

Years 5 & 6 · Free resource

Endings: **-cious** and **-tious**

Year group: 5/6

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

Curriculum requirement: Statutory

The rule

The endings *-cious* and *-tious* both make the /ʃəs/ sound ("shus"). They create adjectives meaning "having a great deal of" something, or "full of" a quality.

-cious is used when:

The related noun ends in *-ce* → *space* → **spacious**

The base is rooted in Latin *-cia* or similar

In most cases where the /ʃəs/ comes after a vowel

-tious is used when:

The related noun ends in *-tion* → *ambition* → **ambitious**

The word has a *t* in its root

When in doubt: look for the related noun. If it ends in *-tion*, the adjective ends in *-tious*. If it ends in *-ce*, use *-cious*.

Etymology note

Both endings come from Latin. *-cious* derives from Latin *-ciosus*; *-tious* from *-tiosus*. They entered English via French. The /j/ sound in both is not in the Latin — it developed through French pronunciation and was stabilised in English spelling while the sound shifted. This is why the spelling and sound do not match: the spelling records the Latin root; the pronunciation records the French pronunciation shift.

-cious words

Word	Related word	Meaning
vicious	<i>vice</i>	deliberately cruel
precious	<i>price/value</i>	of great value
conscious	<i>conscience</i>	aware; awake
unconscious	<i>un- + conscious</i>	not awake; unaware
suspicious	<i>suspicion</i>	distrustful
spacious	<i>space</i>	having lots of space
delicious	<i>delight/delight</i>	very pleasant to eat
ferocious	<i>ferocity</i>	fierce; violent
atrocious	<i>atrocitiy</i>	horrifyingly bad
gracious	<i>grace</i>	polite; kind
audacious	<i>audacity</i>	bold; daring
voracious	<i>voracity</i>	eating greedily; very eager

-tious words

Word	Related noun	Meaning
ambitious	<i>ambition</i>	eager to succeed
cautious	<i>caution</i>	careful; wary
fictitious	<i>fiction</i>	not real; made up
infectious	<i>infection</i>	able to spread disease
nutritious	<i>nutrition</i>	providing nourishment
superstitious	<i>superstition</i>	believing in luck/magic
contentious	<i>contention</i>	likely to cause argument
pretentious	<i>pretention</i>	attempting to seem important
ostentatious	<i>ostentation</i>	showy; designed to impress

Tricky cases

conscious / conscience / conscientious

conscious (-cious): aware, awake

conscience (noun): the moral sense of right and wrong

conscientious (-tious, from Latin *conscientia*): careful and thorough — this is -tious despite seeming like it should be -cious. The *t* comes from the Latin root *conscientiōsus*.

suspicious: although *suspicion* ends in *-ion* not *-tion*, the related form is *-cious* not *-tious*. The *c* comes from the Latin *suspiciosus*.

Common mistakes

Wrong	Right	Reason
<i>ambitious</i>	ambitious	<i>ambition</i> → <i>-tious</i>
<i>cautous</i>	cautious	<i>caution</i> → <i>-tious</i>
<i>delicious</i>	delicious	<i>delic-</i> + <i>-ious</i> → <i>-cious</i>
<i>consciencious</i>	conscientious	<i>conscienti-</i> + <i>-ous</i> → <i>-tious</i>
<i>spacious</i>	spacious	<i>spac-</i> + <i>-ious</i> → <i>-cious</i>

Word sort

Find the related noun. Then sort by ending.

Words: ambitious · vicious · cautious · precious · fictitious · conscious · nutritious · spacious · suspicious · ferocious · infectious · delicious

-cious	-tious

Dictation sentences

The **ferocious** storm made it **cautious** to venture outside.

She was **ambitious** and **conscious** of every opportunity.

The **delicious** and **nutritious** meal was served in a **spacious** dining hall.

His **suspicious** behaviour during the **fictitious** game made everyone nervous.

With **precious** little time left, she made a **conscientious** effort to finish.

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). All statutory word examples verified against the published statutory word lists for Years 5–6.