

Years 3 & 4 · Free resource

Years 3/4 Statutory Spelling Word List – grouped by pattern

Year group: 3/4

Source: DfE, *English Appendix 1: Spelling*, National Curriculum for England (2013) — Years 3–4 Word List

Curriculum requirement: Statutory — all schools must teach these 100 words by the end of Year 4

Why these words?

The Y3/4 statutory list contains words that children commonly misspell AND that appear frequently in their reading and writing. Unlike the phonically regular words children can decode from rules, most of these words have patterns that need explicit teaching — a tricky vowel spelling, a silent letter, an unusual suffix, or a morpheme that unlocks the whole word family.

The most effective approach is to **group the words by pattern** rather than teaching them as a random list. When children understand *why* a word is spelled as it is, they remember it far more reliably.

(Source: Dymock & Nicholson, 2017; Moats, 2006 — rule-based instruction produces significantly greater retention than word-list memorisation)

Group 1: Words with -ough (tricky vowel string)

Word	Pattern note
though	-ough = /oʊ/ (like "oh")
through	-ough = /u:/ (like "oo")
thought	-ough = /ɔ:/ (like "aw") – also: bought, brought
although	-ough = /oʊ/ – though with al- prefix

Teach together: these four words show that -ough has multiple pronunciations. The spelling is consistent even when the sound varies.

Group 2: Words with silent letters

Word	Silent letter	Etymology hint
island	silent <i>s</i>	Old English <i>igland</i> – the <i>s</i> crept in through confusion with Latin <i>insula</i>
reign	silent <i>g</i>	Old French <i>reignier</i> – the <i>g</i> reflects the Latin <i>regnum</i> (kingdom); <i>signal</i> and <i>sign</i> share this
guard	silent <i>u</i>	Old French <i>garder</i> – the <i>u</i> preserves the hard <i>g</i> (cf. <i>guitar</i> , <i>guarantee</i>)
guide	silent <i>u</i>	Same pattern as <i>guard</i> – <i>u</i> keeps the <i>g</i> hard
build	silent <i>u</i>	Old English <i>byldan</i> – the <i>u</i> is a spelling remnant
surprise	no silent letter, but - prise often misspelled	French <i>surpris</i> – think <i>sur</i> (over) + <i>prise</i> (taken)
knowledge	silent <i>k</i>	Old English <i>cnāwan</i> (to know) – the <i>k</i> was once pronounced

Group 3: Double letters (not from doubling rule)

Word	Pattern note
accident	<i>cc</i> – from Latin <i>accidere</i> (to happen to); <i>ac-</i> prefix + <i>cidere</i>
occupy	<i>cc</i> – Latin <i>occupare</i> ; same <i>oc-</i> prefix pattern
occasion	<i>cc</i> – Latin <i>occasio</i> ; <i>ob-</i> + <i>cadere</i>
address	<i>dd</i> – Latin <i>addirector</i> ; <i>ad-</i> prefix
possess	<i>ss</i> – Latin <i>possidere</i> ; <i>-sess</i> stem
sufficient	<i>ff</i> – Latin <i>sufficere</i> ; <i>suf-</i> prefix
committee	<i>mm, tt, ee</i> – Latin <i>committere</i> ; three doubled letters
difference	<i>ff</i> – Latin <i>differre</i> ; <i>dif-</i> prefix
difficulty	<i>ff</i> – Latin <i>difficilis</i> ; <i>dif-</i> prefix

Teach together: many double letters come from a prefix ending in the same letter as the base word starts with. *ac* + *cident* = *accident*; *oc* + *cupy* = *occupy*.

Group 4: -ate and -tion word families

Word	Word family unlock
sentence	<i>sent-</i> = feel/sense (Latin <i>sentire</i>); also: <i>sentiment, sentimental</i>
separate	<i>separ-</i> = apart (Latin <i>separare</i>); "there is a rat in separate" (mnemonic)
immediate	<i>im-</i> + <i>mediate</i> = without a middle; at once
experiment	<i>ex-</i> (out) + <i>peri-</i> (try) + <i>-ment</i> ; also: <i>experience</i>
certain	from Latin <i>certus</i> = decided, fixed; also: <i>certify, certificate, certainty</i>
complete	<i>com-</i> (together) + <i>plete</i> (fill); also: <i>completion, complement</i>
consider	from Latin <i>considerare</i> – to observe the stars; also: <i>considerable, consideration</i>
continue	from Latin <i>continuarere</i> ; also: <i>continuous, continuation</i>
decide	<i>de-</i> (off) + <i>cide</i> (cut); also: <i>decision</i>
describe	<i>de-</i> + <i>scribe</i> (write); also: <i>description, prescribe</i>
position	from Latin <i>positio</i> ; also: <i>positive, deposit</i>
promise	from Latin <i>promissa</i> ; also: <i>promising</i>
purpose	Old French <i>porpos</i> ; also: <i>purposeful, purposely</i>
sentence	see above

Word	Word family unlock
suppose	<i>sub-</i> (under) + <i>pose</i> (put); also: <i>supposition</i>

Group 5: -ary, -ery endings

Word	Note
February	<i>Feb-ru-a-ry</i> – four syllables; the <i>r</i> is often swallowed in speech
library	<i>lib-ra-ry</i> – three syllables; often mispronounced <i>libary</i>
ordinary	<i>or-di-na-ry</i> – four syllables; often reduced in speech
necessary	one <i>c</i> , double <i>s</i> : <i>ne-ce-ss-a-ry</i> – "it is necessary to have one collar and two socks" (mnemonic)
history	from Greek <i>historia</i> – an inquiry; also: <i>historical, historian</i>
mystery	from Greek <i>mysterion</i> – a secret rite; also: <i>mysterious</i>
memory	from Latin <i>memoria</i> ; also: <i>memorable, memorial</i>

Group 6: Words with unusual vowel patterns

Word	Tricky pattern	Memory hook
breath	<i>ea</i> = /ɛ/ (short e)	<i>breathe</i> has a long sound; <i>breath</i> is the noun with short sound
breathe	<i>ea</i> = /i:/ (long e)	the verb: <i>breathe</i> deeply
height	<i>eigh</i> = /aɪ/	like <i>eight</i> , <i>weight</i> , <i>freight</i>
weight	<i>eigh</i> = /aɪ/	same family as <i>eight</i>
eight	<i>eigh</i> = /aɪ/	eighth, eighteen, eighty
heart	<i>ear</i> = /ɑ:/	not the usual <i>ear</i> = /ɪə/ sound
earth	<i>ear</i> = /ɜ:/	third vowel sound for <i>ear</i> spelling
heard	<i>ear</i> = /ɜ:/	<i>heard</i> (past) vs <i>hear</i> (present)
learn	<i>ear</i> = /ɜ:/	same family as <i>earth</i> , <i>heard</i>
early	<i>ear</i> = /ɜ:/	same family
fruit	<i>ui</i> = /u:/	from French <i>fruit</i> ; also: <i>suit</i> , <i>juice</i> , <i>bruise</i>
group	<i>ou</i> = /u:/	French origin
beautiful	<i>eau</i> = /ju:/	French origin (<i>beau</i> = handsome)

Word	Tricky pattern	Memory hook
caught	<i>ough = /ɔ:/</i>	same family as <i>taught, daughter, naughty</i>
naughty	<i>ough = /ɔ:/</i>	<i>naught (zero) + -y</i>

Group 7: Words with -ce/-se/-ge endings

Word	Note
notice	<i>noti-</i> + <i>-ce</i>
practise	verb form (British English) – "practise the skill" (verb has s); practice is the noun
sentence	<i>-ence</i> ending
experience	<i>-ence</i> ending; <i>ex-</i> + <i>peri-</i> (try) + <i>-ence</i>
difference	<i>-ence</i> ending; <i>differ</i> + <i>-ence</i>
appearance	<i>-ance</i> ending; <i>appear</i> + <i>-ance</i>
disappear	<i>dis-</i> + <i>appear</i> – double <i>p</i> from <i>appear</i> , not from doubling rule

Group 8: Frequently misspelled – learn the pattern

Word	Why tricky	Strategy
because	<i>be- + cause</i> – two clear morphemes	"Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants" (mnemonic for letters)
believe	<i>be- + lieve</i> – <i>ie</i> not <i>ei</i>	"never beLIEve a LIE"
receive	<i>re- + ceive</i> – <i>ei</i> after <i>c</i>	<i>ei</i> after <i>c</i> rule (taught fully at Y5/6)
friend	<i>fri- + end</i> – "fri" is the tricky part	"a friend to the end"
February	four syllables, second <i>r</i> swallowed	Say it fully: Feb-ru-a-ry
separate	<i>sep-a-rate</i> – <i>a</i> not <i>e</i> in middle	"there's a rat in separate"
necessary	one <i>c</i> , two <i>s</i>	"one collar, two socks"
disappear	<i>dis- + appear</i>	prefix + base: both remain intact
occasionally	<i>oc- + casion + -ally</i>	build from <i>occasion</i> → <i>occasional</i> → <i>occasionally</i>

The full statutory list (alphabetical)

accident, actual, address, answer, appear, arrive, believe, bicycle, bottom, breath, breathe, build, busy, business, calendar, caught, centre, century, certain, circle, complete, consider, continue, decide, describe, different, difficult, disappear, early, earth, eight, enough, exercise, experience, experiment, extreme, famous, favourite, February, forward, fruit, grammar, group, guard, guide, heard, heart, height, history, imagine, important, increase, interest, island, knowledge, learn, length, library, material, medicine, mention, minute, natural, naughty, notice, occasion, often, opposite, ordinary, particular, peculiar, perhaps, popular, position, possess, possible, potatoes, pressure, probably, promise, purpose, quarter, question, recent, regular, reign, remember, sentence, separate, special, straight, strange, strength, suppose, surprise, therefore, though, through, various, weight, woman

(100 words — verified against DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling, 2013)

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). Word groupings and etymology are pedagogical aids, not statutory content. All words verified against the published statutory list.