



# Silent Letters in English: A-Z

## Learn the rules of silent letters in English!

Many words in English have letters that we do not pronounce. These are called silent letters. Silent letters exist in English because of historical and linguistic reasons. English has also been less "regulated" than many other languages.

This aspect of English can be very frustrating for English learners, but there are some rules which can help us.

Note: This is not a complete list of words with silent letters, but these are some of the most common examples. ([A list of these words without the explanations is at the end of this document.](#))

## A

If a word ends in **-ically**, most people do not pronounce the **A**.

For example:

- automatically
- basically
- chaotically
- logically
- practically
- specifically
- surgically

**!** Be careful. That rule does not apply to all words that end in **-ally**.

For example, in these words, we pronounce the **A**:

- ideally
- generally
- vocally

## B

We do not usually pronounce **B** if it is after **M** at the end of a word.

For example:

- bomb
- climb
- comb
- crumb
- dumb
- lamb
- limb
- numb
- plumb
- succumb
- thumb
- tomb
- womb

**B** is also usually silent in words that are derived from the words above.

For example:

- climber
- numbness
- plumber

**!** When **MB** is in the middle of a word, most of the time we pronounce both letters.

For example, in these words:

- ambiguous
- member
- number
- symbol

- umbrella

There are also a few words in which the **B** is silent before the letter **T**.

These words are:

- debt
- doubt
- subtle

This also applies to words that are derived from the words above.

For example:

- debtor
- doubtful
- subtlety

## C

**C** is almost always silent if it comes after an **S** AND is before an **E** or an **I**.

For example:

- descent
- fascinate
- fluorescent
- scene
- scent
- science
- scissors

It is also silent after the **S** in the word:

- muscle

# D

**D** is silent before the letter **G**.

For example:

- badge
- bridge
- budget
- edge
- fridge
- judge
- knowledge

Some common words that also have a silent **D** are:

- handkerchief
- handsome
- sandwich
- Wednesday

# E

There are many silent **E**'s in English.

Normally if an **E** is at the end of a word, we do not pronounce it.

For example:

- before
- bridge
- give
- some

Sometimes **E** affects the pronunciation of the previous vowel.

For example, "cap" is pronounced /kæp/, but cape is pronounced /keɪp/. Here the previous vowel is **A** and in "cape" it is pronounced like the letter in the alphabet.

Similarly:

- pet: /pet/

↳ Pete: /pi:t/ (the first **E** is pronounced like the letter **E**)

- quit: /kwɪt/

↳ quite: /kwaɪt/ (the **I** is pronounced like the letter **I**)

Here is another helpful rule. If the past form of a verb ends in **-ed**, normally we do not pronounce the **E**.

For example:

- called
- helped
- looked
- seemed

**!** We pronounce the **E** in an **-ed** ending if the base form ends in a /d/ or a /t/ (a **D** sound or a **T** sound).

For example:

- ended
- included
- started
- wanted

## **G**

**G** is silent if it is before an **N** at the beginning of a word. (But there are not many words like this.)

For example:

- gnat
- gnaw
- gnome

It is also usually silent before an **N** at the end of a word.

For example:

- design
- campaign
- foreign
- reign
- sign

**!** Be careful. If **GN** is in the middle of a word, most of the time we pronounce the **G**.

For example, in words like:

- ignore
- magnificent
- signature

The combination **GH** is usually silent after a vowel sound.

For example:

- daughter
- night
- thought
- through
- weigh

## H

If a word begins with **GH**, the **H** is silent.

For example:

- gherkin
- ghetto
- ghost

Similarly, if a word starts with **RH**, the **H** is silent.

For example:

- rhinoceros
- rhythm

There are also many scientific and medical terms that start with **RH**.

For example:

- rheumatic
- rhinoplasty

If a word starts with **WH**, the **H** is normally silent.

For example:

- whale
- what
- when
- white
- why

**!** Some native speakers pronounce **WH** as **HW**. This is common, for example, in Ireland, Scotland and the Southern United States.

**H** is also sometimes silent after a **C**.

For example:

- chemistry
- mechanic
- school
- stomach
- technology

! This only occurs sometimes. **CH** is more often pronounced /tʃ/ (like in “chair”), and sometimes it is even pronounced /f/ (like in “chef”).

There are also a few words that start with a silent **H**.

For example:

- heir
- honest
- honour (US: honor)
- hour

In American English, the **H** is also silent in the words “herb” and “herbal”.

Click here for a full explanation of words that start with a silent **H**:

<https://learnenglishgrammar.com/silent-h-in-english/>

## I

We basically always pronounce **I**.

The main exception is:

- business

## K

**K** is silent before the letter **N** at the beginning of words.

For example:

- knee
- knife
- knight
- knot
- know

# L

Unfortunately, there is no real rule here. Most of the time we pronounce the letter **L** (like in “ball”, “fold” or “result”). You just need to learn the exceptions.

Some of the most common ones are:

- calf
- half
  
- chalk
- talk
- walk
  
- balm
- calm
- palm

It is also silent in the words:

- could
- should
- would

And:

- salmon

In the word “almond” the **L** is optional. Most speakers of British English do not pronounce it, whereas speakers of American English usually do.

# M

There are not many words with a silent **M**.

One notable example is:

- mnemonic

## N

We do not pronounce **N** if it comes after **M** at the end of a word.

For example:

- autumn
- column
- condemn
- damn
- hymn

## O

There is no rule for the letter **O**.

Some common words with a silent **O** are:

- jeopardy
- leopard
- people

## P

The **P** is silent before **S** at the beginning of a word

For example:

- pseudoscience
- psychiatrist
- psychic
- psychology

It is also silent before **N** and **T** at the beginning of a word, but there are not many words like this in English.

Some examples are:

- pneumatic
- pneumonia
- pterodactyl

Some other words with a silent **P** are:

- coup
- cupboard
- raspberry
- receipt

## R

In standard British English (and Australian English), the **R** is silent if it is followed by a consonant or if it is at the end of a word.

For example:

- fork
- start
- star
- teacher

**!** In standard American English, the **R** is pronounced in these words. In British English, an **R** at the end of a word is usually pronounced if the following word starts with a vowel sound.

# S

Unfortunately, there are not really any rules for the letter **S**, but luckily there are not that many words with a silent **S** in English.

The most important examples are:

- aisle
- bourgeois
- debris
- island
- isle

# T

**T** is silent before **CH**.

For example:

- catch
- stitch
- sketch
- watch
- witch

It is normally silent in words that end in **-sten**.

For example:

- christen
- fasten
- listen

It is also normally silent in words that end in **-stle**.

For example:

- castle
- hustle
- whistle

The **T** is silent in words taken directly from French and that end in **-et**.

For example:

- ballet
- buffet
- gourmet

**!** Most of the time we pronounce **-et** at the end of word.

Some other common words with a silent **T** are:

- asthma (the **H** is also silent here)
- Christmas
- mortgage
- soften

Another example is:

- often

**!** Some people pronounce the **T** in "often" and some people do not.

## U

**U** is often silent after **G** and before a vowel.

For example:

- colleague
- guard

- guest
- guide
- guitar

## W

If a word starts with **WR**, the **W** is always silent.

For example:

- wrap
- wrinkle
- wrist
- write
- wrong

If a word starts with **WHO**, the **W** is often silent.

For example:

- who
- whoever
- whole

Some other common words with a silent **W** are:

- answer
- sword
- two

## X

There are not many words in English with a silent **X**. The most common one is probably:

- faux

“Faux” comes from French.

## Y

Y is very rarely silent. It is silent in:

- prayer

It is also often silent in:

- mayor

**!** There are some people who pronounce the **Y** in "mayor", especially speakers of American English.

## Z

Z is rarely silent in English.

The most common examples are in two words that come from French:

- laissez-faire
- rendezvous

**Full list of words from the above examples:**

**A**

1. automatically
2. basically
3. chaotically
4. logically
5. practically
6. specifically
7. surgically

**B**

8. bomb
9. climb
10. comb
11. crumb
12. dumb
13. lamb
14. limb
15. numb
16. plumb
17. succumb
18. thumb
19. tomb
20. womb
21. climber
22. numbness
23. plumber
24. debt
25. doubt

26. subtle

27. debtor

28. doubtful

29. subtlety

**C**

30. descent

31. fascinate

32. fluorescent

33. scene

34. scent

35. science

36. scissors

37. muscle

**D**

38. badge

39. bridge

40. budget

41. edge

42. fridge

43. judge

44. knowledge

45. handkerchief

46. handsome

47. sandwich

48. Wednesday

**E**

- 49. before
- 50. bridge
- 51. give
- 52. some
- 53. called
- 54. helped
- 55. looked
- 56. seemed

**G**

- 57. gnat
- 58. gnaw
- 59. gnome
- 60. design
- 61. campaign
- 62. foreign
- 63. reign
- 64. sign

**GH**

- 65. daughter
- 66. night
- 67. thought
- 68. through
- 69. weigh

**H**

- 70. gherkin
- 71. ghetto
- 72. ghost

73. rhinoceros

74. rhythm

75. rheumatic

76. rhinoplasty

77. whale

78. what

79. when

80. white

81. why

82. chemistry

83. mechanic

84. school

85. stomach

86. technology

87. heir

88. herb (only in US English)

89. honest

90. honour (US: honor)

91. hour

92. chemistry

93. mechanic

94. school

95. stomach

96. technology

**I**

97. business

**K**

98. knee

99. knife

100. knight

101. knot

102. know

**L**

103. calf

104. half

105. chalk

106. talk

107. walk

108. balm

109. calm

110. palm

111. could

112. should

113. would

114. salmon

**M**

115. mnemonic

**N**

116. autumn

117. column

118. condemn

119. damn

120. hymn

**O**

121. jeopardy

122. leopard

123. people

**P**

124. pseudoscience

125. psychiatrist

126. psychic

127. psychology

128. pneumatic

129. pneumonia

130. pterodactyl

131. coup

132. cupboard

133. raspberry

134. receipt

**R**

135. fork (in UK English)

136. start (in UK English)

137. star  
(usually silent in UK English)

138. teacher  
(usually silent in UK English)

**S**

139. aisle

140. bourgeois

141. debris

142. island

143. isle

**T**

144.catch

145.stitch

146.sketch

147.watch

148.witch

149.christen

150.fasten

151.listen

152.ballet

153.buffer

154.gourmet

155.asthma (the **H** is also silent)

156.Christmas

157.mortgage

158.soften

159.often (optional)

**U**

160.colleague

161.guard

162.guest

163.guide

164.guitar

**W**

165.wrap

166.wrinkle

167.wrist

168.write

169.wrong

170.who

171.whoever

172.whole

173.answer

174.sword

175.two

**X**

176.faux

**Y**

177.prayer

178.mayor

**Z**

179.laissez-faire

180.rendezvous