

See below: [a brief history of spelling reform over seven centuries.](#)

## Some of the Main Efforts to Reform English Spelling from 1875 to 2000

Collated by Cornell Kimball

- 1876: Teachers' group initiates proposal for government inquiry into spelling reform; submitted by school boards in early 1878
- 1876: Spelling Reform Association founded in the US
- 1879: British Spelling Reform Association founded
- Late 1870s to mid-1890s: Attempts in the US to enact legislation to implement reformed spellings
- 1880 –► on: The Philological Society present sets of simplified spellings
- 1906: Simplified Spelling Board founded in the US
- 1906: US President Teddy Roosevelt implements use of Spelling Board's set of simpler spellings; this order is later overridden and rescinded
- 1908: The English Spelling Society [founded in the UK](#) (as the Simplified Spelling Society)
- 1923, 1926, and 1933: Simplified Spelling Society [appeal to British Board of Education](#) to consider reformed spelling
- Mid-1930s: Simplified Spelling Society develop 'New Spelling' which spells all words phonemically
- 1934 to 1975: [Chicago Tribune](#) use small set of reformed spellings as standard in their newspaper
- 1946: US Spelling Reform Association and Simplified Spelling Board merge to become the Simpler Spelling Association (this leading to a group known as [American Literacy Council](#) by end of 20th century)
- 1949 and 1953: [Bills introduced into British Parliament](#) on looking into and instituting reformed spellings; 1st defeated, 2nd withdrawn but leads to use of the Initial Teaching Alphabet in some schools
- 1958: [Contest held](#), in accordance with part of George Bernard Shaw's will, to design a new phonetic alphabet
- 1969, 1970s: ['SR1', a small-scale reform](#), created ; Spelling Action Society founded in Australia
- 1975 to late 1980s: Simplified Spelling Society put on [five conferences](#) with presentations and discussions about spelling, reading, and teaching
- Late 1980s, 1990s: American Literacy Council pursue dual effort of tutoring and of encouraging simpler spellings
- Late 1980s, 1990s: Simplified Spelling Society educate public about problems English spelling causes, [appeal to government officials](#)

## Associations Begin Supporting English Spelling Reform

There have been some attempts to reform English spelling since at least the 1400s. Samuel Johnson's dictionary came out in 1755, and one effort at planned spelling reform since that time did take hold to some degree – [Noah Webster](#), with inspiration and encouragement from Ben Franklin, advocated certain simpler forms for use in American English. A number of (but not all of) Webster's recommendations became accepted as the standard spellings in American English around the mid-19th century.

Early reform efforts were usually by individuals. Starting around the middle of the 19th century, some reformers began working in tandem or in small coalitions in Britain and the US, and in the 1870s organised efforts began for promoting English spelling reform.

The (British) National Union of Elementary Teachers supported reform, and in 1876 began gathering ideas on approaching education officials on the matter. A public conference was held in May 1877, and in early 1878 the London School Board and other school boards in the UK proposed to the government that a royal commission be formed to look into and consider spelling reform. However, this request was turned down.

An organisation called the American Philological Association also favored reforming spellings. They had held an "International Convention for the Amendment of English Orthography" in Philadelphia in 1876 (as part of events for the 100th anniversary of the United States) with delegates from the (British) National Union of Elementary Teachers, the (American) National Educational Association, the Philological Society (of England), and others also attending. At this convention, the Spelling Reform Association (a US organisation) were founded.

The American Philological Association's plan was for the eventual spelling of English in a phonemic system. Not quite the same thing as phonetic, the *phonemic* plan called for sounds always to be spelt in regular, consistent ways but not necessarily 'one letter for one sound and vice versa'. For the near future, the American Philological Association endorsed reforming a couple of hundred spellings, which mostly fell into one of a few types of spelling changes (e.g. remove silent 'e' in certain words ending '-ine' and '-ite'). From that, a very small set of reformed spellings – *ar*, *catalog*, *definit*, *gard*, *giv*, *hav*, *infin*, *liv* (for the verb), *tho*, *thru*, and *wich* – was put together in 1878 and promoted for immediate, general use.

Out of the 1878 attempt in the UK to get a commission to consider reform came a move for a British spelling organisation. The British Spelling Reform Association (also noted as the English Spelling Reform Association in at least a couple of accounts of the time) were founded in 1879. Founding members included Lord Tennyson and Charles Darwin, also James A H Murray (who later became the editor of the "Oxford English Dictionary"), Isaac Pitman, and Alexander J Ellis. The latter two people were long-standing spelling reform advocates who had developed a plan to reform English spelling in the 1840s which they called 'phonotype'. It had a one-letter-one-sound correspondence, using additional characters for some sounds. (Isaac Pitman had also developed a type of shorthand, to note.)

In the late 1870s, individual legislatures in the US states Connecticut, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Pennsylvania discussed resolutions about spelling reform. No measures were adopted from these.

The [Chicago Tribune](#) began using a few simplified spellings as part of their publishing style in 1879, and the *Home Journal of New York* also joined in using some simpler spellings in print.

The Philological Society (of England) put out a list of several hundred proposed reformed spellings in 1880, and a few years later the Philological Society and the American Philological Association jointly came out with a list of 3500 reformed spellings.

The American Philological Association and the (American) Spelling Reform Association tried to get the US Congress to adopt bills to investigate spelling reform matters in 1880 and 1888; no go. Then in 1889 a bill did get introduced into the US Congress which would call for use of the Philological Society / Philological Association's spellings; it did not pass. Two bills on this were introduced into US Congress in 1890, and one again in 1893, with none of those three passing either.

US publishing house Funk & Wagnalls were partial to spelling reform, and began using simplified spellings in some items in 1895. A small set of simplified spellings was used for a few decades in a magazine they published called the *Literary Digest*.

### **International Phonetic Alphabet**

The 'phonotype' system for spelling English that [Isaac Pitman and Alexander Ellis](#) created in the 1840s did get used, altho not as a spelling reform. Their plan used the letters of the Roman alphabet plus additional characters to get a one-letter-one-sound correspondence. The International Phonetic Alphabet, which is used to show pronunciations in many dictionaries, was ultimately based on Pitman and Ellis' 'phonotype' system. The International Phonetic Alphabet was developed in 1887, and has been added to over the years.

### **Simplified Spelling Board, Teddy Roosevelt, American Literacy Council**

The Simplified Spelling Board were founded in the US in 1906, and had a list of 300 simpler spellings they promoted. One of the founding members was [Andrew Carnegie](#), who donated more than US\$250 000 over the next several years. Other founding members included Sir James A H Murray, editor of the "Oxford English Dictionary" (also a founder of the British Spelling Reform Association as noted earlier), and then-US President Teddy Roosevelt. The Simplified Spelling Society (which were renamed The English Spelling Society a few years after 2000) were founded in the UK in 1908 as a sister organisation, also with Sir James A H Murray and others noted in these paragraphs as members. (More on The English Spelling Society / Simplified Spelling Society later in this piece.)

A number of American newspapers and journals used at least some of the Simplified Spelling Board's spellings for a few years. During this time, the (US) National Education(al) Association were endorsing a set of twelve reformed spellings: *tho*, *altho*, *thru*, *thruout*, *thoro*, *thorofare*, *program*, *catalog*, *Decalog*, *demagog*, *pedagog*, and *prolog*. This teachers' organisation had come out with this set of twelve spellings in 1898, and officially encouraged their use until 1921. In many of the cases, it was the twelve spellings recommended by the (US) National Education(al) Association (these all were also on the Simplified Spelling Board's list) that the publications used. The *Philadelphia North American* were among the papers which used those twelve spellings. A few colleges, among them Clark College and Emerson College, also used those twelve simpler forms in internal writings and such for a few years. Also just to note regarding the groups here, the Simplified Spelling Board consulted with the (US) National Education Association in putting together their reform plan and when carrying it out.

As noted, Teddy Roosevelt, president of the US at the time, was a member of the Simplified Spelling Board. In late August 1906 he issued an order for the US Government Printing Office to use the Spelling Board's 300 simpler spellings in all documents printed by the Printing Office from then on. There was immediate reaction to this. Many newspapers made comments, often satirical, opposing the idea. Others in the US government disagreed with the idea and members of the American public voiced opposition. British newspaper editors and some British officials weighed in as well, with mostly acerbic opinions.

The US Supreme Court made a ruling, in late October, that invalidated any reformed or simplified spelling that was used in a court ruling or in the proceedings of the Court. This ruling applied to use of spellings only in briefs, arguments, etc. given to the Court – it did not affect anything else. However, the mere fact that the US Supreme Court made such a ruling was a notable strike against simplified spellings. In December, when the bill in the US Congress for allocating the Printing Office's budget came up, a rider was attached to it which said the funds

could only be used for printing matter which used “orthography generally accepted in the dictionaries of the English language”. The House of Representatives Appropriations Committee voted 142 to 25 to add that rider to the bill, which effectively ended further use of the simplified spellings in anything printed by the US Government Printing Office. The next day, Teddy Roosevelt officially rescinded his order to use the simplified spellings.

Roosevelt and his immediate staff did continue to use twelve of the simpler spellings in written items that came from Roosevelt’s own office.

One item to note is that about half of the Simplified Spelling Board’s 300 spellings were already the standard American spellings in 1906, and were the spellings already used in all US government documents. These were spellings such as *color*, *center*, and *defense* which Noah Webster had included as the preferred forms in his dictionaries. Only about 150 of the 300 spellings were variant or reformed spellings, and in essence Roosevelt was only implementing the approximately 150 variant / reformed spellings and the US Supreme Court’s and US Congress’ restrictions only applied to those as well. The already-standard US spellings of *color*, *center*, *defense*, etc. were not affected one way or the other.

An incidental note . . . On the day Teddy Roosevelt left office in 1909, The New York Sun noted the ‘occasion’ with a large, one-word headline: THRU .

In the years leading up to and after 1910, the Simplified Spelling Board added more simplified spellings to their list. By 1913 the list had about 1200 simpler spellings. Andrew Carnegie had pledged to fund the Spelling Board for 10 years; he encouraged the Board to raise more money on their own. (No record of the group conducting such efforts could be found in the items used in putting together this file.) Carnegie did end up funding them for 14 years in all, but did not provide any money in his will for the Spelling Board.

The Simplified Spelling Board became fairly inactive after 1919. A group called the Simplified Spelling Leag were organised in 1920, but did not attract much support. The (US) National Education Association ceased sponsoring their list of twelve reformed spellings the next year. However, the earlier-founded (US) Spelling Reform Association were reactivated. The organisation put out several pamphlets and contacted the media. Over the next few years they published a magazine, and later in the decade the group braut out a phonemic spelling plan. In 1930 the Spelling Reform Association and the English Spelling Society (then known as the Simplified Spelling Society) worked with a professor in Sweden, Robert E Zachrisson, to refine a simplified system (of spelling and also of grammar) Zachrisson had developed called ‘Anglic’.

The remaining Simplified Spelling Board and the Spelling Reform Association merged in 1946, becoming the Simpler Spelling Association. In the mid-1950s, the Simpler Spelling Association collaborated with The English Spelling Society (Simplified Spelling Society) to create a reformed spelling called ‘World English Spelling’ which was derived from the Simplified Spelling Society’s Nue Speling.

In 1971 a US group called the Phonemic Spelling Council were founded. The next year, the Simpler Spelling Association merged into the Phonemic Spelling Council. A dozen years later the group, called the American Language Academy (the non-profit) at the time, produced a set called ‘Simplified American Spelling’. It’s a modified form of World English Spelling, which is a modified form of Nue Speling.

Named the American Literacy Council since the late 1980s, this organisation focus on tutoring software and volunteer tutoring of reading and spelling as well as with spelling reform. They backed the system called Simplified American Spelling as a reformed spelling system for English as of the late 1990s. The American Literacy Council’s Web site is:

<http://www.americanliteracy.com/>

As mentioned earlier, US publisher Funk & Wagnalls favored some spelling reform. During the early and mid-20th century, their dictionaries listed the Simplified Spelling Board’s proposed spellings alongside the conventional spellings.

## **Bills for Reformed Spelling in Parliament, Initial Teaching Alphabet**

A bill was introduced into the British Parliament in 1949 which would have ultimately made reformed spellings 'official'. It had two basic parts. The first called for a committee to put together the spelling reform. The second part called for initially using the reformed spellings by teaching them in schools, then for the reformed spellings later to be used in government publications and other public uses. The bill was sponsored by a Member of Parliament named Mont Follick. It was debated in the House of Commons on 11 March 1949 – for five hours – and narrowly defeated, by a vote of 87–84.

Another spelling bill was introduced by Mont Follick about four years later. This one called for the government to set up research into ways of improving low reading scores. It also asked for research to see if children would learn to read appreciably better if taught with a consistent, reformed spelling, at least in the early years. A second part of the bill would go into effect if the use of reformed spelling in teaching were noticeably more effective – it called for a permanent implementation of reformed spellings. The bill was given a second reading and debated on 27 February 1953. It passed the House of Commons by a vote of 65–53. One comment in favor came from an MP named Ralph Morley who said, "I am convinced from my experience as a teacher – I was a class teacher for over 40 years – that it is our illogical and ridiculous spelling which is the chief handicap in teaching children how to read".

The bill next went to Committee stage and also passed. However there was political wrangling over the final step of putting it to a vote in the House of Lords, and the bill ended up being withdrawn. From that step, tho, came an agreement to research the use of simplified spelling in teaching.

The plan that was agreed to and implemented was a system called the 'Initial Teaching Alphabet', that was put together by another MP named Sir James Pitman. Sir James Pitman also belonged to the Simplified Spelling Society, and was a grandson of one of the founders of the British Spelling Reform Association, Sir Isaac Pitman. The system agreed to came from studies and proposals the Simplified Spelling Society had been working on. Children were taught to read and write first using a totally phonetic system, then later shifted to conventional spelling. This method was used in many British schools in the 1960s, and continued to be used in some schools after that. It was also used in a few US schools at the time. The Initial Teaching Alphabet had one letter for each sound, mostly using the Roman alphabet plus additional characters derived from Roman letters. It was intended as a teaching system, not as a permanent reform for English spelling.

The debate of the 1949 spelling bill can be found at:

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1949/mar/11/spelling-reform-bill>

And the debate of the 1953 spelling bill at:

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1953/feb/27/simplified-spelling-bill>

A Web site with information on the Initial Teaching Alphabet is:

<http://www.barnsdle.demon.co.uk/spell/itaaddis.html>

## George Bernard Shaw and Phonetic Alphabet

George Bernard Shaw also expressed support for changing English spelling. In his will, Shaw provided for a contest to design a new, phonetic (in this case based on the speech of England's late King George V) alphabet for English. The contest was held during 1958. The alphabet chosen, which is referred to as the 'Shavian' alphabet, has 48 characters, which are different looking to Roman letters; the designer's / winner's name was Kingsley Read. One of Shaw's plays, *Androcles and the Lion*, was published using the Shavian alphabet (along with the same text in conventional English spelling on each facing page). The Phonetic Alphabet Association were founded to support Shaw's reform ideas. A couple of Web pages about the Shavian alphabet:

<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/shavian.htm>

<http://spellingsociety.org/uploadednewsletters/n1-newsletter.pdf> Items 1 & 2.

'ghoti': You may have seen this. It's attributed to George Bernard Shaw, but . . . he didn't come up with it. Whimsically, ghoti is another spelling for fish – the 'gh' is pronounced as it is in enough; the 'o' as it is in women; and the 'ti' as it is in '-tion' words (nation, etc.). It was likely devised by a journalist named William Ollier in 1855. (Shaw was born in 1856, by the way.)

## Chicago Tribune's Use of Reformed Spellings

The *Chicago Tribune* had used some simplified spellings, as earlier noted (this was from about 1879 to 1899). The paper's editor and publisher, Joseph Medill, was a member of the (American) Spelling Reform Association. The *Tribune* also used a few simpler spellings as part of their publishing style during the 1920s and early 1930s.

In 1934, editor and publisher (and grandson of Joseph Medill) Col. Robert R. McCormick instituted the use of 80 reformed spellings in the *Chicago Tribune*. They included *burocrat*, *canceled*, *catalog*, *definitely*, *etiquet*, *hocky*, *intern* (for the noun *interne* meaning 'boarding-school resident' / 'apprentice'), *rime*, *tarif*, *tranquility*, and *yern*. There were mixed reactions and some controversy about these spellings, with comments both in favor of and opposed to the changes. The *Tribune* modified their list of simplified spellings over the years, as the initial announcements in 1934 had said the paper might do.

A few years down the road, more than half of the simplified spellings were removed from the list, then *tho*, *thru*, *thoro*, and their derivatives were added, giving a list of 40 reformed spellings. In the late 1940s, *frate* and *frater*, then some 'ph' to 'f' changes such as *telegraf* and *sofomore*, were made part of the paper's official spellings. A few more were added in the early 1950s; *aging*, *cantaloup*, *hiccup*, and *sodder* were among them. These modifications were based partly on comments from readers and partly on editorial decisions about the most appropriate candidates.

Publisher McCormick passed away in 1955, and after that the *Chicago Tribune* began removing words from this list. They had used 60 or so simpler forms in the mid-1950s. A little more than half were still being used by the *Tribune* by the mid-1960s, centred around spellings in which final '-te' / '-ue' was dropped and those with single 'l' for 'll'. The paper reduced the list of simpler spellings by several more words in 1970, and used about two dozen simpler spellings including *catalog*, *etiquet*, *tranquility*, and *thru* for the next five years. They officially ended their use of reformed spellings in 1975. They did continue to use '-og' for '-ogue' spellings (e.g. *catalog*, *prolog*, *demagog*) and eight other simplified spellings for a few more years, but went back to the conventional spellings for the '-og' / '-ogue' words (e.g. *catalogue*) and four of the other words. The *Tribune* did permanently keep four of them, *aging*, *canceled*, *hiccup*, and *intern* (for *interne*).

See *Tribune* announcements of its [Saner Spelling](#)

### **Simplified Spelling Society (The English Spelling Society)**

The English Spelling Society (TESS) was [founded in the UK in 1908](#) as the Simplified Spelling Society. The organisation prepare and distribute material addressing the problems English spelling can cause in learning, and they contact education officials and members of the media with their findings and views.

After their founding, the group put out [pamphlets](#) with reasons for reforming spelling and information on the history of English spelling, and they devised a prototype phonemic system for spelling English. They occasionally contacted members of the government about spelling and spelling reform. When an education act for 1921 began its way thru the Houses of Parliament, the Society requested to have an item about spelling reform included in it. However, no such provision was added. In 1923 and 1926 the Society made appeals to the British Board of Education to consider phonemic spelling, both of which were turned down.

The Simplified Spelling Society and the (American) Spelling Reform Association worked with a Robert E Zachrisson in 1930 to refine a simplified system of Zachrisson's called '[Anglic](#)', as noted earlier in this file.

In 1933, the Society – along with the support of 900 university officials, vice-chancellors, professors, and lecturers; 250 Members of Parliament; a few dozen mayors and bishops; and 10 teachers' organisations – made another [appeal to the British Board of Education](#) to look into the potential of simplified phonemic spelling, but this was rejected just as earlier submissions had been.

Three years later, the Society braut out a reformed spelling called 'Nue Speling', a fully-developed plan of the prototype phonemic system the group had laid out earlier. Nue Speling (its name also has been written as 'New Spelling') represents each sound in one regular way. It's not strictly 'phonetic' because two letters can represent one sound for some sounds, but it is completely regular. All long vowels are always represented the same way, for instance, long 'a' is always spelt 'æe', long 'e' is always 'ee', etc. As noted earlier, in the mid-1950s the Simplified Spelling Society and the (American) Simpler Spelling Association produced 'World English Spelling' which was derived from Nue Speling / [New Spelling](#).

In the late 1940s, the Society prepared a series of books in which children would learn to read and write using completely phonetic spelling. They proposed to a few institutions that studies be conducted comparing how well children learnt with the phonetic spelling versus with conventional spelling. The University of London undertook such studies beginning in 1950. The idea went further a few years later, as noted earlier (this is the last time that phrase occurs in this file) in the item about the bills in Parliament for reformed spellings. The compromise that came out of the second bill, to use the [Initial Teaching Alphabet](#) in some schools, was created by Simplified Spelling Society member (and MP) Sir James Pitman, and continued the idea of these experiments in teaching using phonetic spelling. Incidentally, this also somewhat continued the work and ideas for reformed spelling and teaching developed by British Spelling Reform Association co-founder, and grandfather of James Pitman, Sir Isaac Pitman.

In the following decades, the Society continued to work with government officials for wider use of simplified spelling, and members of the Society gave occasional lectures at universities and to civic organisations about simplifying spelling.

They sponsored a series of [five conferences](#) between 1975 and 1987 in which speakers presented papers and discussions were held on spelling, reading, writing, and teaching English. The first conference focused mainly on writing systems and the basic structure of spelling. The second had several items about teaching reading and writing, common spelling errors and difficulties, and a few items about specific spelling reform proposals. Conference three presented results of studies that were done with both children and adult readers using alternative spellings or alternative teaching methods, items about spelling and spelling reforms in other languages, and possible ways of implementing a reform in English. The fourth and fifth convenings continued with topics on implementing reform and specific spelling features.

One of the group's main efforts in the 1980s and 1990s was presenting government officials with information gleaned from the conferences, noting the difficulties English spelling causes for students learning it, and how regularising the spellings would ameliorate this. They submitted detailed appeals to this effect to the (British) [National Curriculum](#) Council in 1987 (for a 1988 act), 1992, and 2000. The group also contacted the media, and [members](#) occasionally gave newspaper or radio interviews on simplifying English spelling.

The English Spelling Society as of the 1990s – still known as the Simplified Spelling Society – was a forum for discussing the problems of spelling and different solutions. The organisation weren't officially backing just one particular spelling reform plan, but did have a plan at the forefront of their work called '[Cut Spelling](#)'. Cut Spelling incorporated some of the ideas that were discussed at the conferences of the 1970s / 1980s. It calls for removing certain letters from words, or changing letter(s) to another letter in a few cases. Applying it to a sentence above as an example (from the item about the bills in Parliament) gives, "childrn wer taut to read and rite first using a totaly fonetic systm, then later shiftd to conventionl spelng". Another plan was RITE (Reducing Irregularities in Traditional English) spelling which changes only a portion of spellings and retains general patterns of current spelling. The Society's Web site is:

<http://www.spellingsociety.org/>

In 1969, Harry Lindgren, who became a long-standing member of the Simplified Spelling Society, came out with an overall spelling reform plan which was in stages. The first step in this, 'SR1' (for 'Spelling Reform 1'), changes the spellings of a small group of words: It respells all short 'e' with just 'e' (thus *head* is spelt as *hed*, etc.). An organisation called the Spelling Action Society were founded in Australia in 1971 to promote SR1. SR1 spellings were used in some published items in the 1970s; one of these was a publication issued in 1973 by an Australian government agency, as its departmental Minister at the time, Doug Everingham, backed SR1. The Australian Teachers' Federation gave official validation to SR1 spellings as 1975 began, and they appealed to state school boards to adopt SR1 at least for use in some teaching. The Board and the Premier of Education in Victoria state did give consent to use of SR1 in schools, altho the 'traditional' spellings such as *head* continued to be the ones taught in the classroom in Victoria and the other states. [See many references in [Bulletin](#) and [Journal](#) Authors and Topics.]

## Others Working Toward English Spelling Reform

Other support for English spelling reform in the latter part of the 20th century came from the organisations Better Education thru Simplified Spelling and the Internasional Union For The Kanadian Langwaje (originally the Simplified Speling Sosiety Ov Canada), the Lojikon plan's adherents, and the Typographic Council for Spelling Reform.

Better Education thru Simplified Spelling, founded in the US in 1978, promoted simplifying a small set of spellings. One effort was to encourage businesses and educational institutions to use these spellings in their written items. Contact information as of 2000 was: 1858 Culver; Dearborn, Michigan 48124, USA; Fax: (011)-1-313-393-5850; E-mail: Campbe4@flash.net . If unable to make contact with that information, questions about Better Education thru Simplified Spelling may be directed to the American Literacy Council (<http://www.americanliteracy.com>).

The Internasional Union For The Kanadian Langwaje promoted spelling reform during the 1980s (when they were known as the Simplified Speling Sosiety Ov Canada) and at least part way into the 1990s. This group's address in the early 1990s: 94 Glenholm Avenue; Toronto, Ontario M6H 3B1, Canada .

Supporters of a spelling reform plan called Lojikon, who began their work in the last few years of the 20th century, promote reforming irregular consonants in English spelling. Lojikon calls for, using its name for some examples, spelling the 'g' in logical with a ' j' and spelling the 'c`s' in logical and consonant with 'k `s', among others. The e-mail contact is: [mng1932@yahoo.com](mailto:mng1932@yahoo.com) .

The Typographic Council for Spelling Reform in the US worked toward spelling reform from their founding in 1974 until the end of the 1980s when they merged with the American Literacy Council.

Dozens of individuals also conceived plans to reform English spelling between the years 1875 and 2000, and several of those individuals actively promoted their plans.

A list of some of the spelling reform plans promoted by individuals as well as ones promoted by organisations is at:

<http://spellingsociety.org/uploadedpamphlets/p13typology-pamphlet.pdf>

For links to sites with full details of a few spelling reform plans:

<http://www.barnsdle.demon.co.uk/spell/#ref>

### A Few Further Details

- Philological Society / Philological Association's 3500 Reformed Spellings
- [Main Provisions of Spelling Bills in UK Parliament, 1949 and 1953](#)
- [Spell all short \[ɛ\] as 'e': SR1 in Use](#)
- [Standard Spellings That Changed Between 1875 and 2000](#)

### Philological Society / Philological Association's 3500 Reformed Spellings

Nearly all of the 3500 reformed spellings proposed by the Philological Society (of England) and the American Philological Association are in one or more of ten somewhat broad categories of change. The basic set:

- » Remove final 'e' in many cases, e.g., *activ, ar, chocolat, definit, giv, gon, hav, medicin, relativ, angl* (with a hard 'g'; *angel* is still spelt *angel*), *candl, singl, steep!*; also *raind, seemd, shrunkn*, etc.
- » Spell 'ea' as 'e' if pronounced as a short 'e', e.g., *delt, fether, hed, helth, ment, redy, spred, thred*
- » Spell 'o' as 'u' if pronounced as a short 'u', e.g., *cumpany, cuver, frum, frunt, mune, y, sponge, stumach, uther, wunder*, + remove silent 'e', 'u', or '-ue', giving *abuv, dun, luv, culor, tung*, etc.
- » Spell 'ou' as 'u' or 'o', e.g., *tuch*, also *harbor*, etc. for Brit./Cana./Aus./etc. English and for Americans still writing *harbour*, etc.; + change 'gh' in: *ruf, cof*, etc.; + add'l changes: *cupl, dubl*
- » Remove '-ue' or 'u', giving: *catalog, demagog, dialog, leag, morg, prolog, bild, gard, gess*, etc.
- » Make some double consonants single (+ remove some 'e`s'), e.g., *bailif, batl, forgotn, quil, tarif*, also *traveler*, etc. for Brit./Cana./Aus./etc. English and for Americans still writing *traveller*, etc. » Change past tense '-ed' to '-t' where so sounded, e.g., *dasht, fixt, lookt, wisht*, + single consonant in *clipt, drest, kist, stept*, etc. (keep '-ed' after a soft 'c'/'g' and if preceding vowel is long)
- » Change 'gh' and 'ph' to 'f' if sound is 'f' (and remove 'u'), e.g., *laf, draft* (for all meanings of *draught*), *alfabet, elefant, emfasis, farmacy, fonetic, fotograf, hemisfere, hyfen, pamflet, symfony*
- » Spell voiced 's' as 'z', e.g., *huzband, noze, raizin*, + *recognize*, etc. for Brit./Cana./Aus./etc. English and for Americans still writing *recognise*, etc.; this will make distinctions between certain pairs, e.g. *close* as a verb or noun is respelt as *cloze*, while *close* as an adjective is still spelt *close*
- » Drop 't' in '-tch', giving: *cach, fech, hich, kichen, noch, pach, pich, rachet, scrach, wach*, etc.

The handful of other spellings on the list include *braud* for 'broad', *hart*, *speek*, and *tho*.

Not every 'eligible' spelling in each category gets changed. In cases where two words with different meanings are pronounced the same but spelt differently – homophones – spellings generally are not changed. Most words spelt with an 'o' for the short 'u' sound get respelt with a 'u', but the spellings of *son*, *none*, and *some* are left as they are to keep the distinctions between those words and *sun*, *nun*, and *sum*. The spellings of the very common words *of* and *one* are not changed. 'S's' that are pronounced as 'z's' in the plurals of nouns and forms of verbs are also left unchanged.

## **Main Provisions of Spelling Bills in UK Parliament, 1949 and 1953**

### **1949 Spelling Reform Bill in British Parliament:**

Introduced in House of Commons on 28 January 1949. Second reading and debate on 11 March 1949. Bill 54.

The bill had two main parts, three parts overall. Part I called for a committee which would produce a comprehensive, simple, and consistent style of spelling, with the committee reporting to and working with The Minister of Education. It gave certain guidelines and called for the spelling reform set to be completed by 30 December 1950.

Part II of the bill outlined the implementation of the reformed spellings. They would first be used just in teaching. Five or more years after their introduction in schools, the spellings would become the official ones for government use (government documents, correspondence, publications, etc.). Then, over the years, the spellings would be gradually phased in within other realms. Altogether Part II entailed 15 clauses showing this framework.

The bill's third part concerned the legislative mechanics of implementing the reform and specific regulations.

### **1953 Simplified Spelling Bill in British Parliament:**

Introduced in House of Commons on 9 November 1952. Second reading and debate on 27 February 1953. Bill 14. (The 1949 bill was referred to as the *Spelling Reform* bill, this one as you'll notice, the *Simplified Spelling* bill.)

The initial clause of this bill called for The Minister of Education to set up a body or bodies to investigate reasons why reading scores of British schoolchildren had generally been so low. The second subsection called for teaching some children to read using simplified spelling to see if they learnt to read appreciably better with simpler, consistent spelling. Basic item three set out the principles behind what the simpler spellings were to be, very generally, only saying that they were to be completely consistent and go with alphabetic principles. It did not specify any current spelling plan and left the choice or design of that up to the body or bodies set up at the beginning.

Item four called for consulting with officials in other English-speaking nations before proceeding too far with the project. The fifth clause here involved consultation with, and respect of, the teachers, children, and parents, and agenda six ensured that the research and plan for new spellings were comprehensive and cohesive with educating overall. These six items in general made up the first section of the bill.

The second section would go into effect contingent upon the results of teaching using simplified spelling. If the research showed a marked improvement in reading abilities, then this next part of the bill would engage. It called for a more permanent implementation of simpler spellings. The permanent spelling set could be the same as the one used in the teaching studies or it could be a different design – that was up to the body / bodies conducting this.

Other provisions related to the role of The Minister of Education in this and the mechanics of Parliamentary approval.

## Spell all short [E] as 'e': SR1 in Use

SR1 respells all short 'e' with just 'e', thus *head* is spelt as *hed*. It also changes *spread, instead, ready, thread, breath, dealt, feather, health, meant, pleasure, treacherous, heifer, leopard, friend, any, said, etc.* to *spred, insted, redy, thred, breth, delt, fether, helth, ment, plesure, trecherous, hefer, lepard, frend, eny, sed, etc.*

SR1 spellings were used in issues of *The Teachers' Journal* (Australia), edited by Kevin Grover, in the early 1970s. They were used in the education supplement of the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 5 October 1971, and in a 1972 novel called "Escape to Elysium" by Dr L J J 'Bill' Nye. SR1 was used for many years in the works of an English teacher and poet (and later a Poet Laureate of Australia) named Mark O'Connor. A few other journals and works published in Australia in the 1970s also used these spellings.

The Australian departmental Minister who favored SR1, Doug Everingham, was the Minister for Health – the *Minister for Helth* – from 1972 to 1975. The government never officially changed the title of the position or department to be spelt 'Helth', but some items of the time referred to Doug Everingham as the 'Minister for Helth'. In the debate of an appropriations bill in the Australian House of Representatives on 12 September 1973, a Member of Parliament (one David E. Fairbairn) noted 'H-e-l-t-h' as the spelling used by the then – Minister for Helth, to give an example.

At a session of the Australian Senate on 8 March 1973, during Questions, it was asked (by a Senator Marriott) if all publications issued by all departments used only the standard spellings all the time with no deviations. The Leader of the Government in the Senate, Lionel K. Murphy, stated in part, "the Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary and Government Publications, of which both Senator Marriott and I were members – presented a report which was widely accepted, a style manual and so on. I understand that that style is being observed. There may be a slight amount of cribbing in one department in order to enlighten the Australian public about the possibilities of adopting uniform spelling." A slight going-outside-of-the-standard occurred in one publication issued by Doug Everingham's department a few months later – the short 'e' sound in words was uniformly spelt as just 'e' (SR1).

Incidentally, Lionel K. Murphy's reply, picking up from ". . . adopting uniform spelling" continues: "If Senator Marriott is referring to Dr Everingham, I know that Dr Everingham has had a very long interest in the subject of not only uniformity of spelling but also of uniformity of graphic descriptions of chemicals that might be used in various formulae."

### Standard Spellings That Changed Between 1875 and 2000

Some writers and publications were using the spellings *deposite* and *develope* in 1875, but the English-speaking world was pretty much switching over to dropping the final 'e's' and spelling them as *deposit* and *develop*. The spellings *lanoline*, *paraffine*, and *toxine* were in general use in 1875 but were giving way to the current spellings of *lanolin*, *paraffin*, and *toxin*, and *envelop* was replacing *envelope* for the meaning (and different pronunciation) of the word when used as a verb.

*Phantasy* was the more common, preferred spelling until the end of the 19th century, then *fantasy* replaced it as the standard spelling in the English-speaking world. *Hiccough*, *despatch*, and *to-day / to-morrow* were the widely-used spellings, but *hiccup*, *dispatch*, and *today / tomorrow* are now standard in Commonwealth and American English. *Shew / shewn* and later *gramme* and *mediaeval* shifted to *show / shown*, *gram*, and *medieval* in British usage during the 20th century. The standard spellings for *quartette*, *quintette*, *octette*, etc. generally became *quartet*, *quintet*, *octet*, etc. in all English-speaking countries, and *encyclopedia* (already the standard spelling in American English) came to be on equal footing with *encyclopaedia*.

*Programme* and *praeterite / preterite* changed to *program* and *preterit* in American English in the first part of the 20th century. (*Preterite* means 'past tense', by the way.) Later in the 20th century, *furore*, *interne* (for the noun, meaning 'boarding-school resident' / 'apprentice'), *sulphur*, *ageing*, *anaesthetic*, and *epaulette* became *furor*, *intern*, *sulfur*, *aging*, *anesthetic*, and *epaulet* in

the US. Catalog became the preferred form in American English in the last couple of decades of the 20th century, and *ax* came into equal usage with *axe*. (And *program* is the general spelling in English-speaking countries for the computer sense.)

At least eleven spellings (or nine, depending on how one 'counts' items here) on the (US) Simplified Spelling Board's list (of 300 spellings) which were variant / reformed spellings in 1906 have since become standard spellings in American English. They are: *anesthetic*, *anesthesia*, *ax*, *catalog*, *dispatch*, *epaulet*, *hiccup*, *preterit*, *program*, *sulfur*, and *sulfate*.

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## A brief history of spelling reform over seven centuries.

From

[*Spelling Reform ed Newell Tune* [§2.5](#) Item 5]

[*Spelling Progress Bulletin* [Summer 1980](#) Item 3]

### Is Spelling Reform Feasible?

by Elsie M. Oakensen,\*

#### Appendix III

*The way to spelling reform — a brief history of spelling reform over seven centuries.*

- 13th century An Augustine Canon named ORM distinguished short vowels from long by doubling the succeeding consonants, or when not feasible, by marking the short vowels with a superimposed breve.
- 1476 WILLIAM CAXTON deliberately adopted certain spellings in the interests of consistency and uniformity.
- 1568 Sir THOMAS SMITH proposed an extended set of symbols (Alphabetum Angelicum), with 34 characters.
- 1569 JOHN HART used diacritical marks to distinguish vowel sounds and devised new symbols for consonants.
- WILLIAM BULLOKAR used numerous marks both above and below letters to assist readers. He suggested that vowels should have marks to indicate length and quality; vowels should be doubled for long sounds e.g. oo, and that some silent letters (e, b, i, o) should disappear.
- 1530-1611 RICHARD MULCASTER recommended no change in the existing 24 letters (j and v were still included under i and u). Mulcaster's influence was considerable and he listed the first rules of spelling.
- 1621 ALEXANDER GILL thought spelling should be phonetic but made allowance for derivation, difference of meaning, accepted usage and dialect.
- 1634 CHARLES BUTLER was particularly keen on single characters or the ligature for the existing double or doubled symbols, but he was completely unphonetic.
- 1640 SIMON DAINE was interested in letter names and referred to the changing pronunciation of the time with its relationship to spelling.
- 1644 RICHARD HODGES highlighted homophones. He disliked unnecessary double consonants and was concerned about the different sounds of vowels in different words. He used diacritic marks and separated syllables by a hyphen.
- 1668 JOHN WILKINS was concerned with word confusion. He had 450 characters in his system.
- 1768 Dr BENJAMIN FRANKLIN dispensed with c, j, q, w, x, y and added 6 new characters, but he relied on digraphs and for a long vowel he doubled the short vowels.
- Dr. WILLIAM THORNTON aimed at one symbol for each spoken sound and included  for sh, #1 for aw, and #2 for wh.
- 1840 Sir ISAAC PITMAN. In his *Phonography in Writing by Sound, being a New and Natural System of Shorthand*, the signs and symbols were consistently phonetically and emphasised the anomalies of English spelling. In Pitman's Shorthand we have a phonetic spelling that for consistency and accuracy, has stood the test of time.
- 1866 Dr. EDWIN LEIGH invented Fonotypy and carried out experiments in it and with an alphabet that indicated all sounds and silent letters without respelling.

- 1908 PITMAN's enthusiasm and inventiveness encouraged the formation of the Simplified Spelling Society.
- 1912 ROBERT BRIDGES (Poet Laureate) belonged to the Society for Pure English. He removed mute letters, e.g. hav, liv, coud, etc.
- 1914 Miss McCALLUM successfully taught a reading system based on the 'International Phonetic Alphabet', at a school in Cowdenbeath.
- 1856-1950 GEORGE BERNARD SHAW was interested "in the introduction of a new English alphabet containing between 40 and 50 new letters to be used and taught concurrently with the old alphabet until one or the other proves the fitter to survive,"
- In his own writings he dropped the u in our endings and apostrophes in noun possessives, and abbreviated words and phrases. After his death part of his estate was used for the alphabet scheme in which in
- 1962 Androcles and the Lion was published.
- The 'Shaw Contest Alphabet' was of 40 letters and 8 digraphs. Shaw provided money in his will for the inauguration of a "British alphabet of at least 40 letters" to be devised by a qualified phonetician.
- 1949 Dr. MONT FOLLICK, Labour M.P. for Loughborough introduced a private members' Spelling Reform Bill into the House of Commons, seconded by Sir JAMES PITMAN. The Bill was defeated in a small house by a vote of 84 to 87.