

Year 2 · Free resource

## Soft *c*, *kn-*, *gn-*, and *wr-* spellings

Year group: 2

Source: DfE, *English Appendix 1: Spelling*, National Curriculum for England (2013) — Year 2

Curriculum requirement: Statutory

### Rule A: The /s/ sound spelled *c* before *e*, *i*, *y*

The letter *c* usually makes the /k/ sound (*cat*, *cup*, *coat*). But when *c* is followed by *e*, *i*, or *y*, it makes the /s/ sound. This is called **soft c**.

*ce*: *cent*, *pace*, *ice*, *race*, *fence*

*ci*: *city*, *circle*, *pencil*, *acid*

*cy*: *cycle*, *fancy*, *icy*, *mercy*

**The rule:** *c* + *e/i/y* = /s/. *c* + anything else = /k/.

**Etymology note:** This rule came into English with Latin and French vocabulary after 1066. In Latin, *c* was always /k/. In French, the *c* softened before *e* and *i*. When English absorbed French words, it kept the French spelling and the French soft-*c* rule.

## Rule B: The /n/ sound spelled *kn-* at the start of words

Word	Meaning
<b>knock</b>	<b>to strike a surface</b>
<b>know</b>	<b>to have knowledge</b>
<b>knee</b>	<b>the joint in the leg</b>
<b>kneel</b>	<b>to rest on one's knees</b>
<b>knife</b>	<b>a cutting blade</b>
<b>knight</b>	<b>an armoured warrior</b>
<b>knit</b>	<b>to make fabric from yarn</b>
<b>knot</b>	<b>a tying of rope</b>
<b>knew</b>	<b>past tense of <i>know</i></b>
<b>knack</b>	<b>a special skill</b>
<b>knave</b>	<b>a dishonest person; a playing card</b>

**Why:** In Old English, the *kn* was fully pronounced. By around 1600, the *k* fell silent in speech but the spelling was already standardised. Every *kn* word is a medieval sound preserved in writing.

## Rule C: The /n/ sound spelled *gn-* at the start of words

Word	Meaning
<b>gnaw</b>	<b>to bite repeatedly</b>
<b>gnat</b>	<b>a tiny flying insect</b>
<b>gnome</b>	<b>a mythical creature</b>

**Why:** Same as *kn-* — the *g* was once pronounced in Old English. *gn* is less common than *kn* in modern English.

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## Rule D: The /r/ sound spelled *wr-* at the start of words

Word	Meaning
<b>write</b>	<b>to form letters or words</b>
<b>wrap</b>	<b>to cover; to fold around</b>
<b>wrong</b>	<b>not correct</b>
<b>wrist</b>	<b>the joint between hand and arm</b>
<b>wreck</b>	<b>a destroyed vehicle; to destroy</b>
<b>wrestle</b>	<b>to struggle physically</b>
<b>wring</b>	<b>to twist and squeeze</b>
<b>wrinkle</b>	<b>a small crease in skin or fabric</b>
<b>wrote</b>	<b>past tense of <i>write</i></b>
<b>wren</b>	<b>a small brown bird</b>

**Why:** In Old English, *wr* was a distinct consonant cluster — both letters were pronounced. Over time the *w* became silent, but the spelling remained.

## Common mistakes

Wrong	Right	Reason
<i>nok</i>	<b>knock</b>	<i>kn-</i> spelling for initial /n/
<i>no</i> (as in knowledge)	<b>know</b>	<i>kn-</i> for /n/
<i>rite</i>	<b>write</b>	<i>wr-</i> for initial /r/
<i>rong</i>	<b>wrong</b>	<i>wr-</i> for initial /r/
<i>neel</i>	<b>kneel</b>	<i>kn-</i> for initial /n/
<i>naw</i>	<b>gnaw</b>	<i>gn-</i> for initial /n/
<i>sircle</i>	<b>circle</b>	soft <i>c</i> before <i>i</i>
<i>sentury</i>	<b>century</b>	soft <i>c</i> before <i>e</i>

## Word sort

Sort these words by their silent letter pattern.

**Words:** know · write · city · gnaw · knife · wrap · pencil · wreck · gnat · cycle · kneel · wrong · ice · knight · gnome

<b><i>kn-</i> (silent k)</b>	<b><i>gn-</i> (silent g)</b>	<b><i>wr-</i> (silent w)</b>	<b>soft <i>c</i> (c = /s/)</b>

## Dictation sentences

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She had the **knack** of tying a **knot** without looking at her **wrist**.

He chose to **write** about what was **wrong** with the plan.

The **gnat** flew in a **circle** near the edge of the **city** park.

The **knight** used his **knife** to **kneel** and carve his initial in the stone.

She had to **wrestle** with the **wrapping** to open the box without causing a **wreck**.

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*Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). All examples verified against Year 2 statutory content.*