

Teacher Resource · Free resource

Word sort activities – Years 5/6

Year group: 5/6

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

Purpose: Printable word sort activities for Y5/6 spelling patterns.

How to run a word sort

Print and cut the word card grid below, or write words on small slips of paper

Give pupils the column headers only — not the completed sort

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

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

The talking is the learning. A pupil who can say "*I put 'ferocious' in the -cious column because the root is 'ferocity' — the c is already there*" knows the pattern far better than one who memorises the spelling in isolation.

Sort 1: *-cious* or *-tious*?

Column headers: *-cious* · *-tious* · Can be either / check the root

Word cards — print and cut:

ferocious	cautious	suspicious	ambitious	precious
nutritious	conscious	fictitious	spacious	infectious
atrocious	contentious	gracious	superstitious	vicious
ostentatious	delicious	conscientious	voracious	repetitious
tenacious	pretentious	loquacious	adventitious	efficacious

Column header cards:

<i>-cious</i>	<i>-tious</i>
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(Tip: find the root word. Space → spacious (-cious). Ambition → ambitious (-tious, because the root ends in -tion). When the root ends in a vowel, it's usually -cious; when it ends in -tion, it becomes -tious.)

Sort 2: *-able* or *-ible*?

Column headers: *-able* (base is a whole word, or links to *-ation*) · *-ible* (base is not a whole word, or links to *-ion*)

Word cards — print and cut:

comfortable	possible	noticeable	terrible	reliable
visible	manageable	horrible	reasonable	sensible
adorable	responsible	fashionable	incredible	digestible
accessible	desirable	convertible	believable	reversible
divisible	lovable	permissible	laughable	flexible

Column header cards:

<i>-able</i>	<i>-ible</i>
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(Test: if the base is a complete word, *-able* is usually right: *comfort* → *comfortable*. If the base is not a standalone word, *-ible*: *poss-* is not a word → *possible*. The *-ation* link: *admiration* exists → *admirable*.)

Sort 3: *-ant/-ance* or *-ent/-ence*?

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

Word cards — print and cut:

observant	innocent	hesitant	different	expectant
frequent	tolerant	confident	dominant	excellent
relevant	patient	significant	evidence	abundance
confidence	brilliance	prevalence	importance	obedience
ignorance	intelligence	resistance	assistance	competence

Column header cards:

<i>-ant/-ance</i> (-ation word exists)	<i>-ent/-ence</i> (no -ation word)
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(Test: observation exists → observant. Expectation exists → expectant. But there's no differentiation → different, not differant.)

Sort 4: *-fer* words – does the *r* double?

Column headers: *r* doubles (stress on second syllable) · *r* stays single (stress on first syllable)

Word cards — print and cut:

referred	preference	reference	transferred	inference
inferred	conference	offering	preferred	suffered
deferred	difference	occurred	referring	suffering
preferring	transference	deferring	differing	buffered

Column header cards:

Doubles (stressed 2nd syllable)	Stays single (stressed 1st syllable)
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(The stress shifts: *preFER* → *preferRED* (stress stays on *fer* → double *r*). *PREfer* → *PREference* (stress moves away from *fer* → single *r*.)

Sort 5: Statutory word list – sort by spelling challenge

Column headers: Silent or unexpected letter · Unusual vowel pattern · Easy to misspell the ending · Looks like another word

Word cards — print and cut:

accommodate	exaggerate	committee	conscience	embarrass
existence	foreign	guarantee	mischievous	parliament
necessary	occasion	relevant	rhythm	secretary
separate	privilege	definite	hindrance	immediately
environment	cemetery	category	apparent	correspond

(Discussion point: which words look easiest but catch the most people? Often it's words we think we know — necessary, separate, definite.)

Blank sort template

Pattern I am sorting: _____

Column header cards:

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
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My word cards:

Extension: Can pupils add three more words to any column from memory? Can they write a sentence that uses one word correctly?

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.