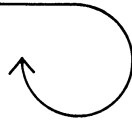


# Introduction

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## The Problem

English spelling is weird (or is it *wierd*?). For almost every rule-abiding word—*mat*, *cat*, *sat*—there's a demon whose spelling makes little or no sense.

Some demons have silent letters: **sign**, **herb**, **knee**. Others seem to be missing letters: *welcome* (instead of *wellcome*).

There are demon pairs—words that sound alike but have different spellings—*pain* and *pane*, *Mary* and *marry*. Other pairs are pronounced differently but spelled confusingly alike—*dessert* and *desert*, *hoped* and *hopped*.

What about suffix pairs like **-ance** and **-ence**? They mean the same thing. They're pronounced alike. But there's no rule to tell which suffix to use with a particular word. The same is true for **-able** and **-ible**.

## The Solution

Conventional wisdom recommends drilling such demons into submission. Unfortunately, most people can list dozens of words they've studied and looked up again and again, yet they're still not sure of the correct spelling.

A more powerful way to defeat a demon word is to confront it with a *mnemonic* (nĭ-’mahn-ick) device. A mnemonic is a memory trick. It works by creating an association or link between the demon word and an easy-to-spell word or phrase. You may know some mnemonics already. A few are classics:

The school **principal** is your **pal**. The **principle** that serves as a guideline is a **rule**.

A **stationary**, unmoving object **stands** still. The **stationery** that you write letters on is **paper**.

Mnemonics are sometimes silly, farfetched, or downright outrageous. So much the better, as long as they do their job—to help you master words that are equally outrageous and irrational in the ways they are spelled.

## **This Book**

*Demonic Mnemonics* offers memory tricks for more than 800 of the most commonly misspelled words. Entries were chosen from a dozen lists of demon words and also from the suggestions of teachers, writers, and editors.

Each entry has three parts. The first part is the *definition*. Knowing what the word means is especially important when dealing with homonyms (*capital* and *capitol*) or other frequently confused pairs (*desert* and *dessert*). Rather than formal, dictionary-type definitions, informal definitions are given so that each word is readily identifiable.

Next comes the *trouble spot*. Boldface type highlights the letter or letters that cause the spelling problem. Awareness of the tricky part of the word strengthens the mnemonic link. When the boldface type alone isn’t enough to explain the problem, a parenthetical comment provides clarification.

The third part is the *trick*, the mnemonic device intended to find a permanent niche in your memory, so you’ll never misspell that demon again.

### Sample Entry

fundamental: basic

trouble spot: fundamental

trick: Saying “**amen**” is **fundamental**.

In some instances, one of the rules found at the back of this book relates to the tricky spelling of demon words (see pages 115–124). When that is the case, the rule is noted.

#### Sample Entry

bookkeeper: one who keeps track of business transactions  
trouble spot: bookkeeper  
trick: (Compounders, page 117)

Certain mnemonics are immediately memorable. Many mnemonics don't stick quickly, however, and you may have to look up a mnemonic two or three times before you finally get it. But it's worth the effort. Memorizing a mnemonic is almost always easier than trying to memorize a word whose spelling will continue to elude you.

### The Eight Basic Links

As you use *Demonic Mnemonics* you will discover that there are eight basic kinds of links.

1. *The built-in-word link.* Many eccentric words contain easy-to-spell clue words. The mnemonic sentence simply links the demon word to its inner clue word.

You **hear** with your **ear**.

**Forty** soldiers stormed the **fort**.

2. *The definitional link.* The meaning of a word can sometimes provide the clue to correct spelling. In such cases, the mnemonic takes the form of a definition.

A **beach** is land by the **sea**.

A **beech** is a **tree**.

3. *The analogous pattern link.* This kind of link usually works best to remind you whether a demon is in fact one word or two.

We will go **all together** or **all separately**.

4. *The story sentence link.* This kind of mnemonic tells a story. Some mnemonics combine several recalcitrant words, all irregular in the same way. By turning the words into a story, you

link them together and have an easier time remembering each one.

Neither **l**eisured **f**oreign **c**ounter**f**eiter could **s**eize **e**ither **w**eird **h**eight without **f**or**f**eiting **p**rotein.

That's a strange mouthful, but it's far more memorable than a list of **ei** words that are the exception to the "I before E" rule.

Another kind of story link states the problem itself in a memorable way:

Use both **i**'s (eyes) in **s**ki**i**ng.

5. *The acronym link.* A sentence is invented based on each letter of the demon word. Take *arithmetic*:

**A**rithmetic: **A** rat in the **h**ouse **m**ight eat the **i**ce **c**ream.

Strange but true, many people find mastering this 11-word sentence a fun way to remember that arithmetic has an **e** in it—between the **m** and the **t**.

6. *The pronunciation link.* You can learn how to spell some words by inventing memorable ways of pronouncing—or mispronouncing—them:

Pronounce *Wednesday* "Wed-nes-day."

Naturally, this kind of exaggerated pronunciation should be used only in private. But note that widespread usage will often transform the pronunciation of a word to conform to its spelling. Many people pronounce the **t** in *often*, and *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* now gives that pronunciation legitimate standing.

7. *The etymological link.* This kind of link uses one form of a word to clarify the spelling of another. For example, because it is silent, the **c** in *muscle* sometimes is forgotten, so a helpful mnemonic links *muscle* to the word *muscular* in which the **c** is pronounced.

If you have **m**uscles, you're **m**uscular.

8. *The descriptive link.* This kind of mnemonic simply describes the problem in a succinct, memorable way.

There's no **x** in **e**cstasy.