

Years 3 & 4 · Free resource

Suffix: -ly

Year group: 3/4

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

Curriculum requirement: Statutory

The rule

The suffix **-ly** is usually added to adjectives to make adverbs. It means "in a [adjective] way."

*slow (adjective) → **slowly** (adverb — in a slow way)*

*complete (adjective) → **completely** (adverb)*

*gentle (adjective) → **gently** (adverb — note spelling change)*

Four cases where the spelling changes:

1. Base word ends in **-le** preceded by a consonant: change **-le** to **-ly**

*gentle → **gently** (not gentlyly)*

*simple → **simply***

*terrible → **terribly***

2. Base word ends in **-ic**: add **-ally** (not just **-ly**)

*basic → **basically** (not basicly)*

*dramatic → **dramatically***

*automatic → **automatically***

3. Base word ends in **-y** (with a consonant before it): change **y** to **i** then add **-ly**

*happy → **happily***

*angry → **angrily***

easy → ***easily***

4. Most other bases: add *-ly* directly, with no change

quick → ***quickly***

near → ***nearly***

certain → ***certainly*** †

Etymology note

-ly descends from Old English *-lice* (pronounced approximately "lee-cheh"). It has been part of English for over a thousand years, which is why it attaches to so many native English adjectives (*quickly, slowly, kindly*). The *-ic* → *-ically* pattern comes from words of Greek origin via Latin: *basic, dramatic, electric* all derive from Greek and take *-ally* rather than *-ly* alone. This is why *basicly* feels wrong — the *-ic* ending comes with its own rule.

Examples from the Y3/4 statutory word list and Appendix 1

(† = statutory word)

Straightforward -ly (add directly):

certainly † (*certain* + -ly)

commonly (*common* + -ly)

recently † (*recent* + -ly)

particularly † (*particular* + -ly)

probably † (*probable* → *probabl-* → change -le to -ly → **probably**) (*case 1*)

possibly † (*possible* → **possibly**) (*case 1*)

simply (*simple* → **simply**) (*case 1*)

gently (*gentle* → **gently**) (*case 1*)

-ly from -y bases (y → i):

happily (*happy* → **happily**)

angrily (*angry* → **angrily**)

easily (*easy* → **easily**)

-ally from -ic bases:

basically (*basic* → **basically**)

dramatically (*dramatic* → **dramatically**)

magically (*magical* → **magically**) (*note: magical ends in -al, not -ic, so just -ly*)

The awkward ones worth teaching explicitly

Adjective	Adverb	What's happening
<i>whole</i>	wholly	silent <i>e</i> kept despite the <i>-ly</i> rule (one of the genuine exceptions)
<i>true</i>	truly	drop the <i>e</i> before <i>-ly</i>
<i>due</i>	duly	drop the <i>e</i> before <i>-ly</i>
<i>full</i>	fully	drop one <i>l</i> – <i>full</i> + <i>-ly</i> → fully (not <i>fully</i>)
<i>possible</i>	possibly	change <i>-le</i> to <i>-ly</i>
<i>terrible</i>	terribly	change <i>-le</i> to <i>-ly</i>

Common mistakes and why they happen

Wrong	Right	Reason
<i>gentlely</i>	gently	<i>gentle</i> ends in <i>-le</i> – change <i>-le</i> to <i>-ly</i>
<i>basicly</i>	basically	<i>-ic</i> words take <i>-ally</i>
<i>happly</i>	happily	<i>happy</i> → change <i>y</i> to <i>i</i> → happily
<i>probaly</i>	probably	<i>probable</i> → drop <i>-le</i> → <i>probabl</i> → add <i>-y</i>
<i>certainley</i>	certainly	no <i>e</i> – just <i>certain</i> + <i>-ly</i>

The **-ic trap** is the most common in KS2. Children write *basicly*, *specificly*, *automaticly*. Teach *-ic* → *-ically* as a reliable sub-rule: if the adjective ends in *-ic*, the adverb ends in *-ically*.

Word sort activity

Sort these adverbs by which *-ly* rule applies. Write the base adjective first.

Adverbs to sort: certainly · simply · dramatically · happily · gently · possibly · basically · nearly · angrily · terribly · automatically · easily

Add -ly directly	Change -le to -ly	Change y to i + ly	Add -ally (-ic words)

Dictation sentences (teacher-ready)

She **certainly** worked hard enough to deserve the reward.

The children **gently** placed the eggs back in the nest.

He was **probably** the fastest runner in the whole school.

Simply adding the suffix does not always work — you need to check the base word.

She **happily** accepted the challenge and got started straight away.

The magician **dramatically** revealed the hidden card.

Classroom questions

What is the base word in *possibly*? What rule did we use?

Why is *basicly* wrong? What should it be?

What happens to *happy* when we add *-ly*? Why?

Can you think of three more adverbs that end in *-ically*?

What is the difference between an adjective and an adverb? Can you give an example of each?

Links to other rules

Y2 rule: -y → -i (changing *y* to *i* before a suffix) — same rule applies here in *happily, angrily*

Y2 rule: drop the -e — *true* → *truly*, *due* → *duly*

Y5/6: -ant/-ent and -ance/-ence — these suffixes also change adjectives; -ly connects them to adverb forms

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). All statutory word examples verified against the published statutory word lists for Years 3–4.