latin origin: chemistry, chaos, charisma, chlorine, chorus, archaeology, archaic, archive, archipelago, architect, echo, mechanic, monarchy, anarchy, synchronize, psychologist, school, scholar.

The combination CH represents the sound [sh] in words of French origin: champagne, chandelier, charlatan, chef, chevron, chic, chiffon, cache, moustache, machine, parachute.

At the end of the word the sound [ch] is also represented by TCH in writing: catch, match, watch, pitch, pitcher, butcher.

The sound [ch] is also represented by the combination TU in the suffix: departure, feature, furniture, literature, picture, lecture, adventure, adventurous, nature, torture, signature, gesture, sculpture, century.

6. LETTER G: sounds [g], [j]

The letter G before vowels represents either the sound [g] (go) or the sound [j] (just).

Letter G: sound [g]

The letter G has the sound [g] before the vowels A, O, U and before consonants.

The sound [g]: gain, again, game, gate, gap, Gary, gas, gather, gaunt, gawk, gay.

The sound [g]: go, goal, gold, gone, good, goose, gourd, gourmet, govern.

The sound [g]: gull, gust, gut, guy, argue, regular, singular, angular.

The sound [g]: glare, glide, global, glow, grand, grim, grip, gross, pygmy, enigma, stagnant.

Letter G before E, I

The letter G before the vowels E, I can represent the sound [g] or [j]. There is no rule that could help us to decide which of the two sounds to pronounce in such cases, so you have to memorize such words.

The sound [g]: get, geyser, gear, geese, anger, finger, singer.

The sound [j]: gentle, gender, general, gelatin, genius, geology, gesture, German, legend, sergeant, vegetable, gorgeous, carriage, marriage, passage, language, voyage, college, change, manage, huge, urge, urgent, danger, stranger.

The sound [g]: give, gimmick, girl, girdle, giggle, gilded, gigabyte, begin.

The sound [j]: giant, gin, gist, gigolo, giraffe, gigabyte, engine, imagine, region, religious.

The letter G before Y has the sound [j]: gym, gypsy, gyro, Egypt, energy.

Single G at the end of the word is pronounced [g]: bag, rag, lag, dig, fig, log, beg, Meg, rug. Double G is usually pronounced [g]: egg, giggle, wriggle, toggle, struggle, aggressive, reggae. But GG is pronounced [j] in the words exaggerate, suggest.

Sound [j]: j, ge, dge

The sound [j] at the beginning and in the middle of the word is often represented by the letter J: jet, jumbo, just, Jane, John, jelly, jealous, jury, majority, pajamas. It is helpful to write two columns of words in which the sound [j] is represented by the letters G and J: gin, jinx; gene, jeans; Gene, Jean; gym, Jim.

The sound [j] at the end of the word is often represented in writing by the combination DGE: bridge, edge, hedge, judge, knowledge, cartridge, badger, budget, fidget. But there are many words in which the sound [j] is represented by GE at the end of the word (see above: Letter G before E, I). It may help to know that DGE is part of the root and occurs after a short vowel sound (compare: hedge – huge), while GE occurs in various positions in the word and is also part of the noun-forming suffix AGE (marriage, postage). But the best way to memorize words ending in GE and DGE is to arrange them in two columns on one page for comparison.

Note: Sound [zh]

The combination GE is pronounced [zh] at the end of some words of foreign origin: beige, garage, mirage, montage, prestige, rouge. The sound [zh] is also represented by the combinations SI and SU in the suffix: erosion, explosion, vision, leisure, pleasure, seizure, usually, visual.

7. COMBINATION GH

The combination GH at the beginning of the word is always pronounced [g]: ghost, ghastly, Ghana, ghetto, ghoul.

The combination GH at the end of some words is pronounced [f]: enough, rough, tough, laugh, cough.

The combination GH at the end of some other words is silent: though [ðou]; bough [bau]; plough (BrE), plow (AmE) [plau]; through [θru:].

The combination GH at the end of the word before T is usually silent: bought [bo:t], caught [ko:t], thought [θo:t], drought [draut], night [nait], height [hait], weight [weit], straight [streit]. But GH is pronounced [f] before T in the words draught, laughter.

8. COMBINATION GU

The combination GU is pronounced [g] at the beginning and in the middle of the word: guard, guardian, guarantee, guess, guest, guide, guilt, guitar; argue, regulate, singular, disguise.

The combination GUE is pronounced [g] at the end of the word: catalogue, dialogue, tongue, fatigue, league, vague, rogue. In American English, some of these words have two variants of spelling: catalogue, catalog; dialogue, dialog; monologue, monolog; prologue, prolog.

The combination GU is pronounced [gw] in some words of Latin and Spanish origin: language, lingua, linguistics, guava, Guatemala, Nicaragua, distinguish.

9. SOUND [f]: f, ff, ph, gh

The sound [f] is usually represented by the consonant F: file, full, faint, flame, flick, flight, fly, free, fry, prefer, defend, after, safe, scarf, half, beef, roof.

Double F is usually found in the syllable with a short vowel sound: puff, cuff, cliff, riff, traffic. Double F is also found in cases where the prefix ends in F, and the root starts with F: affair, affirm, afford, differ, effect, offend, offer, suffer, suffix.

The combination PH also has the sound [f]: photograph, physics, phonetics, philosophy, alphabet, and symphony.

The combination GH represents the sound [f] at the end of the word: enough, rough, tough, laugh, cough.

10. SOUND [sh]

In English words, the sound [sh] is usually represented by the combination SH: she, shine, shark, shoe, rush, fish.

The combination CH is pronounced [sh] in words of French origin: champagne, chandelier, charlatan, chef, chevron, chic, chiffon, cache, machine.

There are several consonant + vowel combinations that are pronounced [sh], namely, TI, CI, SI, SU, and they are usually in the suffix or right before it.

The combination CI: appreciate, associate; social, official, special, financial; musician, politician, magician; ancient, efficient; delicious, suspicious, precious, vicious, conscious.

The combination SI: extension, expansion, comprehension; discussion, expression, fission, mission.

The combination TI: negotiate, initiate, substantiate; essential, confidential, initial, martial arts; patient, ambitious, cautious; condition, section, organization.

The combination SU: sugar, sure, sensual, assure, censure, fissure, pressure, issue, tissue.

11. LETTER X and COMBINATION XH

The letter X and the combination XH represent the sounds [ks]: exercise, exclaim, exclude, expect, experiment, explain, extreme, exhibition.

The letter X and the combination XH represent the sounds [gz]: exact, example, execute, exempt, exert, exist, exhaust, exhibit, exhilarate.

Some words with X or XH have two variants of pronunciation:

exile ['egzail], ['eksail];

exhale [eks'heil], [ig'zeil];

xhume [ig'zu:m], [eks'hyu:m].

In some words, there is C after EX: exceed, excellent, except, excite, excuse, Excalibur, excavate. In such cases, the pronunciation follows the rules of C before vowels: [ks] exceed, excellent, except, excite; [ks+k] excavate, Excalibur, excuse.

In some words of Greek origin, the letter X is pronounced [z]: xenon ['zenon], ['zi:non]; xenophobia, Xerox ['zi:roks], xylophone.

12. LETTER Z

The sound [z] is often represented by the consonant S in writing: rose [rouz], wise, was, always, his, present, resist, music, poison, reason, busy, clumsy, organism, realism, advertise, advise, comprise, raise, surprise.

But the letter S is never pronounced [z] at the beginning of the word, so when you hear [z] as the first sound of the word, you can be practically sure that this word is spelled with initial Z.

The letter Z usually has the sound [z]: zebra, zeal, zenith, zero, Zeus, zinc, zip, zipper, zombie, zone, zoo; dozen, citizen, horizon, razor, enzyme, ozone, plaza, lazy, crazy, quiz; seize, organize, realize, apologize, modernize.

Double Z is also pronounced [z]: drizzle, sizzle, puzzle, mezzanine; buzz, jazz, fuzzy.

The letters Z and ZZ are pronounced [ts] in some words of foreign origin: pizza ['pi:tsə]; mezzo ['metsou], ['mezou]; Mozart ['moutsɑ:rt]; mozzarella [motsə'relə]; Nazi ['na:tsi:].

In several foreign borrowings the sound [ts] is represented by the letters TZ: waltz, chintz, blitz, blitzkrieg, Fitzgerald.

Also note the following spelling and pronunciation variants of the word "tsar": tsar, tzar [za:r] or [tsa:r]; czar [za:r].

13. SOUND [y] as in YES

The consonant sound [y] is represented by the letter Y before a vowel, mostly at the beginning of the word: yacht, Yale, Yankee, yarn, yard, yawn, year, yearn, yeast, yell, yellow, yelp, Yemen, yen, yes, yesterday, yet, yield, yoga, yogurt, yoke, yolk, New York, you, young, Yukon, beyond, canyon, Tanya, lawyer.

The consonant sound [y] is also represented by the vowel I in certain positions in the word after a consonant before another vowel: billiards, billion, familiar, milliard, million, onion, junior, senior, union.

In a number of cases, the consonant sound [y] is not represented by any letter in writing, for example, in the case of the vowel U when it is pronounced [yu:]: use [yu:z], unit ['yu:nit], cube [kyu:b], music, human, few, fuel, feudal, view.