

Teacher Resource · Free resource

## Word sort activities – Years 3/4

Year group: 3/4

Source: DfE, *English Appendix 1: Spelling* (2013)

**Purpose:** Printable word sort activities. Print, cut, sort into columns. Evidence base: Dymock & Nicholson (2017) — word sorts build pattern recognition that transfers to new words; direct instruction with lists does not.

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### How to run a word sort

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**Print and cut** the word cards in each sort below

**Give pupils the column header cards only** — not the completed sort

**Pupils sort in pairs or individually** — they must say *why* each word goes where it does

**Discuss as a class** — focus on the reasoning, not just the answer

**Add a blank card** — ask pupils to add one more word to each column from memory

**The talking is the learning.** A pupil who can articulate "I put *famous* in the 'drop the e' column because the base is *fame* and I had to drop the *e* before adding *-ous*" has a far deeper understanding than one who silently copies.

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## Sort 1: Prefix families

Column headers: *un- · dis- · mis- · re- · sub- · inter- · super- · anti- · auto-*

Word cards — print and cut:

<b>unhappy</b>	<b>anticlockwise</b>	<b>autobiography</b>	<b>international</b>	<b>supermarket</b>
<b>submerge</b>	<b>antiseptic</b>	<b>automatic</b>	<b>intercity</b>	<b>supernatural</b>
<b>subtitle</b>	<b>antidote</b>	<b>autopilot</b>	<b>subway</b>	<b>disagree</b>
<b>misbehave</b>	<b>rebuild</b>	<b>disappear</b>	<b>misunderstand</b>	<b>redo</b>
<b>submarine</b>	<b>reappear</b>	<b>unfair</b>	<b>unkind</b>	<b>mislead</b>
<b>rewrite</b>	<b>substandard</b>	<b>intercept</b>	<b>recount</b>	<b>disconnect</b>

Column header cards:

<b><i>un-</i></b>	<b><i>dis-</i></b>	<b><i>mis-</i></b>	<b><i>re-</i></b>	<b><i>sub-</i></b>	<b><i>inter-</i></b>	<b><i>super-</i></b>	<b><i>anti-</i></b>	<b><i>a</i></b>
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## Sort 2: The *-ous* suffix – which rule?

Column headers:

Add *-ous* directly (no change)

Drop the *-e* before *-ous*

Drop *-u* from *-our* before *-ous*

Keep *-e* to protect soft *g*

Word cards — print and cut:

<b>famous</b>	<b>dangerous</b>	<b>courageous</b>	<b>humorous</b>	<b>poisonous</b>
<b>adventurous</b>	<b>glamorous</b>	<b>outrageous</b>	<b>nervous</b>	<b>mountainous</b>
<b>vigorous</b>	<b>marvellous</b>	<b>gorgeous</b>	<b>enormous</b>	<b>ambiguous</b>
<b>joyous</b>	<b>thunderous</b>	<b>hideous</b>	<b>disastrous</b>	<b>advantageous</b>
<b>ridiculous</b>	<b>righteous</b>	<b>treacherous</b>	<b>murderous</b>	<b>raucous</b>

Column header cards:

<b>Add <i>-ous</i> directly</b>	<b>Drop the <i>-e</i></b>	<b>Drop <i>-u</i> from <i>-our</i></b>	<b>Keep <i>-e</i> (soft <i>g</i>)</b>
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### Sort 3: The *-tion/-sion/-ssion/-cian* decision

Column headers: *-tion · -sion · -ssion · -cian*

Word cards — print and cut:

<b>station</b>	<b>division</b>	<b>musician</b>	<b>discussion</b>	<b>question</b>
<b>revision</b>	<b>electrician</b>	<b>tension</b>	<b>passion</b>	<b>mention</b>
<b>permission</b>	<b>magician</b>	<b>position</b>	<b>extension</b>	<b>session</b>
<b>politician</b>	<b>action</b>	<b>suspension</b>	<b>possession</b>	<b>fraction</b>
<b>explosion</b>	<b>collection</b>	<b>direction</b>	<b>confession</b>	<b>attention</b>
<b>optician</b>	<b>mathematician</b>	<b>expression</b>	<b>detention</b>	<b>obsession</b>

Column header cards:

<b><i>-tion</i></b>	<b><i>-sion</i></b>	<b><i>-ssion</i></b>	<b><i>-cian</i></b>
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*(Rule: -cian always refers to a person. -ssion follows a root ending in -ss or -mit. -sion often follows d, l, n, r, or a vowel. -tion is the default.)*

### Sort 4: *ch* spellings – which sound?

Column headers: *ch* = /tʃ/ (Old English) · *ch* = /k/ (Greek) · *ch* = /ʃ/ (French)

Word cards — print and cut:

<b>character</b>	<b>chef</b>	<b>chorus</b>	<b>machine</b>	<b>chemist</b>
<b>chalet</b>	<b>echo</b>	<b>scheme</b>	<b>brochure</b>	<b>school</b>
<b>anchor</b>	<b>stomach</b>	<b>champagne</b>	<b>orchestra</b>	<b>chain</b>
<b>church</b>	<b>child</b>	<b>chart</b>	<b>cheese</b>	<b>challenge</b>
<b>chromosome</b>	<b>chivalry</b>	<b>chandelier</b>	<b>parachute</b>	<b>chauffeur</b>
<b>monarch</b>	<b>architect</b>	<b>crochet</b>	<b>chaos</b>	<b>niche</b>

Column header cards:

<b><i>ch</i> = /tʃ/ (Old English)</b>	<b><i>ch</i> = /k/ (Greek)</b>	<b><i>ch</i> = /ʃ/ (French)</b>
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## Sort 5: Silent letters – which letter is silent?

Column headers: Silent *b* · Silent *k* · Silent *g* · Silent *w* · Silent *l* · Silent *n*

Word cards — print and cut:

<b>lamb</b>	<b>knight</b>	<b>write</b>	<b>debt</b>	<b>gnaw</b>
<b>calm</b>	<b>sign</b>	<b>wrong</b>	<b>autumn</b>	<b>kneel</b>
<b>bomb</b>	<b>foreign</b>	<b>solemn</b>	<b>hymn</b>	<b>walk</b>
<b>talk</b>	<b>castle</b>	<b>often</b>	<b>know</b>	<b>wrap</b>
<b>climb</b>	<b>folk</b>	<b>half</b>	<b>could</b>	<b>knot</b>
<b>gnome</b>	<b>knee</b>	<b>wrist</b>	<b>column</b>	<b>thumb</b>

Column header cards:

<b>Silent <i>b</i></b>	<b>Silent <i>k</i></b>	<b>Silent <i>g</i></b>	<b>Silent <i>w</i></b>	<b>Silent <i>l</i></b>	<b>Silent <i>n</i></b>
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### Sort 6: *-able* or *-ible*?

Column headers: *-able* (base is a complete word, or has *-ation* link) · *-ible* (base is incomplete, or has *-ion* link)

Word cards — print and cut:

<b>comfortable</b>	<b>possible</b>	<b>noticeable</b>	<b>terrible</b>	<b>reliable</b>
<b>visible</b>	<b>manageable</b>	<b>horrible</b>	<b>reasonable</b>	<b>sensible</b>
<b>adorable</b>	<b>responsible</b>	<b>enjoyable</b>	<b>incredible</b>	<b>washable</b>
<b>edible</b>	<b>fashionable</b>	<b>accessible</b>	<b>understandable</b>	<b>digestible</b>
<b>available</b>	<b>flexible</b>	<b>desirable</b>	<b>convertible</b>	<b>believable</b>
<b>reversible</b>	<b>laughable</b>	<b>divisible</b>	<b>lovable</b>	<b>permissible</b>

Column header cards:

<b><i>-able</i></b>	<b><i>-ible</i></b>
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**Sort 7: -ant/-ance or -ent/-ence?**

Column headers: *-ant/-ance* (related *-ation* form exists) · *-ent/-ence* (no related *-ation* form)

Word cards — print and cut:

<b>observant</b>	<b>innocent</b>	<b>hesitant</b>	<b>different</b>	<b>expectant</b>
<b>frequent</b>	<b>tolerant</b>	<b>confident</b>	<b>dominant</b>	<b>excellent</b>
<b>relevant</b>	<b>patient</b>	<b>significant</b>	<b>evidence</b>	<b>abundance</b>
<b>confidence</b>	<b>brilliance</b>	<b>prevalence</b>	<b>importance</b>	<b>obedience</b>
<b>ignorance</b>	<b>intelligence</b>	<b>resistance</b>	<b>existence</b>	<b>assistance</b>
<b>competence</b>	<b>significance</b>	<b>performance</b>	<b>independence</b>	<b>urgency</b>

Column header cards:

<b><i>-ant/-ance</i> (-ation word exists)</b>	<b><i>-ent/-ence</i> (no -ation word)</b>
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## Sort 8: Adding suffixes – which rule?

Column headers: Double the consonant · Drop the *e* · Change *y* to *i* · No change needed

Word cards — print and cut:

<b>running</b>	<b>making</b>	<b>happiness</b>	<b>jumped</b>	<b>shining</b>
<b>trying</b>	<b>carried</b>	<b>hopeful</b>	<b>planned</b>	<b>easily</b>
<b>sitting</b>	<b>careful</b>	<b>swimmer</b>	<b>lovely</b>	<b>angrily</b>
<b>flatter</b>	<b>beginning</b>	<b>gardening</b>	<b>preferred</b>	<b>forgotten</b>
<b>opened</b>	<b>excitement</b>	<b>beautiful</b>	<b>business</b>	<b>noticeable</b>
<b>famous</b>	<b>courageous</b>	<b>humorous</b>	<b>nervous</b>	<b>knifing</b>

Column header cards:

<b>Double consonant</b>	<b>Drop the -e</b>	<b>Change y to i</b>	<b>No change</b>
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## Sort 9: Etymology – which language family?

Column headers: Old English · Old Norse · French (post-1066) · Latin · Greek

Word cards — print and cut:

<b>sky</b>	<b>window</b>	<b>school</b>	<b>chef</b>	<b>machine</b>
<b>chorus</b>	<b>knight</b>	<b>child</b>	<b>love</b>	<b>government</b>
<b>justice</b>	<b>character</b>	<b>pharmacy</b>	<b>nation</b>	<b>antique</b>
<b>scheme</b>	<b>echo</b>	<b>unique</b>	<b>lamb</b>	<b>strange</b>
<b>danger</b>	<b>ancient</b>	<b>describe</b>	<b>microscope</b>	<b>ambulance</b>
<b>adventure</b>	<b>generous</b>	<b>legal</b>	<b>civil</b>	<b>phantom</b>

*(Note: some words entered through more than one language — encourage discussion rather than one definitive answer.)*

Column header cards:

<b>Old English</b>	<b>Old Norse</b>	<b>French</b>	<b>Latin</b>	<b>Greek</b>
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## Sort 10: Homophones – match the meaning

Word card pairs — print and cut:

<b>there</b>	<b>their</b>	<b>they're</b>	<b>here</b>	<b>hear</b>
<b>peace</b>	<b>piece</b>	<b>past</b>	<b>passed</b>	<b>principal</b>
<b>principle</b>	<b>stationary</b>	<b>stationery</b>	<b>affect</b>	<b>effect</b>
<b>desert</b>	<b>dessert</b>	<b>complement</b>	<b>compliment</b>	<b>whose</b>
<b>who's</b>	<b>bare</b>	<b>bear</b>	<b>weather</b>	<b>whether</b>

*(Activity: match each word to the correct definition. Write one sentence for each pair showing you understand the difference.)*

## Blank sort template

Use to create your own sort for any Y3/4 pattern.

Pattern I am sorting: \_\_\_\_\_

Column header cards:

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4 (optional)
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My word cards:


**Extension:** Can pupils add three more words to any column? Can they write a sentence using one word from each column?

*Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). Word sort pedagogy: Dymock & Nicholson (2017), Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties — rule-based instruction and word sorting produce significantly greater transfer to new words than word-list memorisation.*