

Spelling

Quiz

Are you a good speller? If so, you are in the minority. In a recent experiment most people, even good spellers, failed to spell correctly all of a list of 16 common words. Most failed several.

Here is the list, which may be misspelled. Can you spell them correctly?

accommodate
disappoint disciplin
excessive gardian
innocuous miniatjur
mischivus ocazion
professor
psyckolojy
recommend
remembered sovraign,
tecnically

Answers are on the back page. [Answers? Are? Why spelled like that?]

We are the Spelling Society [international] Look us up on the web at spellingsociety.org Read on for more info.

Did you try the quiz & then check to see how you did? If you made some mistakes, let's see why you made them. Quite possibly you were making good sense, but the "correct" spelling was not.

Did you [u?] leave out the silent e & g in /sovereign/? If so you were making good sense; the g in particular is a redundant leftover from ancient latin. It is no longer sounded, so why write it, say spelling reformers.

Are you & I writing this way to please the etymologists? Some say we are supposed to. Why is a puzzle, since the history of each word is all on record for the scholars to argue about if they wish.

Are we writing [excuse my spelling] to please our teachers? Teachers all over are refusing to correct spelling mistakes, on the grounds partly that the old spellings don't make sense any more.

Are we writing the old spellings - & being considered stupid when we don't - to live up to an ideal of some kind?

What ideal? What is ideal about the figure of 40 million people in the US who are semi-illiterate, unable to read a newspaper or fill out an application form?

What is ideal about reading scores which are no higher after years of intensive efforts to raise them than they were before the effort began?

We can blame the great influx of immigrants who don't read English. We can blame the TV watching which prevents reading of newspapers & books. But English spelling is a culprit.



What is all that illiteracy doing to employment?

Last week a tenant of mine, who came as a refugee from Bosnia, went to apply for a job at a home care facility. He could not read the elaborate government requirements & questions, so gave up, came sadly home. ... Today I went with him & helped him try again. This time he was welcomed, & may be hired. What if he didn't have my help?

Our language is one of the most difficult in the world to learn to read & write. The



scholars of past ages spelled the same word in multiple ways. No central

editing job was ever done in an English speaking country. We pay a price.

English cums from at least 4 difrent language roots - latin, nordic, saxon, french.

They all got mixd up together as English was sorting itself out & emerging as one language, from 800-1400.

At that time riters wer spelling enny way they thaut best. Chaucer & Shakespeare wer both inconsistent spellers.



That period wud hav been the time to edit & regularize the spelling, to decide e.g. wether the word "pay" was going to be ritten pey [saxon], paiien [old french, the language of Wm. the Conquerer], or pacare [latin].

"Pay" was the new way, now cald The Great Shift, under wich the sound of the letter A wich had been "ah" changed for sum reeson & became "ay", today's name for the letter A.



Wich to use? Since nobody knew, paiien became pay wile saxon they stayd as they. Inconsistent? Yes. Dificult to lern? Yes.

Pay & they rime. They wud be eesier to read & rite if they wer speld alike. The other languages of Europe settled on consistent spelling patterns, so they ar eesy to spel. English is nothing of the sort. It stumps menny of its own people, as well as outsiders lerning it.



The erly problem was worsend wen printing was invented in the 1300's. The first printers of inglish wer germans. Thees, not being familiar with inglish, did not feel up to editing the MSS that wer handed to them.

The german printers took the words & printed them as they wer ritten - mistakes, inventiv spellings & all.

Once printed, the words took on a certan holiness. From then on they wer regarded as being corectly speld wether they wer or not.

Samuel Johnson about 1750 created one of the first English dictionarys. He made no effort to cleer up the contradictions, but left them all as they wer.



Samuel Johnson
School pupils wer expected to memorize, not to challenge his spellings.

Today this failure of the UK to do wot all the other european nations did is exacting a hevvy price. If it is elitist, it is a costly elitism indeed.

With television to be wochd instead of reeding, text messaging larding the ritten word with abreevations, scool teachers who don't respect the old spellings - Wy shud they, wen they cum from cuntrys with foneticly speld languages? - we shud be in a state of red alert.

A man who cannot reed an aplication or a set of instructions is unlikely to be hired. Boys becum dropouts because they ar ashamed- "I cant lern to spel, must be stupid." Unemployment & crime increase alarmingly. **Sumthing needs to be dun....**

Quiz ansers: accommodate, disappoint, discipline, excessive, guardian, innocuous, miniature, mischievous, occasion, professor, psychology, recommend, remembered, sovereign, technically.

Leaflet by Theo Halladay, 2008. The Spelling Society, London, UK. Order from spellingsociety.org.

Also see American Literacy Council; americanliteracy.com.