

Years 5 &amp; 6 · Free resource

## Endings: -ant/-ance/-ancy and -ent/-ence/-ency

Year group: 5/6

Source: DfE, *English Appendix 1: Spelling*, National Curriculum for England (2013) — Years 5–6, Suffixes

Curriculum requirement: Statutory

### The rule

These six endings are notoriously difficult because both sets make very similar sounds and there is no single reliable rule that distinguishes them in all cases. Appendix 1 gives the most useful guidance:

#### Use -ant, -ance, -ancy when:

The root word has a related form with the *-ation* suffix

→ *observe* → *observation* → **observant, observance**

→ *hesitate* → *hesitation* → **hesitant, hesitancy**

#### Use -ent, -ence, -ency when:

The root word has a related form with the *-tion* or *-sion* suffix (but NOT *-ation*)

→ *innocent* → *innocence* (no *-ation* form)

→ *differ* → *difference* (no *-ation* form — *differ* → *different*, not *differatious*)

→ *frequent* → *frequency* (relate to *-tion* not *-ation*)

**When neither test applies:** learn the individual word. Many high-frequency examples must be memorised alongside the pattern.

## Etymology note

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Both sets derive from Latin verb endings. *-ant-* comes from the Latin present participle *-antem* (first/second conjugation verbs); *-ent-* from *-entem* (third/fourth conjugation verbs). English absorbed both through French and kept both spelling forms. This is why there is no single sound-based rule — the distinction was grammatical in Latin, not phonological.

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## **-ant / -ance / -ancy words**

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*(related -ation forms shown where applicable)*

Word	-ation connection	Meaning
<b>observant</b>	<i>observation</i>	<b>quick to notice</b>
<b>observance</b>	<i>observation</i>	<b>the act of following a rule or custom</b>
<b>hesitant</b>	<i>hesitation</i>	<b>uncertain; slow to act</b>
<b>hesitancy</b>	<i>hesitation</i>	<b>the quality of hesitating</b>
<b>expectant</b>	<i>expectation</i>	<b>waiting hopefully</b>
<b>expectancy</b>	<i>expectation</i>	<b>the state of expecting</b>
<b>relevant</b>	– (no -ation form: must learn)	<b>connected to the matter at hand</b>
<b>relevance</b>	–	<b>the quality of being relevant</b>
<b>significant</b>	<i>signification</i>	<b>important; meaningful</b>
<b>significance</b>	<i>signification</i>	<b>importance</b>
<b>tolerant</b>	<i>toleration</i>	<b>willing to accept difference</b>
<b>tolerance</b>	<i>toleration</i>	<b>the capacity to accept difference</b>
<b>dominant</b>	<i>domination</i>	<b>most powerful or important</b>
<b>dominance</b>	<i>domination</i>	<b>the state of being dominant</b>
<b>pleasant</b>	<i>placation (related placent)</i>	<b>enjoyable; agreeable</b>

Word	-ation connection	Meaning
<b>pleasant</b>	–	<b>note: <i>pleasance</i> is archaic; use <i>pleasure</i> instead</b>
<b>abundant</b>	<i>aboundation (via abundance)</i>	<b>plentiful</b>
<b>abundance</b>	–	<b>a very large quantity</b>
<b>brilliant</b>	– (no -ation form: must learn)	<b>very clever; sparkling</b>
<b>brilliance</b>	– (no -ation form: must learn)	<b>the quality of being brilliant</b>
<b>substance</b>	–	<b>matter; the most important part</b>
<b>distance</b>	–	<b>the amount of space between things</b>
<b>instance</b>	–	<b>an example</b>
<b>importance</b>	–	<b>the quality of being important</b>
<b>ignorant</b>	<i>ignorance</i>	<b>lacking knowledge</b>
<b>ignorance</b>	–	<b>the state of lacking knowledge</b>

## **-ent / -ence / -ency words**

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*(no -ation form)*

<b>Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>innocent</b>	<b>not guilty; pure</b>
<b>innocence</b>	<b>the state of being innocent</b>
<b>frequent</b>	<b>happening often</b>
<b>frequency</b>	<b>how often something happens</b>
<b>confident</b>	<b>sure of oneself</b>
<b>confidence</b>	<b>the feeling of certainty</b>
<b>different</b>	<b>not the same</b>
<b>difference</b>	<b>the way things are not the same</b>
<b>patient</b>	<b>able to wait calmly</b>
<b>patience</b>	<b>the quality of waiting calmly</b>
<b>efficient</b>	<b>achieving results without waste</b>
<b>efficiency</b>	<b>the quality of being efficient</b>
<b>excellent</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>excellence</b>	<b>the quality of being very good</b>
<b>evident</b>	<b>clear; obvious</b>

<b>Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>evidence</b>	<b>facts or proof</b>
<b>intelligent</b>	<b>able to learn and understand</b>
<b>intelligence</b>	<b>the ability to think and learn</b>
<b>permanent</b>	<b>lasting forever</b>
<b>permanence</b>	<b>the quality of lasting</b>
<b>present</b>	<b>here; existing now; a gift</b>
<b>presence</b>	<b>the fact of being somewhere</b>
<b>violent</b>	<b>using force to hurt</b>
<b>violence</b>	<b>the use of harmful force</b>
<b>obedient</b>	<b>doing as told</b>
<b>obedience</b>	<b>the quality of obeying</b>
<b>convenient</b>	<b>easy; fitting well</b>
<b>convenience</b>	<b>the quality of being easy to use</b>

## Word families – always teach the trio together

Teach the adjective, noun, and quality noun as a set:

<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Noun (person/act)</b>	<b>Quality noun</b>
<i>observant</i>	<i>observer</i>	<i>observance</i>
<i>confident</i>	<i>confidence</i>	–
<i>innocent</i>	<i>innocent</i>	<i>innocence</i>
<i>frequent</i>	–	<i>frequency</i>
<i>efficient</i>	–	<i>efficiency</i>

## Common mistakes

Wrong	Right	Reason
<i>innocant</i>	<b>innocent</b>	<i>-ent</i> , no <i>-ation</i> form
<i>confidant</i>	<b>confident</b>	<i>-ent</i> (n → <i>-ant</i> is an old French loanword meaning a confidant person – actually correct but different word)
<i>diffrence</i>	<b>difference</b>	<i>-ence</i> , missing middle syllable
<i>relevent</i>	<b>relevant</b>	<i>-ant</i> (must learn – no reliable <i>-ation</i> test)
<i>frequent</i>	<b>frequent</b>	<i>-ent</i> , no <i>-ation</i> form
<i>excellant</i>	<b>excellent</b>	<i>-ent</i> , no <i>-ation</i> form

## The -ation test in practice

Does the word have a related -ation form?

Test	Word	-ation form?	Use
<i>hesit-</i>	hesitant/hesitance	hesitation ✓	<b>-ant</b>
<i>differ</i>	different/difference	difference (no -ation)	<b>-ent</b>
<i>observ-</i>	observant/observance	observation ✓	<b>-ant</b>
<i>excell-</i>	excellent/excellence	(no -ation form)	<b>-ent</b>
<i>expect-</i>	expectant/expectancy	expectation ✓	<b>-ant</b>
<i>innocent</i>	innocent/innocence	(no -ation form)	<b>-ent</b>

## Word sort

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Use the *-ation* test. Sort these into the correct column.

**Words:** observant · innocent · hesitant · different · expectant · frequent · tolerant · confident · dominant · excellent · relevant · patient

<b>-ant/-ance (has -ation form)</b>	<b>-ent/-ence (no -ation form)</b>

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## Dictation sentences

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She was **confident** that the **evidence** was **sufficient** to prove her case.

His **innocent** expression made the **difference** between **ignorance** and deceit.

With **patience** and **observance** of the rules, they made **excellent** progress.

The **frequency** of the **violent** storms made it **evident** that the **climate** was changing.

His **hesitant** response showed a lack of **confidence** in his own **intelligence**.

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## Links to other rules

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**Y3/4 rule 02: -ation** — the key test for choosing -ant/-ance

**Y5/6 rule 04: -able/-ible** — similar challenge; related decision strategy

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*Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). The -ation test is the guidance given in Appendix 1. Individual words verified against the statutory lists and standard British English usage.*