

SoundSpel
Written as it sounds
Pronounced as it's written

SoundSpel is a reform spelling system that makes English spelling simple and regular, while preserving continuity from traditional spelling. Its great advantage over other reform spelling systems is that it is easier to learn, and particularly easy to read, for those raised with traditional spelling. Specifically, Soundspel:

- Does not introduce any new symbols, thus making it compatible with the current (QWERTY) keyboard.
- Relies upon familiar digraphs.
- Does not assign unusual notations for sounds (ex. using q for the ng sound), except for 'uu' and 'zh'.
- Does not introduce diacritical marks (such as accents), which are generally not favored in English-speaking countries.
- Does not dramatically change the appearance of existing words.
- Keeps the spelling of the 12 most common words, uses s for plurals and possessives, and current 'th' digraph.

A concise summary of SoundSpel rules are:

1. Short vowels are a single letter, as in: sat, set, did, dot, cut
2. Long vowels are followed immediately by an e, as in: sundae, see, die, toe, cue
3. No silent letters
4. Most double letters are removed
5. Consonants such as f, c, s, j, g have a consistent, single sound and spelling

This results in a system that is intuitive and consistent:

| | |
|--|--|
| hat, have, laugh, plaid → hat, hav, laf, plad | roll, hole, soul, goal, bowl → roel, hoel, soel, goel, boel |
| red, head, said, friend → red, hed, sed, frend | tough, love, judge, tongue → tuf, luv, juj, tung |
| herd, earth, birth, journey → herd, erth, berth, jerny | knight, receipt, asthma → niet, reseet, azma |
| hide, fight, find, sign, knight → hied, fiet, fiend, sien, niet | phone, city, judge, gorgeous → foen, sity, juj, gorjus |

Phonetics

Phonemes are represented as follows, with nearest possible International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) equivalent.

| Notation | IPA | Example | Notation | IPA | Example |
|----------|-----|---------|----------|-------|---------|
| a | /æ/ | sat | ae | /eɪ/ | sundae |
| e | /ɛ/ | set | ee | /i:/ | see |
| i | /ɪ/ | did | ie | /aɪ/ | die |
| o | /ɒ/ | dot | oe | /oo/ | toe |
| u | /ʌ/ | cut | ue | /ju:/ | cue |

| Notation | IPA | Example | Notation | IPA | Example |
|----------|------------|---------|----------|-------|---------|
| ar | /ɑ:r/ | bar | arr | /æ:r/ | marry |
| er | /ɜ:r, ə:r/ | merger | err | /ɛ:r/ | cherry |
| or | /ɔ:r/ | for | orr | /ɒ:r/ | sorry |

| Notation | IPA | Example |
|----------|--------|---------|
| air | /ɛər/ | air |
| aa | /ɑ:/ | alm |
| eer | /i:r/ | beer |
| oo | /u:/ | moon |
| uu | /ʊ/ | guud |
| oi | /ɔɪ/ | coin |
| ou/ow | /aʊ/ | out |
| au/aw | /ɔ:/ | saw |
| ur | /ʊər/ | tour |
| uer | /jʊər/ | cure |

| Notation | IPA | Example |
|----------|------|----------|
| b | /b/ | bat |
| c/k | /k/ | cat, kit |
| ch | /tʃ/ | chat |
| d | /d/ | did |
| f | /f/ | fat |
| g | /g/ | gag |
| h | /h/ | hat |
| j | /dʒ/ | jet |
| l | /l/ | let |
| m | /m/ | met |
| n | /n/ | net |
| ng | /ŋ/ | singing |
| nk | /ŋk/ | ink |
| p | /p/ | pep |
| q | /kw/ | quake |
| r | /r/ | red |
| s | /s/ | set |
| sh | /ʃ/ | shed |
| t | /t/ | tot |
| th | /θ/ | thin |
| th | /ð/ | this |
| v | /v/ | van |
| w | /w/ | war |
| wh | /w/ | why |
| x | /ks/ | box |
| y | /j/ | yes |
| z | /z/ | zoo |
| zh | /ʒ/ | azure |

Exceptions and other differences

U

U, meaning "you", is capitalized.

Common words

There is no change in the words *was*, *as*, *of*, *the*, *he*, *she*, *me*, *we*, *be*, *do*, *to*, and *off*. Words derived from these (such as *being*, *together*, and *thruout*) also remain unchanged. Words ending in *-ful* remain unchanged.

Word-final S

There is no change in the plural suffix *-s* (as in *jobs*), the possessive suffix *'s* (as in *man's*), and in the third person present singular verb suffix *-s* (as in *he runs*), even though in all these cases the *s* is sometimes pronounced [z].

"Th" digraph and x

There is no change in the digraph *th*, even though it can be pronounced as voiced [ð] or unvoiced [θ]. Similarly, the letter *x* is retained for both voiced [gz] and unvoiced [ks]. The reason is that unvoiced occurrences outnumber the voiced 5 to 1, and words normally calling for a voiced *x* are understood even if pronounced unvoiced.

Schwa

There are usually no changes in the spelling of short (schwa) vowels in the unstressed syllables of words like *organ*, *novel*, *pencil*, and *lemon*, unless the spelling would otherwise indicate an over-pronunciation of the word (as in *mountain*).

Stress

Depending on its position in the word or root, the unstressed "half ee" (as in *between*, *detect*, *reform*, *champion*, *editorial*, *hapyer*, and *fifty*) continues to be spelled as *e*, *i*, or *y*.

Double "rr"

As in traditional orthography, indicates that the preceding vowel is short (as in *carry*, *merry*, and *sorry*).

Double "ll"

Indicates that the preceding *a* is pronounced /ɔ:l/, as in *fall*, *tall*, and *call*.

Word-final O and I

The long *o* or long *i* sound at the end of a word may be written with a single letter, as in *banjo*, *go*, *so*, *alibi*, *hi*, *fli*, *mi* (but *banjoes*, *alibieing*, *flies*, etc., since the vowel is no longer at the end of the word).

Ambiguous syllable breaks

A hyphen following a vowel unambiguously separates a long vowel from another vowel following, as in *re-enter* and *co-operate*.

False diphthongs

If two vowels—such as *ea*—do not match a digraph on the SoundSpel chart, then the syllable ends with the first vowel: *react* (*ea* is not a digraph), *jeenius*, *memorial*, *creaetiv*. In cases of more than two vowels the syllable ends with the first digraph: *floodid* (*oo*, being the first digraph, ends the syllable—it is not *flo-oid*), *hieest*, *freeing*, *inueendo*, *power*, *continueing*, *paeabl*, *evaluateet*.

History

SoundSpel has a long history of development that was closely associated with the reform spelling movement in the twentieth century. Walter Ripman and William Archer wrote the first dictionary of the system, "New Spelling" (NuSpelling), which was republished in 1941 by the Simplified Spelling Society. In 1969 Godfrey Dewey improved upon Ripman's and Archer's work, producing "World English Spelling". Dewey and Edward Rondthaler, a prominent typesetter, CEO of International Typeface Corporation, corresponded from 1971.

In 1986 the book "Dictionary of Simplified American Spelling" written by Rondthaler and Edward Lias was published by the American Language Academy. This called for improvements to spelling, with clearer rules and better grapheme/ phoneme correspondence. It was slightly less strict than Classic New Spelling, allowing "the" rather than "dhe", for example. The system was further reformed from 1987 on and became SoundSpel.

References

Dewey, Godfrey, World English Spelling (WES) Dictionary, Lake Placid Club, N.Y., Simpler Spelling Association, 1969.

Ripman, Walter and Archer, William, New Spelling, 6th edition, London: Pittman House, 1948. Available at: <http://spellingsociety.org/books>

Rondthaler, Edward and Edward J. Lias, "Soundspel: A revised orthography of the English language," in IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, vol. PC-21, no. 1, pp. 25-29, March 1978. DOI: [10.1109/TPC.1978.6592434](https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.1978.6592434)

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