

Poems showing the absurdities of English spelling.

Poems about spelling are quoted on many websites. There are lots of others of course — so let us hear of them from you — enquiries@spellingsociety.org

The classic spelling poem is The Chaos by Gerard Nolst Trenité, researched and published in full by SSS in [Journal 17](#) Item 6. It can be seen as a [stand-alone pdf](#) in Miscellaneous.

The Chaos

I take it you already know
Of tough and bough and cough and dough?
Others may stumble, but not you,
On hiccough, thorough, lough and through?
Well done! And now you wish, perhaps,
To learn of less familiar traps?
Beware of heard, a dreadful word
That looks like beard and sounds like bird,
And dead: it's said like bed, not bead—
For goodness sake don't call it deed!
Watch out for meat and great and threat
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt).

A moth is not a moth in mother,
Nor both in bother, broth in brother,
And here is not a match for there
Nor dear and fear for bear and pear,
And then there's dose and rose and lose —
Just look them up - and goose and choose,
And cork and work and card and ward,
And font and front and word and sword,
And do and go and thwart and cart —
Come, come, I've hardly made a start!
A dreadful language? Man alive!
I'd mastered it when I was five!

Quoted by Vivian Cook and Melvin Bragg 2004, by Richard Krogh, in D Bolinger & D A Sears, *Aspects of Language*, 1981, and in [Spelling Progress Bulletin March 1961](#), Attributed to T S Watt, 1954. *Brush up on your English with Hints on Pronunciation for visiting Foreigners*, from the *Manchester Guardian*.

Our Strange Lingo

When the English tongue we speak.
Why is break not rhymed with freak?
Will you tell me why it's true
We say sew but likewise few?
And the maker of the verse,
Cannot rhyme his horse with worse?
Beard is not the same as heard
Cord is different from word.
Cow is cow but low is low
Shoe is never rhymed with foe.
Think of hose, dose, and lose

And think of goose and yet with choose
Think of comb, tomb and bomb,
Doll and roll or home and some.
Since pay is rhymed with say
Why not paid with said I pray?
Think of blood, food and good.
Mould is not pronounced like could.
Wherefore done, but gone and lone -
Is there any reason known?
To sum up all, it seems to me
Sound and letters don't agree.

This full version, in [SSS Pyoneer September 1917](#) was taken from 'Ashore and Afloat'. A short version in the [1930 SSS pamphlet](#) essay, "English as a World Language by Harold Cox, Former Editor *Edinburgh Review*, repeated in [Bulletin Winter 1966](#), Item 4, says this poem was written by Lord Cromer and published in the *Spectator* of August 9th, 1902.

CANDIDATE FOR A PULLET SURPRISE

I have a spelling checker,
It came with my PC.
It plane lee marks four my revue
Miss steaks aye can knot sea.

Eye ran this poem threw it,
Your sure reel glad two no.
Its vary polished in it's weigh.
My checker tolled me sew.

A checker is a bless sing,
It freeze yew lodes of thyme.
It helps me right awl stiles two reed,
And aides me when eye rime.

Each frays come posed up on my screen
Eye trussed too bee a joule.
The checker pours o'er every word
To cheque sum spelling rule.

Bee fore a veiling checker's
Hour spelling mite decline,
And if we're lacks oar have a laps,
We wood bee maid too wine.

Butt now bee cause my spelling
Is checked with such grate flare,
Their are know fault's with in my cite,
Of nun eye am a wear.

Now spelling does knot phase me,
It does knot bring a tier.
My pay purrs awl due glad den
With wrapped word's fare as hear.

To rite with care is quite a feet
Of witch won should bee proud,
And wee mused dew the best wee can,
Sew flaw's are knot aloud.

Sow ewe can sea why aye dew prays
Such soft wear four pea seas,
And why eye brake in two averse
Buy righting want too pleas.

Jerrold H. Zar.

Eye halve a spelling checker
It came with my pea sea
It plainly marques for my revue
Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.

Eye strike a key and type a word
And weight four it to say
Weather eye am wrong oar write
It shows me strait a weigh.

As soon as a mist ache is maid
It nose bee fore two long
And eye can put the error rite
It's rare lea ever wrong.

Eye have run this poem threw it
Eye am shore your pleased two no
It's letter perfect awl the weigh
My checker tolled me sew.

Margo Roark.

WHY ENGLISH IS SO HARD TO LEARN

We must polish the Polish furniture.
He could lead if he would get the lead out.
The farm was used to produce produce.
The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
The soldier decided to desert in the desert.
This was a good time to present the present.
A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.
When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
I did not object to the object.
The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
The bandage was wound around the wound.
There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.
They were too close to the door to close it.
The buck does funny things when the does are present.
They sent a sewer down to stitch the tear in the sewer line.
To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.
The wind was too strong to wind the sail.
After a number of injections my jaw got number.
Upon seeing the tear in my clothes I shed a tear.
I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.
How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend?
I read it once and will read it again
I learned much from this learned treatise.
I was content to note the content of the message.
The Blessed Virgin blessed her. Blessed her richly.
It's a bit wicked to over-trim a short wicked candle.
If he will absent himself we mark him absent.
I incline toward bypassing the incline.

Phoney Phonetics.

One reason why I cannot spell,
Although I learned the rules quite well
Is that some words like coup and through
Sound just like threw and flue and Who;
When oo is never spelled the same,
The duice becomes a guessing game;
And then I ponder over though,
Is it spelled so, or throw, or beau,
And bough is never bow, it's bow,
I mean the bow that sounds like plow,
And not the bow that sounds like row -
The row that is pronounced like roe.
I wonder, too, why rough and tough,
That sound the same as gruff and muff,
Are spelled like bough and though, for they
Are both pronounced a different way.
And why can't I spell trough and cough
The same as I do scoff and golf?

Why isn't drought spelled just like route,
or doubt or pout or sauerkraut?
When words all sound so much the same
To change the spelling seems a shame.
There is no sense - see sound like cents -
in making such a difference
Between the sight and sound of words;
Each spelling rule that undergirds
The way a word should look will fail
And often prove to no avail
Because exceptions will negate
The truth of what the rule may state;
So though I try, I still despair
And moan and mutter "It's not fair
That I'm held up to ridicule
And made to look like such a fool
When it's the spelling that's at fault.
Let's call this nonsense to a halt."

Attributed to Vivian Buchan, NEA Journal 1966/67, USA, published in [Spelling Progress Bulletin Spring 1966](#), Item 6, Reprinted from *Educational Horizons*.