

BEGINNER'S GUIDE to CUT SPELLING

● CUT LETTERS AS FOLLOWS:

Rule 1: Cut letters irrelevant to the sound:

A in *head*>*hed*, B in *doubt*>*dout*, C in *except*>*exept*,
D in *adjust*>*ajust*, E in *are*>*ar*, GH in *caught*>*caut*,
H in *when*>*wen*, I in *friend*>*frend*, K in *knife*>*nife*, O-L in
would>*wud*, N in *condemn*>*condem*, O in *people*>*peple*,
P in *receipt*>*receit*, S in *island*>*iland*, T in *fetch*>*fech*,
U in *build*>*bild*, W in *write*>*rite*, Y in *key*>*ke*,
and in many other spelling patterns.

Rule 2a: Cut unstressed vowels before L,M,N,R

A as in *pedal*>*pedl*, and likewise *madm*, *womn*, *vicr*.
E as in *camel*>*caml*, and likewise *system*, *gardn*, *singr*.
I as in *lentil*>*lentl*, and likewise *victm*, *raisn*, *Cheshr*.
O as in *pistol*>*pistl*, and likewise *fathm*, *reasn*, *sailr*.
U as in *consul*>*consl*, and likewise *albm*, *murmur*.
AI as in *mountain*>*mountn*.
OU as in *glamour*>*glamr*.

Rule 2b: Cut vowels in regular endings

as -ED>-D in *washed*>*washd*.
-ES>-S in *washes*>*washs*.
-ING>-NG in *washing*>*washng*.
-ABLE>-BL in *washable*>*washbl*.

Rule 3: Write most double consonants single

as in *ebb*>*eb*, *lock*>*lok*, *well*>*wel*, *bottle*>*botl*,
hopped>*hopd*, *hopping*>*hopng*, *accommodate*>*acomodate*.

● SUBSTITUTE LETTERS AS FOLLOWS:

- 1 F for GH & PH: *rough*>*ruf*, *photograph*>*fotograf*
- 2 J for soft G: *ginger*>*jinjr*, *judge*>*juj*
- 3 Y for IG: *sigh*>*sy*, *sight*>*syt*, *sign*>*syn*

● FEWER CAPITALS & APOSTROPHES

Write only proper names with capitals:

France **but** *french*, *Paris* **but** *parisian*,
Augustus **but** *august*, *Satrn* **but** *satrday*.

Write apostrophes only to link words:

she'd, *it's*, *we'l*, *let's*,

not to show omission or possession:

oclok, *hadnt*, *Freds house*, *our neibrs houses*.

THE CUT SPELLING HANDBOOK

*a Handbook to the simplification
of written English
by omission of redundant letters*

prepared by Christopher Upward

42nd (revised and expanded) edition, 1998,
Birmingham, UK: Simplified Spelling Society, 340+viii pp,
ISBN 0 9506391 3 3

Price £10/US\$20 + airmail outside Europe £3/US\$6.

THE BTRSPL / CUTSPL CONVERTER

For information on the automatic Cut Spelling
converter program, see last paragraph overleaf.
For more details, and to download the program
free of charge:

THE SIMPLIFIED SPELLING SOCIETY

*"Working for planned change to English spelling
for the benefit of learners and users
throughout the world"*

Details of the Society may be obtained from:

Simplified Spelling Society

introducing cut spelling

written English
simplified by
cutting
redundant letters

- handbook
with exercises & dictionary
- converter program
free on Internet

Contact:

The English spelling problem

English spelling is notoriously difficult. It is an antiquated, unpredictable system not designed for universal literacy. We all suffer from its irregularity: it takes much longer to learn than more regular systems; it inhibits free expression; it causes mispronunciation; it is handled erratically by most people, with even skilled writers prone to uncertainty and error; and it depresses educational standards (millions are functionally illiterate). Many languages with more regular spellings have modernized their writing in the past century, and several English-speaking countries modernized their currency and/or weights & measures in the 1970s. Our spelling can and should now be modernized too.

Old and new to be recognizably similar

An ideal spelling system matches letters to speech-sounds. The sounds of words then tell us how to spell them, and the spelling tells us how they sound. English is so far from that ideal that we would need a totally new spelling system to make a perfect match. Even if such a drastic change were agreed, it would so disrupt the continuity of literacy, and the necessary worldwide re-education would be so costly, that it would be impracticable. As other languages show, new spellings must be close enough to the old for people educated in the one to read the other easily.

Redundant letters the key

Isolated reforms (eg, abolishing GH) may therefore seem the only feasible approach, but their effect on the all-pervading irregularity of English spelling would be marginal. So does that mean it is impossible to improve the spelling of English significantly, without excessive disruption? An answer came in the 1970s, when Australian psychologist Valerie Yule noted the many redundant letters in English. In the next decade those letters were classified, and the effect of removing them studied. The result was the Cut Spelling (CS) system which regularizes swathes of inconsistencies in written English that confuse learners, readers and writers everywhere, regardless of accent. In 1992 the Simplified Spelling Society published a comprehensive Handbook to CS (2nd edition 1996). Interested readers around the world have since come to know CS, and a number of writers have become proficient in using it. Its principles are widely acknowledged as offering a promising new approach to the English spelling problem that is flexible enough to be adapted to public demand.

Effect of CS on readers

Th foloing paragraphs sho CS in action. We first notice it is not hard to read, even without noing its rules, and with practis we read it as esily as traditionl spelng. Most words ar unchanged

(over 3/4 in th previus sentnce), and we hav th impresson not of a totaly new riting systm, but of norml script with letrs misng here and ther. Th basic shape of most words, by wich we recognize them, is not fundmently altrd, and nearly al those that ar mor substantialy chanjed ar quickly decoded; very few ar truly puzlng. This means that, if al printd matr sudnly apeard in CS tomoro, peples readng ability wud not be seriously afectd. Foren lernrs in particulr ar helpd by th clearr indication of pronunciation, as wen pairs like *lo/cow*, *danjer/angr*, *undrmine/determn* cese to look like ryms. With groing familiarity, users apreciate CS as a streamlined but mor acurat represntation of spoken english. Its novlty lies in th disapearnce of much of th arbitry clutr that makes ritn english so confusing and causes most of th mistakes peple now make.

Lernng CS

How CS is lernt depends on th lernr. Those first aquirng litracy skills can lern by norml fonic methods, wich ar mor efectiv in CS thanks to its improved regularity (eg, *hav*, *wer*, *litl*, *nyt*, *scool*, *frend*). Litrat lernrs, by contrast, mastr CS by practising deletion of redundnt letrs from traditionl spelng. They may first try riting CS by foloing th Beginrs Gide overleaf, wich outlines th 3 cutng rules and 3 substi-tution rules, or they may teach themselv systmatically thru th excrcises in th Handbook. It soon becoms aparent that CS not only removes many of th old perversitis like th unhis-toricl GH in *hauty*, but it also smooths away countless irritating variations like th unpredictbl vowl letrs befor final R in *burglr*, *teachr*, *doctr*, *glamr*, *murm*, *injr*, *martr*, etc. Th difrneces between british and american spelng evaprate. For lernrs from a numbr of othr languajs CS has th furthr attraction of removing discrepncis between english and ther mothr tong (eg, singl consnnts in CS *acomodation* as in spanish *acomodación*). Once mastrd, CS is ritn mor fluently and acuratly than traditionl spelng, as numerabl uncertntis and traps that previously causd hesitation and mispelng hav been eliminated (eg, *receive/relieve* becom *receve/releve*). From 1997 it has also been posbl to produce text in CS without lernng th rules at al (se last paragraf ⊃).

Econmy of efrt, time, space, mony

CS not only asists readng and riting skills, but also speeds up th production of text. Th loss of redundnt letrs shortns riting by around 10%, and so saves time and efrt for evryone engaged in creating ritn text, wethr schoolchildren, novlists, printrs, jurnlists, secretris, advrtisers, grafic desynrs, editrs, or anyone else. Th gretr regularity of CS means less time spent lernng to read and rite, and less need for chekng and corectng. In education th time saved can be spent on mor useful lernng, wile in th workplace it increses productivity. Th reduced space

ocupyd by CS has typograf-icl advantajs: public syns and notices can be smalr, or ritn larjr; mor words can be fitd on video or computer screens; fewr abreviations ar necesry; and fewr words hav to be hyfnated at line-ends. Ther ar also material econmis: with 10% space-saving, books and newspapers use less paper (or else th same pajes can carry mor text), and less storaj and transport ar required. Not least, th environmnt benefits from loer consumption of raw materials and enryj, and from reduced waste. Al these gains also save mony.

CS a flexibl concept

Som peple fear spelng reform wud mean spelng caos (as if english spelng wer not alrely caotic). Th flexibility of th CS concept minmizes that danjer. CS is not a rijid systm, but a synpost pointng to th omission of redundnt letrs as th most practicl and advntajus way of modrnizing english spelng. Th CS Handbook ofrs a coherent systm, as seen here, but difrnt users (ranjing from individual riters and orgnizations to entire cuntris) cud adopt CS to varying degrees. Probbly only a few of todays litrat adlts wud chanje ther riting, tho in ther readng they wud becom acustmd to many simplr forms. Of those that do chanje, som may rite *committee* (many alrely do, tho it now counts as rong), wile othrs prefer ful CS *comitee*: th two forms can co-exist, just as *judgement/judgment* and othr alternativ ‘cut’ spelngs co-exist today. In th long run th lojic and econmy of ful CS cud be expectd to prevail. Those responsbl for deciding standrd spelngs in education, publishng, dictionris, etc, can decide th balance between cutng and keepng redundnt letrs that best suits ther needs. Worldwide co-ordnation wud be desirebl, but a comn urj for simplification by shedng redundnt letrs wud work against any fragmntation of ritn english as a medium of world communication.

Autmatic spelng convertr

Ful mastery of CS may take mor time, concentration and practis than many peple can giv to th task, yet they may stil wish to produce text in CS (eg, to print a weekly CS colum in newspapers). They can now do so, thanks to enjneer Alan Mole (Colorado, USA), aidd by Bernard Sypniewski (New Jersey, USA) and John Bryant (Cambridge, UK), ho hav created th BTRSPL program. In conjunction with th 40,000-word CUTSPL dictionry, this rapidly (at about 100 pajes per minut) converts text from traditionl orthografy to CS. Availbl fre of charj from th Intrnet, BTRSPL/CUTSPL curently suits PCs (incl. WINDOWS), but not yet th Macintosh. Th program is stil in its infncy, and furthr developmnts ar pland, for instnce to enable users to adapt th dictionry to ther own needs, adng new words or altrng those alrely listd, and so bild up a persnlized CS riting tool.

(For Beginrs Gide to CS and CS Handbook, se overleaf: ⊃)

RULES OF CUT SPELLING

Cutting rules

The three problem areas of traditional spelling listed overleaf correspond to the three main rules of Cut Spelling (CS).

Rule 1 *Letters irrelevant to pronunciation*

About 20 of the 26 letters of the alphabet are sometimes used with no bearing on pronunciation at all. Some, like <e> in *love*, <gh> in *though* and <w> in *answer*, were once sounded, but fell silent centuries ago. Others were taken from foreign languages, like <ch> in *yacht* (Dutch), <h> in *honest* (French), and <p> in *psyche* (Greek), but are always silent in English. Yet others were inserted by analogy (<gh> in *haughty* to match *naughty*, <l> in *could* to match *would*) or to show a dubious or imagined derivation (in *doubt*, <c> in *scythe*). Two vowel letters are often written when the pronunciation only needs one; thus <a> in *measure*, <e> in *hearth*, <i> in *friend*, <o> in *people*, <u> in *build* are all redundant. CS removes letters such as these from hundreds of often common words; most strikingly, CS eliminates that most grotesque of all English spelling patterns, the <gh>.

Rule 2a *Unstressed vowels before <l,m,n,r>*

Thousands of English words contain <l, m, n> or <r> after an unstressed vowel, though the pronunciation fails to tell us which vowel letter to write. In fact, it is often redundant and can be cut, as seen from such rhyming pairs as *apple/chapel*, *centre/enter*: CS Rule 1 cut the silent <e> in *apple*, *centre*, and the resulting *appl*, *centr* show that unstressed <e> can be cut in *chapel*, *enter* too, giving CS *chapl*, *entr*. Like-wise the forms *rhythm*, *mustn't* show that the unstressed <o> can go in *fathom* and the unstressed <a, e> in *resistant*, *insistent*, giving CS *fathm*, *resistnt*, *insistnt*. Sometimes two letters can be cut: CS reduces *curtain*, *luncheon*, *fashion* to *curtn*, *lunchn*, *fashn*. CS Rule 2 cuts a swathe through one of the areas of greatest uncertainty in English spelling.

Rule 2b *Vowels in certain suffixes*

Similar is the cut of vowel letters in some major suffixes: the plural of *ax(e)* is cut to CS *axs*, distinguishing it from the uncut plural of *axis* (*axes*); the verb form *learned* is cut to CS *lernd*, but the adjective is distinguished as *lerned*. Strange at first is the cut of <-ing> to just <-ng> in verbs whose root ends in a consonant (*waiting*, *hating* diverge as CS *waitng*, *hating*), but an important gain from this cut is that it allows numerous troublesome doubled consonants to be simplified by Rule 3. A notable simplification is that the confusing <-able, -ible> suffixes are mostly reduced to just <-bl>, turning *eatable*, *edible* into CS *eatbl*, *edbl*.

Rule 3 *Doubled consonants simplified*

Doubled consonants sound like single consonants, so the writer cannot tell when doubling is required: frequent errors are the inevitable result. CS simplifies nearly all of them, as in CS *abbreviate*, *embarass*, *omitd/comitd/benefitd*, *travld/compeld* and (by Rule 2) *hopng/hoping* for *hopping/hoping*. The main exceptions are disyllabic words ending in <y> and words ending in <ss>; *furry*, *tinny*, *hiss*, *discuss* therefore remain distinct from *fury*, *tiny*, *his*, *discus*.

Substitution rules

The key feature of CS is that it removes rather than replaces letters. However, 3 simple substitutions are also made:

- 1 When <gh, ph> are pronounced /f/, they are spelt <f>. This produces forms such as CS *cof*, *tuf*, *fotografy*, *sulfr*.
- 2 When <g, dg> are sounded as <j>, they are spelt <j>. This produces forms such as CS *juj*, *jeolojy*, *jinjyr*.
- 3 When <ig> is pronounced as in *flight*, *sign*, it is spelt <y>, producing aligned forms such as *fly*, *flyt*, *sty*, *sy*, *syn*.

THE CUT SPELLING HANDBOOK

This leaflet barely outlines the CS proposal for modernizing English spelling. A full account is given in a three-part Handbook. Pt I (pp1-160) discusses the rationale of CS, its main features, its advantages, its psychological, linguistic and educational implications, and ways in which it could be implemented; but above all Pt I gives a detailed analysis of the present irregularities of English spelling and how cutting redundant letters improves the crucial interface of writing and speech. Pt II (pp163-231) illustrates the various cuts and provides exercises for literate adults to practise converting traditional spelling to CS and writing CS for themselves. Pt III (pp233-297) is a dictionary of over 20,000 of the most common words with redundant letters, giving their simpler CS equivalents. At the end is a bibliography of works for readers planning further study of the complexities of English spelling and the possibilities for its simplification.

“CUT SPELLING: a Handbook to the simplification of written English by omission of redundant letters”

306pp, Simplified Spelling Society, 1992, £10 or US\$20 to non-members + p&p £2 or US\$10 outside Europe, ISBN 0 9506391 3 3, obtainable from address opposite ⇒

Simplified Spelling Society

Introducing

CUT SPELLING

A Streamlined Writing System for English

a proposal for modernizing English spelling by removing redundant letters

Enquiries to Chris Upward
Chairman of the Society's Cut Spelling Working Group

THE BACKGROUND

Why reform English spelling?

English spelling is notoriously hard to master. It is a centuries-old writing system whose contradictions and eccentricities were never designed for a fully literate society. We all suffer from its clumsiness and inconsistency: it takes far longer to learn than more regular systems; it limits people's ability to express themselves; it causes mispronunciation, especially by foreign learners; most people acquire at best an erratic command of it (even skilled writers are prone to uncertainty and error); and many millions are condemned to functional illiteracy. It is therefore small wonder there is such concern about standards of literacy in English-speaking countries today. Yet many of those countries have in recent decades seen the benefit of modernizing equally antiquated systems of currency and weights & measures. Similar modernization of English spelling is badly needed.

Is reform possible?

Spelling reform is an unfamiliar idea to the English-speaking world, but other languages show it is feasible and indeed a normal way of preserving a writing system from obsolescence. The letters of the alphabet were designed to stand for the sounds of speech, but pronunciation evolves in the course of time, and confusion sets in when letters and sounds cease to match: the way we speak words now no longer tells us how to write them, and the way they are written no longer tells us how to speak them. That is the central problem of English spelling. In the past century many languages have modernized their spelling to improve this match between letters and sounds, and so aid literacy. To ensure continuity, only small changes are usually made, and while schoolchildren learn some new, improved spellings, most adults continue to write as before. It may therefore take a lifetime before everyone uses the new forms. Ideally, spelling reform needs to be an imperceptibly slow, but carefully planned and continuous process.

Problems of regularizing

Many schemes have been devised for respelling English as it is pronounced, but apart from some small improvements in America none has been adopted for general use. Several fully regularized systems have however been tried in the past 150 years in teaching beginners, with dramatic success in helping them acquire basic literacy skills, the best known recently

being the i.t.a. (initial teaching alphabet). However, all these schemes have required learners to transfer to the traditional irregular spelling as soon as they can read and write fluently, and much of the advantage is then lost.

Ideal though total regularization may ultimately be, the effect such schemes have on written English is so drastic as to be a major deterrent to their adoption. The following sentence, in the Simplified Spelling Society's *New Spelling* (1948), perhaps the best thought-out and most influential of these fully regularized orthographies, demonstrates the effect: "*Dhe langgwej wood be impruuvd bie dhe adopshon of nue spelng for wurdz*". Less radical proposals have therefore been made since then, so as to avoid such visual disruption, suggesting for instance that at first only the spelling of one sound, like the first vowel in *any*, should be regularized; or a single irregularity, like <gh>, should be removed. However, the immediate benefit of such a reform would be slight.

A new approach is called for if today's readers are not to be alienated, yet learners are to benefit significantly.

STREAMLINING

Cutting redundant letters

In the 1970s the Australian psychologist Valerie Yule found that many irregular spellings arise from redundant letters. These are letters which mislead because they are not needed to represent the sound of a word. Writers then cannot tell from a word's pronunciation which letters its written form requires, nor where to insert them, while readers are likely to mispronounce unfamiliar words containing them. A group within the Simplified Spelling Society therefore decided to explore which letters are redundant in English, and the effect their removal has on the appearance of the resulting 'cut' text. This Cut Spelling (CS) is now used for the rest of this column and for the next in order to demonstrate that effect.

Esy readng for continuity

One first notices that one can immediately read CS quite easily without even noting the rules of the system. Since most words are unchanged and few letters substituted, one has the impression of normal written English with a lot of odd slips, rather than of a totally new writing system. The essential core of words, the letters that identify them, is rarely affected, so that there is a high level of compatibility between the old and new spellings. This is essential for the gradual introduction of any spelling reform, as there must be no risk of a breakdown of written communication

between the generations educated in the old and the new systems. CS represents not a radical upheaval, but rather a streamlining, a trimming away of many of those features of traditional English spelling which dislocate the smooth operation of the alphabetic principle of regular sound-symbol correspondence.

FURTHER ADVANTAGES

Savings

The second thing one notices is that CS is some 10% shorter than traditional spelling. This has several important advantages. To begin with, it saves time and trouble for everyone involved in producing written text, from schoolchildren to publishers, from novelists to advertisers, from secretaries to graphic designers. CS would enable them all to create text that much faster, because there would be fewer letters to write and they would hesitate less over difficult spellings. Schoolchildren could then devote the time saved in the act of writing (as well as that saved in acquiring literacy skills) to other learning activities. Similar time-saving would be experienced by adults in handwriting, typing, word-processing, typesetting, or any other form of text production. The reduced space requirement has typographical benefits: public signs and notices could be smaller, or written larger; more text could be fitted on video or computer screens; fewer abbreviations would be needed; and fewer words would have to be split with hyphens at the ends of lines. There would also be material savings: with around one page in ten no longer needed, books and newspapers would require less paper (alternatively, more text could be carried in the same space as before), and demands on both storage and transport would be less. And the environment would gain from the lower consumption of raw materials and energy in manufacturing and from the reduction in the amount of waste needing to be disposed of.

Targeting spelling problems

Less immediately obvious is the fact that CS removes many of the most troublesome spelling problems that have bedeviled writing in English for centuries. There are three main categories: there are silent letters, such as <s> in *isle* or <i> in *business*, which are so often misspelled either as *ilse*, *buisness*, or as *ile*, *busness*; there are the CS forms. Another category is that of variant unstressed vowels, as before the final <r> in *burglar*, *teacher*, *doctor*, *glamour*, *murmur*, *injure*, *martyr*, which CS neatly aligns as *burglr*, *teachr*, *doctr*, *glamr*, *murmur*, *injr*, *martr*. Thirdly there are the doubled consonants, so often misspelled singly today, as found in such words as *accommodate*, *committee*, *parallel(1)ed*; CS simplifies these to *acomodate*, *comitee*, *paraleld*.

Cut Spelling

Christopher Upward

a handbook to simplifying written English by omitting redundant letters

About the *CUT SPELLING HANDBOOK*

"The aim of this book is to sow ideas. It is not to proclaim a dogma."

The English spelling problem

English spelling is a world problem. Its 'rules' deal with exceptions, not regularities. It confuses learners, and debates rage endlessly on how to teach it. Poor literacy is blamed on children, parents, teachers, television, politicians. Errors abound in public and private writing, and misleading spellings cause frequent mispronunciation. Dictionaries list numerous alternative forms, with America and Britain often disagreeing. Unlike most languages, English ignores the alphabetic principle that spelling should show pronunciation. When English was largely confined to Britain and education was for a minority, this mattered less than today; but an educated world now needs something better.

The Cut Spelling (CS) solution

Most past ideas for tackling the problem were radical, requiring extensive respelling, extra letters, even a new alphabet, regardless of disruption. With its three rules for cutting redundant letters, CS streamlines written English to combine maximum regularization with minimum change. Although its basis is the alphabetic principle that spelling should correspond to speech-sounds, CS gives no preference to any one accent, but leaves the criteria of economy, simplicity and predictability to determine the features of a world orthography for the twenty-first century. This second edition of the *CS Handbook* is revised and expanded to build on over ten years' practical experience of CS in use.

Range of readership

The CS Handbook addresses a varied readership. For the 'guardians' of today's spelling (editors, educationists, lexicographers) it will challenge any assumption that English spelling is not in dire need of modernization. Teachers will gain new insights into the problems faced by learners of all ages, native- and non-native-speaking alike. Psychologists will wish to examine the claim that redundant letters are a prime obstacle to literacy. Linguists of every kind will appreciate an analysis of English spelling which is at once functional, systemic, historical and comparative. And all those readers who are enticed into trying out the recommendations, exercises and dictionary-key provided by this book will find their appetite for linguistic adventure whetted.

CONTENTS.

Foreword to second edition.

How to use the Handbook.

Part I: Cut Spelling explained.

Ch.1 *Aim & Context*: definition, origin and evolution of CS - principles of alphabetic spelling - issues of implementation - future development.

Ch.2 *Form & Content*: first approaching CS - letters and sounds - learning processes.

Ch.3 *Cut Spelling rules*.

- 1) letters irrelevant to pronunciation.
- 2) shwa-vowels before L, M, N, R and in suffixes.
- 3) doubled consonants.

Ch.4 *Which letters are substituted?*

Ch.5 *Capital letters and apostrophes*.

Ch.6 *Going beyond CS - and stopping short*.

Part II: Cut Spelling demonstrated: exercises for mastering CS.

Part III: Dictionary: to check CS forms against traditional spellings.

Suggestions for further reading.

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