

2027
words of the
champions

YOUR KEY TO THE BEE

Scripps National Spelling Bee®

welcome to your spelling bee adventure!

Have you ever dreamed of standing on stage, spelling a super tricky word, and hearing the crowd cheer when you get it right? Maybe you even imagine making it all the way to the Scripps National Spelling Bee! If that sounds like you, then guess what? You're already on your way to becoming part of something truly special—an awesome spelling tradition that's been buzzing since 1925!

This guide, *Words of the Champions*, is your ultimate ticket to Bee success. It's the official study tool for the Scripps National Spelling Bee, and it's packed with 4,000 amazing words to help you prepare for district, county, regional, and even state-level spelling bees during the 2026–2027 season.

Every word in this guide comes straight from the experts at the Bee and is chosen from our trusted dictionary, Merriam-Webster Unabridged. And guess what? This year, we've added over 500 brand-new words just for you!

To make studying easier (and more fun!), the guide is split into three levels:

- **one bee** – A great place to start! These words mostly sound like they're spelled and follow common patterns.
- **two bee** – Getting trickier! These words have more syllables, more patterns to learn and more complex meanings.
- **three bee** – The challenge zone! These are the toughest words: rule-breakers, oddballs and words you might not see every day.

And here's a Bee secret: while spelling bees often start with words from this guide, they usually end with words you've never seen before! That's why it's important to understand how words work, not just memorize them.

To help you out, we've added:

- Word stories that bring tough words to life
- Fun games and themed word lists
- A section on language patterns and root words to help you decipher unfamiliar words like a pro

One awesome speller who uses this guide will go on to become the next Scripps National Spelling Bee Champion. But every student who studies these words is helping keep this amazing American tradition alive and buzzing, one word at a time.

So, grab your pencil, flex your brain and get ready to spell your heart out. Because if you're using this guide, working hard and having fun, you're already a champion in our book!



words of the
champions

YOUR KEY TO THE BEE



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a note about this year's word lists

The 2026-27 School Spelling Bee Study List isn't included in this study book. Don't worry! That 450-word list is still available to all schools that enroll in the 2026-2027 Scripps National Spelling Bee program. It's specially designed for students getting ready for classroom and school-level spelling bees.

Words of the Champions is your go-to guide for the next level—perfect for preparing for county, district, regional and state bees, plus the early rounds of the National Competition. It's where champions take their training to the next level!

pro tip:

You can access both the 450-word School Spelling Bee Study List and the full 4,000-word *Words of the Champions* list in the free Word Club app, available on iOS and Android. Inside the app, you can:

-  Hear every word pronounced by the Bee's head pronouncer Dr. Jacques Bailly
-  Practice vocabulary with quizzes and flashcards
-  Master all 4,450 words with tools designed to help you succeed!



So, whether you're just starting out or training for the championship stage, we've got everything you need to *bee* your best!



brand-new this year

We are excited to introduce a new resource for parent and families: the **Spelling Bee Resource Center!**

This online hub gives families of spellers at enrolled schools direct access to study materials and instructional content. Parents can create an account, log in and download study lists—making it easier than ever to support spelling bee preparation at home.

The Resource Center also features rotating content, including exclusive word games and study tips designed to help students explore the material, strengthen their skills and prepare for competition.

Parents, visit **www.spellingbee.com/resource-center** to create an account today!



We are thrilled to launch the Spelling Bee Resource Center in partnership with **College Board**, the official student success partner of the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

You may know College Board through AP courses, the SAT and BigFuture. We're proud to partner with an organization that recognizes the qualities spellers demonstrate every day: curiosity, discipline and the courage to take on a challenge.

Our mission is simple: clear a path for every student to own their future. Our programs are built around the durable skills, practice, persistence, and focus, that make those outcomes possible—the same skills your students are already building at the Bee.

let's
get
started



difficulty level: one bee



Welcome to the starting line of your spelling adventure! These words are a great place to begin—they usually sound like they're spelled and follow familiar patterns. Organized alphabetically, this section is perfect for building confidence, spotting patterns and getting into the spelling bee spirit. Every champion starts here!

Words with a single asterisk (*) indicate a primarily British spelling. A double asterisk (**) indicates the spelling that is more widely used. A complete list of the words that were newly added to this year's study list can be found on page 51.

a

abaft
abashed
abject
abolish
abolitionists
aboriginal
absurdity
acceptance
acclaim
accolade
accomplice
accountable
acquit
acrostic
adage
addendum
addition
addle

to throw into confusion or disorder.

adjacent
adjudicate
admonition
adnate
adsum
advection
aforesaid

afroth
agility
agitation
airborne
alienate
alms
aloof
alpaca
altercation
amass
amendment
amiably
Amish
amnesty
amputate
amulet

a charm inscribed with a spell.

amusement
anarchic
ancho
anime
anklet
anniversary
annotate
anoint
ante
anthropology
anticlimactic

antiseptic
apparel
apparently
appealing
applicable
appraisal
apprehensive
arithmetical
Arthurian
assertion
astounding
astronaut
aswoon
atonement
atrophy
attempt
attendee
attitude
auction
auditorium
august

of majestic dignity or grandeur.

avalanche
avatar
avenue
aviation
awry
azure

b

bailiff
baleful
ballad
banquet
baptismal
barbie
bask
beau
become
begirdle
behavior

OR behaviour*

Bengal
bespoke
bewitched
bigotry
birdie
blandest
blandish
blarney

Read the story behind
the word on page 91!

bleary
bleat
blingy
blink
blotter
blurb
boarders
boggle

bonanza
bonus
boogie-woogie
bootless
botany
bowie

a large hunting knife.

brace
brace
brackish
breakthrough
breathtaking
brick
brigand
brittle
brochure
broil
buffoonery
bumblebee
bungee
burial
burrito
buzzworthy
bystander

c

cabbage
cadence
camcorder
canary

candid
canoe
cantor
capacity
capitalist
captivated
capture
Caribbean
carnation
carriage
casserole
casualty
catchall
cathedral
catnap
celebratory
celestial
cello
census
centipede
charitable
chastise
cheddar
chief
churlish
cidery
cinderella
circuit
citation
clarinet
classified
clearance



spelling around the globe

Did you know the Scripps National Spelling Bee isn't just for the U.S.? While most spellers come from the United States, spellers from all over the world join in the fun too!

You'll find amazing spellers from territories, countries, and places like **Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, Canada, Ghana, Nigeria**, and even **Department of Defense Schools in Europe**. That means the Bee is truly a global spelling celebration!

No matter where you're from, if you love words, the Bee welcomes you!

cleave
cliché
clickbait
clinician
closure
coach
coalition
coastal
cobra
cockles

the center or core of one's
sentient being.

collaboration
collapse
collar
collie
collision
combustible
commandeer
commercial
comparison
compass
compelling
complementary
complex
composite
composure
concrete
concurrent

happening at the same
time.

condiments
condor

conference
confirmation
confound
confrontation
considerable
consideration
consorting
constraints
contamination
contemporary
contend
contested
context
contraction
contradictory
contrite
contusion
conundrum
convention
convocation
convoy
cookie-cutter
cooperate
copperhead
corkscrew
cornily
coverage
cranium
creed
crippled
criteria
criticized
OR criticised*
crucial
culprit

curator
curtail
cyborg
cycle
cyclone
cymbals

d

daft
daisy
debunk

Read the story behind
the word on page 84!

defeat
definitely
delta
demand
demonetize
demoted
demothball

to remove the
preservative covering
from something.

denim
deployment
derby
destructive
detail
detestable
dialect
dicey
diddly-squat
digression
dinette

in good company

Spelling isn't just cool—it's *super* popular! Every year, over **11 million** students from all over the country (and the world!) join in the spelling bee fun. That's a whole lot of buzzing brains!

If you make it to the **Scripps National Spelling Bee's National Competition**, you're not just good, you're *incredible*! You'll be one of the top .00002% of spellers on the planet. That's like being one in a million... literally!

So spell on, superstar—you're in amazing company!



disaster
disco
disposition
disreputable
distinctive
distinguish
districts
diva
diverge
diversion
diversity
divisive
docket
domino
donatee
donatio
doneness
doomed
downcast
dramatization
drenched
dribbles
drivel

to talk stupidly and
carelessly without
thought.

dualism
Dudley
duress
dynamite

e

eagerly
earmark
earnestly
eclectic
eclipse
editorial
effortless
eighth
elaborative
elasticity
elegant
elicitation

eligibility
elixir
ellipse
elocution
elusive
emancipatory
embassy
embezzlement
emblazoned
emerald
empire
endearing
enervate
engagement
engender
engineer
enterprising
entrapment
entreat

to beg for.

entrepreneur
enviable
erode
eruption
escalator
escapade
essential
establishment
evaluate
eventual
evident
ewe
exaggerate
exceedingly
excursion
exercise
existence
expansion
expedition
expenditures
explode
extensive
extinguish
extol

OR extoll**

extracurricular
extradition
extraordinaire
exude

f

facade
fadeaway
fallacy
fanatic
fanfic
feeble
fellowship
felonious
fervently
fez
fiction
fidelity
fie

used to express disgust.

fiendishly
fife
flabbergast
flashback
flavor
OR flavour*
fleeciness
flexitarian
flight
flipperling
floridly
flounder
flourish
flout
fluctuation
fluid
flummery
foible
folate
folklore
folly
fomentation
foozle

foppery
forecast
forensics
forfeit
forgeable
formalize
OR formalise*
fortification
fractions
frailty
fraying
freakishly
freegan

an activist who scavenges for unused food.

freight
fribble
frigid
frisket
frock
frontier
fundamental
furiously
futility

g

gab
gaffer
gaggle
gallant
galley
gangplank
gardenesque
gargle
garniture
gateway
gaucho
gawkers
gazette
generalization
OR generalisation*
genteel

gesture
ghastly
giggle
gist
gizzard
glacier
glint
glisten
glossary
gnarled
gnome
goblet
Godspeed
goober
googly
gospel
gossip
gotcha
gradation
grandeur
grandomania
grapple
gratifying
gridiron

a football field.

griefful
groom
grotto
grout
gruel

h

habitual
handle
handyman
haphazard
hapless
hardtack
harrowing
hatchet
haunted
hazardous
heavenly

hecklers
hectic
heightened
heiress
heist
heraldic
hermitage
Highlands
hijab

the traditional covering for the hair and neck that is worn by Muslim women.

hoagies
hoarse
hoax
hobble
hollywoodize
homesteader
horrid
horseradish
hospice
hostile
howler
humdrum
hurled
husk
hutch

i

Icelandic
illumine
illustrator
immobilize
OR immobilise*
implementation
imposing
inclusion
income
individual
infiltrate
infirm

influential
inglorious

not bringing honor or
accompanied with fame.

injunction
insight
insisted
insomnia
installation
intellectual
intermission
intertidal
intricate
introspection
invasive
iris
irrigation
isms
isolation

j

jammer
jankers
jitterbug
joinery

k

kazoo
kennel
kenning
kernel
kilt

kindred
kingfisher
knee-jerk
knight
knoll

a mound or hillock.

kodak

l

labradoodle
lanai
languish
lateral
latter
lay-ups
league
leaven
legitimately
leisure
leotard
lexicon
liege
ligament
likelier
limelight
linguistics
literally
liturgy
livid
lobbyist
lobster
locket
logical

lolloped
luau
lyricist

m

maddening
madrigal
magus
mahogany
maidenhair
maize
mambo
mammoth
manacle
manicure
manifests
manna

something of value that
falls one's way.

mantra
manure
manuscript
marathon
maritime
martial
Martian
maternity
matrimony
mauve
meaningful
measurable
medallion
melody
melted



the first Bee

Way back in **1925**, the very first National Spelling Bee kicked off—organized by the Louisville Courier-Journal. It was a small but mighty contest, with just **nine spellers** competing.

The champion? A spelling superstar named **Frank Neuhauser**, who took home the crown by nailing the word “**gladiolus**”—a fancy flower name!

membership
memes
memorandum
mentor
menu
merchandise
mercury
Merlin
merry
Mesoamerican
meteor
metrical
Michigander
migratory
millionaire
ministry
minutia
miraculous
mischief
missile
missive
mockery
modality
modem
modify
modular
molasses
monastery

mongoose
monopolize
OR monopolise*
montage
moped

a lightweight low-powered motorbike that can be pedaled.

morose
muddle
mummified
mundane
musings
muskrat
mythical

n

navaid
naysayers
neaten
necessity
nelson
nerfing
nervily
niece
nifty
nirvana

nocturnal
nominee
nonconformist
nosh
notable
notorious
novelties
nozzles
nuggets

o

oatmeal
obliterate
oblong
oboe
obscure
octopus
olympiad
omega
omission
ontology
oppress
optician
opulent
oracle
orchestra

100 years of spelling magic

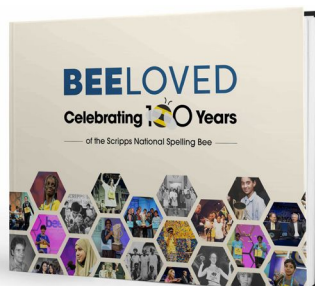
Can you believe it? In 2025, the Scripps National Spelling Bee turned **100 years old!** That's a whole century of spelling, studying and standing ovations.

The Bee is the **nation's largest and longest-running educational program**, and it's been inspiring super spellers like you for generations!

Want to take a piece of Bee history home?
Check out our official book:

Beeloved: Celebrating 100 Years of the Scripps National Spelling Bee

Buzz over to bee100book.com to get your copy!



oregano
ouster

an ejection from a position
or place : an expulsion.

outing
overtures
owed
ozone

p

pablo
packet
pageantry
paginate
palatial
pallor
panelist
parboil
parkour
parley
parlor
OR parlour*
passage
pastime
pasture
patches
pathogen
patience
pauper
peat
peddle
pedigree
pending
peninsular
performance
pervasive
petunia
photogenic
physical
pillar
placate
platinum

pliant
plover

a shore-inhabiting bird.

plummet
poised
polarized
policy
portal
portrait
portrayal
praise
preacher
precinct
preclude
predator
predicament
premonition
previous
primitive
primrose
principality
prism
privy
procedure
procrastinate
production
profiteer
prone
pronounced
proposal
propulsion
prosperous
protein
proxy
puckish
pulpit
pummel
OR pommel*
punctuation
punily
puniness
pupil
puritan

putrid
pyramid

q

quantify
quart
quickstep
quirky

full of peculiarities.

quota

r

rabid
radius
raffle
ragwort
railroad
rambling
ramen
rapidly
ravenous
rebound
rebuff
recanted
reckless
recollections
reconsider
recovery
redemption
refinery
regiment
regional
reign
reiterate
rejuvenate
remain
remnants
remorseful
renewable
renovating

repatriation

the act of returning to one's country of origin.

resemble

residue

respite

restive

retorts

retriever

revelation

revulsive

riddance

riffraff

righteous

rigorous

OR rigorous*

riviera

rootage

rotary

row

rubric

rugby

rumor

OR rumour*

S

sacrifice

salivate

sallow

sanction

scabbard

scalp

scammed

scandal

scanty

scenario

scholarship

sci-fi

sconce

scooter

scope

scornfully

scape

scrapple

screeching

screeno

scrimmage

scripture

scrooge

scrounge

scrutiny

sculpture

seclusion

selfie

seller

semester

sensory

sepal

September

sequel

serenade

serfdom

service

servitude

shaggy

sheaf

sheaves

shindig

a usually large often overly lavish party.

Read the story behind the word on page 90!

shipping

shore

shrapnel

singe

sister

skeleton

skimmed

skirmish

skydiving

slab

slender

sloop

slurry

snitch

snobbery

snowy

sodden

solicit

solidity

solitude

solstice

solvency

sonnet

sorbet

spackle

spangled

spatula

specificity

spectral

spiteful

splintered

sprite

spry

squabble

squeamish

squelch

stagestruck

stamina

stampede

stance

standee

starling

steampunk

stereotypical

sterling

sternum

stewardship

stipend

stodgy

devoid of excitement or interest : dull, prosaic.

stolid

stomach

storm

stowaway

stratagem

strenuous

struggle

stubbornness
stupefy
subdued
substance
substitute
suffix
suffused
suitable
sulkiness
sunseeker
supercargo
surly
sustain
sweepstakes
sweltering
swindler
sympathy

t

tabloid
tactfully
tango
tariff
tarnish
tase
tawny
teamwork
tearjerker
teenagers
tendency
terminator
terrorism
testament
thespian

an actor.

thrift
toastmaster
toilsome
tortoni
touted
trajectory
transference
travesty
treasury
treatise
trespass
trinkets
trombone
trounce
trove
truly
truncate
trustee
tubers
tunnel
tutorial

u

udon

a Japanese noodle.

unabridged
unbeknownst
undercroft
undertake
underwhelmed
unfazed
unheeded
universal
university

unsightly
uppercut
urgency
usher

v

vane
vapid
variance
various
varnish
varsity
vascular
vault
veered
vendetta
vendors
venison
versatile
version
vindictive
vinegar
violate
virtually
visa

an endorsement made on a passport showing it has been examined and that the bearer is allowed to enter the country.

visibility
vlogging



cruising the airwaves

Guess what? The very first time the National Spelling Bee was broadcast, it wasn't on TV—it was on the **radio**! Yep, back in the day, people listened to the action instead of watching it.

It wasn't until **1946** that the Bee made its big debut on television screens. From sound waves to screen time, the Bee has been making waves for decades!



W

waggery
wamble
wand
wanderlust
wanness
warily
wastrel
waterloo
weald
wealthy
weaponry
weighty
welding
wept
western
wheedle

to get or get away
with something by
using flattery.

whelp
whereas
whey
whimsical
whirlybird

wield
wimple
wince
winches
windbaggery
wombat
wordmonger
wring

Y

yammer
yawl
yeaoling
yippee
yonder
yoo-hoo
yore

difficulty level:

two bee



You've mastered the basics—now it's time to dive into trickier territory! These words have more syllables, new patterns and more complex meanings to explore. Alphabetically organized to help you along the way, this section is all about expanding your word power and pushing your skills to the next level. Keep buzzing—you're doing great!

Words with a single asterisk (*) indicate a primarily British spelling. A double asterisk (**) indicates the spelling that is more widely used. A complete list of the words that were added to this year's study list can be found on page 51.

a

abdicate
aberration
ablation
ablaut
abnegation
abrader
Abrahamic
abrogate
abscess
abscond
absolution
abstemious
Abyssinian
Acadians
accentuate
acerbity
achromatic
acoustic
acquiesce
acquisition
acral

of or belonging to the extremities of peripheral body parts.

acumen
acupuncture
adagietto
adiaphorism

Adirondack
adjag
adjugate
adjure
adolescence
adulation
advertisement
OR advertizement**
advocatory
aerophobia
affeer
affiliate
affluent
affogato
aficionado
OR aficionado*
agalma
agarita
agate
agave
agelicism
aggrandizement
agio
aglossal
agnail
agonistic
agoraphobia
agrarian
agroecotype
aguaji

aikido
aioli
albeit
alchemy
alembroth
Alexandria
alimentation
allergenic
alliteration
allocable
allonym
allusions
alluvial
alpestrine
althorn
alveoli

air cells of the lungs.

Alzheimer
ambiguous
ambrosial
amimia
ammonite
Amratian
amygdala
anabolic
anachronism
anacreontic
anaglyphy
analects

anaplasma
 anastomosis
 anatomical
 anchorage
 ancillary
 ancistroid
 andirons
 anent
 anHINGA
 anicca
 anionic
 anise
 anito
 Anjou
 ankh
 anneal
 annuity
 annulment
 anodyne
 anole**
 OR anoli
 anonymity
 anorak

Read the story behind
the word on page 92!

anserine
 antacid
 antagonistic
 anthropomorphic
 antipathy
 antiquarian
 antiresorptive
 antithesis
 aperture
 aporia
 apostrophe
 apothecary
 apotheosis
 apotropaic
 apparatus
 approbatory
 aqueous
 aquiclude
 arbitrary

arboretum
 arbutus
 archetype
 arduous
 arietta
 armaments
 armature
 armistice
 arpeggio
 arraign
 arrearage
 arrieros
 arsenal
 art brut
 artifice
 asado
 ascension
 ascertain
 Asgard
 Asiago
 aspic
 aspish
 assailant
 assiduous
 assumption
 asthmatic
 astigmatism
 astral
 astringent
 astrobleme
 Astur
 atavistic
 Aten
 atman

the supreme universal
self - used in Hinduism.

atrabillious
 atresia
 atrio
 attributive
 attrition
 aughts
 augment
 augury

auklet
 aureate
 aurene
 aureole
 auricular
 aurora
 auspices
 austere
 autobahn
 avarice
 avowedly
 avuncular
 Azilian

b

babka
 babouche
 bacteriolytic
 Bactrian
 balsamic
 bandicoot
 bandolerismo
 bango
 bannock
 baobab
 Barbados
 barbican
 barnacle
 Barnevelder
 baronetcy
 barrio
 basilica
 bastide
 Bavarian cream
 béarnaise
 beatific
 beatnik
 beguile
 beguine
 Belgravia
 belladonna
 Bellatrix
 beloid

benign
bequeath
Berber
bereavement
bermudas
berok
beseech
besieged
bethesda
bezique
bezoar
bibliopagist
bicameral
bifurcate
bilaterian
bilbo
billabong
billet
billingsgate
biltong
binomial
biomimicry
birria
blastema
blastogenesis
blintzes
bloviate
bodega
bodkin
boffin

a scientific expert - used as British slang.

boiserie
boisterous
bolivar
bombardier
bona fide
boneen
bonobo
boomslang
boondoggle

Read the story behind the word on page 93!

boreal
borosilicate
borough
bottega
bouffant
bourgade
bourgeoisie
bowsprit
bragozzo
braille
Bramantesque
brassicas
bravado
breviloquence
Brigadoon
Broccolini
brockage
brogue
bromide
brontophobia

bruxism
bubonic
bulgogi
bulwark
Bundt
bungalow
buoyancy
bureau
burglarious
burgoo
busby

C

cabaret
cabildo
cacao
cacophonous
caduceus
caducity
calcaneus
calcify
calendula
calumet
calvados
calypso
calyx
cambio
cameist
campanology
cancion
candelabrum



archaic or obsolete? not here!

Here's a secret: the Bee doesn't use super old words that nobody really says anymore. That means **no obsolete** or **archaic** words show up in the competition—or even in 2027 *Words of the Champions*!

Why? Because obsolete words stopped being part of regular English way back in **1755**—and archaic words only pop up in special places like poems or prayers.

Why 1755? That's when Samuel Johnson published the first big, fancy English dictionary in London.

cannoli
 Canopus
 cantankerous
 cantilever
 Caodaism
 capillary
 capnometer
 capricious
 capstan
 carbohydrates
 carcass
 OR carcase*
 cardoon
 caret
 caribou
 caricature
 carnassial
 carnitas
 carnitine
 carotenoid**
 OR carotinoid
 Cartesian
 cartilage
 Cassandra
 cassock
 castellated
 castigate
 Castilian
 castor
 catadromous
 catalepsy
 catalina
 catalyst

catecholamine
 cathect
 cathode
 cattalo
 OR catalo
 caucho
 caudex

 causal
 caustic
 cauterize
 cavalcade
 cayenne
 ceinture
 celandine
 cellophane
 Celsius
 cenotaph
 centaur
 centennial
 cerberus
 cerebellum
 Ceres
 cereza
 cetology
 Ceylon
 chaebol
 chamberlain
 chamomile**
 OR camomil
 Chamorro
 chamotte

the woody base of a perennial plant.

chancellor
 channelopathy
 chanterelle**
 OR chantarelle
 chaparral**
 OR chapparral
 chapter
 chapon
 charcuterie
 charismatic
 charlatan
 charnel
 château
 chaton

the head of the ring in which a stone is set.

chauvinism
 Cheshire cat
 chevalier
 Chiapas
 chide
 chilarium
 chimera
 OR chimaera*
 chinook
 cholera
 cholesterol
 chromotrichial
 chrysalis
 chrysolite
 chupacabra
 churchianity
 cicada



the mystery of silent letters!

Why do words have sneaky silent letters that don't make a sound? Take the word "**debt**" for example—it comes from the Latin word **debitum**, which means "debt." When French borrowed the word, they dropped the "**b**" to make it simpler. But when English borrowed it back a few hundred years later, we put the "**b**" right back in!

Why? Probably to make the word look fancy and *classical*—but it definitely makes spelling trickier! Silent letters are like little secrets from the past hiding inside words. Cool, right?

cilantro
Cincinnati
circadian
circuitous
circumstantial
civet
cladistics
cladogram
clairvoyance
clandestine
clarion
clavicle
clemency
cloamen
cloture
coalescence
coaxation
cochin
cochlear
codswallop
coercive
cogently
cogitation
cognizant
 OR cognisant*
cohesive
cohosh
coiffure
colewort
colleague
collectanea
collegiality
collimate
colloidal
collude
colocate
cologne
columbarium
comitatus
comminatory
commiserative
commissar
commissioner
commodious
commove

comparsa
compendium
con forza

with force - used as a
direction in music.

concision
conclave
concordance
condign
conduit
Conestoga
confabulation
confetti
congeners
congeniality
conglutinant
coniferous
consecrate
consecutive
consequent
constabulary
constituent
conticent
contiguous
continuous
continuum
contraband
contractually
contrariwise
contrivance
contumelious
copra
Coptic
coqui
coracidium
cordillera
corduroy
coriander
corinth
Corinthian
corm
cornel
cornucopia
corollary
coroner

corroborate
corrosive
corsage
cortex
corvid
cotangent
cotyledon
courtoisie
crasis
credence
credulity
Cree
creel
crenation
crepuscular
Cretaceous
cribbage
cribble
cribo

a large harmless snake.

crinoid
crith
croquette
croupier
cruciferous
cryogenic
cryptic
ctetology
cuartel
cudgel
cum laude
cumbersome
cummerbund
cumulus
cunette
cupidity
curare
curie
curmudgeon
cybernetics
cygnet
cynicism
Cyrillic

d

da capo
dace
dactylic
Dalmatian
damascened
dambos
dandle
danicism
danseur
danta
danzón
dariole
darnel
dashiki
daubster
davenport
deathin
debacle
debarrass
debilitate
debutante
deceased
deceitful
deceleron
deciduous
decimation
declamatory
declension
declination
decursion

a Roman cavalry officer
in command of 10 men.

deglaciation
delectable
deleterious
deliquesce
delirium
deltoidal
dementia
demerits
demersal
Demeter

demographics
demonstrative
demulcent
dendrite
denigration
denominator
depose
depreciate
depredation
deprivation
derelict
derisive
derivative
deserter
desertification
desolate
desuetude
détraqué
detritus
deus ex machina
devoir
diabolical
diacritic
diadem
diallelon
dialysis
Dianthus
diaspora
diathermy
diatonic
diatribe
diaulos
dicrotic
dietetic
dihedral
dilapidated
diligence
dimorphism
dinanderie
diocese
diphthong
diptych
dirigible

steerable.

discernment
discombobulate

Read the story behind
the word on page 85!

discountenance
discreetly
discretionary
disembogue
disjunct
Disneyfication
disparate
disproportionate
dissemble
dissolution
dissonance
distraught
dodecahedron
dogana
doldrums
dolmen
domesticity
dopamine
Doppler
Dorking

an English breed of large
domestic fowls.

doula
dowager
dowdy
draisine
Dramamine
dromic
druid
drumlin
drupiferous
dryad
du jour
dungarees
duplicitous
durango
dysautonomia
dyschromatopsia
dysgraphia

dyspeptic
dystopia

e

ebenaceous
ebullience
eburnean
eccrinology
ecesis
echidna
echinulate
eclogue
ecossaise
ectoplasm
Ecuador
edelweiss
Edwardian
effervescent
efflorescence
efflux
effusive
eggcorn
eglomise
egress
elodea
embolus
emeritus
eminent
emissary
Emmy
empanada
emulsify
en masse
encomium
ensconced
ensorcell
OR ensorcel

ensued
entente
entrails
epaxial
epenthesis
epidermis
epidural
epiphany
episcopal
epistaxis
epithet
epoch
equinox
equipoise
equivalent
equivocate
eradicate
ergo
ermine
errata
erroneous
erstwhile
eructation
erythema
escarpment
eschew
espousal
ethmoid
etymological
eucalyptus
eucrasia
euphonious
Eurocentric
europium
eustress
Evactor
evacuees

evanescent
evangelical
eveque
evo-devo
evzone
ex libris
exaugural
excelsior
excoriate
execrable
exeunt

to go off the stage.

exiguous
existential
exogenous
exorbitant
expatiate
expectorant
expediency
exposé
exposition
expostulate
expugnable
expunge
extemporaneous
extenuating
extravasate
extrorse

f

facetious
faconne
factitious
facundity
Fahrenheit



there's a first time for everything

Meet **Hugh Tosteson**, the spelling bee trailblazer! In **1975**, he became the first champion from outside the 50 U.S. states. He hailed from **Puerto Rico**!

famulus
fanchonette
fanega
fang shih
farcical
fardel
farinose
farkleberry
Farsi
farthingale
fastuous
fatuously
faun
feckless
fenestrated
fenster
feria
fervorous
festooned
feudalism
fiat

permission.

fibula
fictile
fiduciary
filiferous
finial
fipple
firkin
fjeld
flauta

flittern
Florentine
floribunda
floruit
FLOTUS
fluoride
focaccia
follicle
fontina
forbivorous
fortissimo
fra diavolo
fractur/fraktur
Franciscan
Franglais
frappé
frass
frater
fratority
fraudulent
fravashi
fritillary
frittata
frondeur
froward
fructiferous
frugivore
fucoid
fugue
fulmar
fulminate
fumigate

funambulist
funereal
fungible
furcula
fusiform
fussbudget

g

gaiters
galapago
gallbladder
Gallic
gambeson
gambit
ganache
garçon

a waiter in a French restaurant.

garret
gaseous
gasiform
gastronome
gaur
gelatinous
Gemara
genealogical
geniture
geocaching
geriatric
gewgaw



one dictionary to rule them all

Want to know where the Bee gets all its words? It's from one super-powerful dictionary: **Merriam-Webster Unabridged!**

You can explore this amazing dictionary online at unabridged.merriam-webster.com. Use their **advanced search** to find groups of words by their language of origin, definition or part of speech. It's like a treasure map for word lovers!



gibbous
gingivitis
gladiatorial
glaucophane
glial
glissando
glossolalia
gluttonous
gnathic
gnocchi
Gnostic
gnotobiotic
goji berry
Goliath
gossamer
Gothamite
goûter
grande dame
grandiloquent
grandrelle
graticule
gravimetry
gravitas
grazioso
greaves
Gregorian
gressorial
grissino
groats
grobian
gubernatorial
guillotine
gullibility
gumption
gyro

h

haab
habeas corpus
habiliments
haché
hackneyed
hadith
haggis

hagiographer
halal
Halifax
hallucinate
halocline
Hansa

a merchant guild in a medieval town.

haplography
harangue
harbinger
haricot
harrier
hastula
Hathor
hauteur
Hawaiian
hawok
hearse
heckelphone
hedonism
hegemony
Heian
heleoplankton
heliacal
helical
Helsinki
hennery
hermeneutics
hermetically
heterochromia
heterophony
hetman
heuristic
hibernaculum
hierurgical
hinoki
hipsterism
Hiroshima
histrionics
Hitchcockian
holmium
hologram
holotype
homeostasis

homester
homiletics
Honolulu
humectant
humerus
humidistat
hummock
Hungary
Hyades
hydrargyrum
hydriotaphia
hydrocortisone
hydrophobia
hyoid
hyperbole
hypochondria
hypogeous
hypotenuse

i

ibex
Icarian
idiosyncratic
illative
illicitly
illustrious
imago

an insect in its final adult mature usually winged state.

immolate
immortality
impasse
impasto
impecunious
impediment
imperious
impetus
implacable
implicative
impluvium
imponderabilia
impoverish
imprecatory

impresario
 impromptu
 incessant
 incisiform
 incitive
 inclement
 incompetent
 inconceivable
 inconcinnity
 inconnu
 incubate
 indemnity
 indicia
 indigent
 indistinguishable
 indolent
 ineffable
 ineluctable
 ineptitude
 inerrancy
 ingenuous
 ingratiate
 inimical
 inoculate
 insignia
 instigate
 insufflator
 insurgents
 intermittent
 interred
 interrogative
 intersperse
 inveigle
 OR enveigle*
 inveterate
 inviolable
 iridescent
 Iroquois
 irrevocable
 Isle Royale

an island of Michigan
 in northwestern Lake
 Superior.

j

jacamar
 jackal
 jackanapes
 jacquerie
 jactance
 jalapeño
 jambalaya
 jarl
 jaundiced
 jejune
 jeon
 jicama
 jiggery-pokery
 jocularly
 joie de vivre
 jonquil
 jornada
 judicious
 Juglar
 julienne
 Juliet
 jupe

a woman's skirt.

Jurassic
 juvia
 juxtapose

k

kaiser
 karaoke

Read the story behind the
 word on page 86!

katharobic
 katsu
 katydid**
 OR catydid
 kerchief
 kibosh**

OR kybosh
 Kildare

kinesiology
 kiskadee
 klippe
 konimeter
 Krakatoa
 krausen
 krypton
 kufi
 kung pao

l

la bamba
 labroid
 labyrinthine
 laconic
 lacustrine
 ladang
 lambently
 Lancasterian
 languorous
 lanolated
 lantana
 largesses
 larnax
 lassitude
 latifondo
 latigo
 laudatory
 lavender
 leery
 legerity
 lemniscus
 lerot
 leviathan
 liaise
 lidocaine
 lignin
 limned
 limpet
 limpid
 limpkin
 lingua franca
 liniment
 Linotype

linstock
literatim
lithium
lithophone
litterateur
lobectomy
locavore
loch
loculus
logographic
longitude
loquat

a fruit of an Asiatic evergreen tree which is used for preserves.

lorikeet
lossy
lousicide
loutrophoros
lovage
luculent
ludicrous
lumen
lunette
lutrine
luxuriate
lysis

m

macadam
macadamia
machicolation

machination
macle
maclura
macrame
macular
madder
makluk
malacca
maladaptive
maladroit
malady
malambo
malapropism

Read the story behind the word on page 93!

malaxage

the process of softening clay by moistening and working it.

malevolent
malfeasance
malingering
mancando
Mancunian
mano a mano
manubrium
manumit
Manxman
maraschino
Mardi Gras
mare
marginalia
marimba

marram
marring
marsupial
Martinique
martyrdom
masjid
mastodon
matriculation
matsutake
mazzard
mea culpa
mecca
mediocrity
medusa
meemies
megalomaniac
melamine
mélange
melismatic
menat
mendacious
mendicity
meningitis
Mennonites
mephitic
merganser
meridian
merotomize
Mesopotamian
metaphorically
metaplasia
metatarsal
Michaelmas



all about the schwa: the sneaky sound!

Be like the **schwa**—the chilliest sound in English—never stressed! But if you're spelling, the schwa can actually *stress* you out, because it can sound like any vowel: a, e, i, o, u, or y!

That's why words with a schwa can be tricky to spell. Here's a pro tip: ask for the word's language of origin. If it's from Greek, try guessing an "o" for that sneaky schwa sound—like in the word bacteriolytic.

Master the schwa, and you'll be one step closer to spelling victory!

MIDI

an electronic standard used for the transmission of digitally encoded music.

millet
millisecond
milonga
milquetoast
minacious
minestra
minette
minuscule
Miranda
misnomer
mitigative
moano
moggan
moissanite
mollify
monitory
monochrome
monoclonal
monotreme
Montreal
monture
moratorium
morigeration
mormorando
morphological
mortician
motmot
Motrin

movimento
mozzarella
multivoltine
Munich
municipal
muskeg
musketees
muumuu
Mylar
myocarditis
myrrh
mythopoeic

n

nabobs
Namibian
narcoleptic
nauplius
nautilus
Neapolitan
nectarine
neonatology
neophilia
neophysis
Neorican
neoterism
nepotism
netiquette
neuropathy
neuroticism
Newfoundland
nicad

nigella
nitrate
novice
noctambulist
nodiak
no-goodnik
nomancy
nomenclature
nomophobia
non sequitur
nonchalance
nonet
nonvolatile
Norovirus
notoriety
novemdecillion
noxious
Nubia

a region and ancient kingdom along the Nile in southern Egypt and northern Sudan.

nuciform
nucleated
numerology
nutation
nutria
nuzzer
nystagmus



oberek

The Bee's Bookshelf

Welcome to **The Bee's Bookshelf**, the official reading list of the Scripps National Spelling Bee! It's a super fun place where stories and spelling come together.

Every single word on the School Spelling Bee Study List comes from these 24 titles, and every month, we dive into a new book, explore cool words, and share awesome ideas. Want in on the fun? Sign up for our monthly emails to find out which book we're reading next!

Head over to spellingbee.com/bookself and join the adventure!



Obie
oblast
oblique
obloquy
obnebulate
obsecration
obsolete
obstetrician
obstinacy
obstreperous
occultation
Oceanian
octogenarian
octonocular
octuplicate
odist

a writer of lyric poems.

Odysseus
oecist
offal
official
Oglala
okapi
oleo
olfactory
olingo
omnilegent
omniscient
omphacite
opacity
opaleye
operose
ophthalmologist
opodeldoc
opprobrious
oppugn
ordonnance
orfeverie
Orion
orthogonal
orthros
orvietan
oscitation
osculatory

Osloite
osmagogue
osmium
osprey
ossicle
ossuary
ostensibly
osteomalacia
osteopath
ostreger
oviform

p

pabulum
padrone
pagoda
Paleozoic
paletot
palmaris
palmate
palpebral
palpitant
Panama
pancetta
panchreston
pancreas
panopticon
pantomime
pantophagous
papyrus
par excellence
parabola
parameters
paraplegic
parasol
parazonium
parbuckle
Parcheesi
parfleche
parietal
parlay
Parmesan
parochial
parodic

parr
parsec
parsimony
partiality
particulate
parturient
parvo
pashmina
passé**
OR passée
pasteurize
OR pasteurise*

pastrami
patel
patella
patronymic
peacenik
peccant
peculate
pecuniary
pedantry
pelagial
pelerine
pelf
pellicle
Peloponnesian
pendentive
pendragon
pendulous
penitentiary
penultimate
pepita

the edible seed of a
pumpkin or squash
often dried or toasted.

per se
peradventure
perceptible
periaktos
OR periactus
perigon
perigynous
periodontist
peripheral
periwig

periwinkle
permutation
pernicious
perpetrator
perquisite
perseverance
persienne
persimmon
personeity
perspicacious
persuasible
pertinacity
pertussal
pervenche
pestilence
petroleum
phalanx
phantasmagoria
philtrum
phishing
phlebotomy
phosphorescent
phraseology
phycology
phylum
physiognomy
phyteral
pickerel
Pierre
Pilates
pilchard
pileus
pilosity
pilotage
pinnate
pirouette
Pisces
placoderm
plagiarism
plaintiff
planetesimal
plangency
planisphere
planogram

plantigrade
plenitude
plentiful
plumbago
Plumeria
plutonomy
poblano
pochard**
OR poachard
pococurante
podsnappery
poinsettia
pointelle
pointillage
politick
pollutant
polonaise
polonium
polyester
polygenous
polypeptide
polysemy
polysyllabic
pomato
pomegranate
Pomeranian
pomology
pomposity
pongee

a thin, soft clothing and curtain fabric of Chinese origin woven from raw silk and that is a tan color.

populace
porcelain
porosity
portico
posada
possessive
posterity
posthumous
postural
potassium
potentate
potoroo

poudreuse
poulaine
poultice
prehensile
prelapsarian
preponderance
preposterous
preprandial
prerequisite
prerogative
presentient
prespinous
preterite
OR preterit
prevalence
prevenient
primeval**
OR primaeval
primogeniture
princeps
priory
privatim
privet
probative
procrustean
procurement
prodigious
proem
profligacy
profundity
proletarian
proliferate
prolusive
promontory
proprietary
prorogue
prosody
prostaglandin
protean
protuberant
provenance
proviant

provolone
pueblo

a town founded by Mexican Spanish settlers in the southwestern United States.

pugnacious
pulchritude
pulka
purga
purvey
pyrope
pyrotechnics

q

quadriceps
quadrifid
quadrilateral
quadrillion
quarrelsome
querent
quesadilla
questionnaire**
OR questionnaire
quinary
quirt
quittance
quixotic
quoits
quotidian

r

rabato
rabbinic
ramark
rambla

rambunctious
ramson
rankles
rapscallion
raptatorial
rapturous
rariora

distinctive collectors' item.

rasorial
ravelment
ravioli
reagent
rebab
rebarbative
reboation
recalcitrant
reciprocity
reconcilable
reconnoiter**
OR reconnoitre
recreant
recrementitious
recriminatory
recrudescent
recumbent
recusancy
redhibition
refrigerant
refugium
regatta
Reggiano
regurgitate
reimbursable
reminiscent
remonstrance
remuda

remuneration
renegotiate
renitency
renunciant
reparations
repentant
repercussion
replevin
replicate
repository
Requiem
requisition
reredos
resilience
resipiscence
restitutory
resurrected
resuscitate
reticent
retina
retinoscopy
retrocedence
retrodict
retrograde
reverberant
revetment
rhapsody
rathymia
rheumatism
rhizome
rigatoni
Romano
romeite
rostrum
rote
rotogravure
rotulet
roustabout



older than sliced bread

The first national bee was held in 1925. That makes us older than sliced bread, bubble gum and even trampolines.

Rubicon
rudiments
ruminate
rustication

S

sabbatical
sabermetrics
sabretache
sabutan
sacrament
sacrosanct
sailage
salat

a ritual prayer of Muslims
made five times daily.

salience
saltatory
saltern
saltire
sapphire
sardonic
sarmentum
sartorial
sashay
satrap
saturnine
sauerkraut**
OR sourcrout
OR sourkrout
Scamozzi
scarab

scarlatina
scenographer
scherzo
schism
schnell
scribblative
scrumptiously
scudded
scuppers
scythe
secession
sedentary
sedge
sedum
seethe
selenite
Seminole
senecio
seneschal
senna
sensei
septennial
septum
sepulchral
seraphic
serendipitous
serrated
sesame
severance
shallot
shaman
shamir
shanachie

shawarma
shazam
Shenandoah
shenanigans
Shetland
shirk
sijo
simultaneity
singultus
sirenian
Sirius
sirocco
sisal
siskin
Sitona
sittine
slalom
slumgullion
smellfungus
smithereens
snell
sobersides
solano
solarium
solon
somatotype
somniaquy
sophomoric
soppiness
sortileger
sory
soterial
Sothic

piecing it together: the power of roots!

Did you know words are like puzzles made of little parts called **roots**? Sometimes a root is a whole word by itself—like the Greek **para**, which means “alongside.” Other times, it’s the core part of a bigger word, teamed up with prefixes or suffixes to make something new!

Take **Dev Shah’s** winning word in 2023: **psammophile**. The first part, **psamm-**, comes from Greek and means “sand.” The second part, **-phil**, comes from **philos**, meaning “beloved” or “loving.”

Put them together and... can you guess what **psammophile** means? Someone who *loves sand*!



soufflé
sousaphone
spaetzle
OR spätzle
Spaniel
spatha
spathe
speciation
spectrometer
spicigerous
spinosity
spiracle
spiritoso
spirulina
splenetic
sponsalia
spontaneity
sprightliness
sprue
spumoni**
OR spumone
spurious
stagflation
statistician
statuesque
statusy
steeve
steinkirk
OR steenkirk
stellar
stentorian

steppe
stimuli
stipulate
stratification
stratocracy
stratosphere
strepitoso
striation
stricture
stridency
Styrofoam
subjugate
subliminal
subluxated
submersible
subrident
subsequent
subsistence
substrate
subterfuge
subterranean
subtlety
subversive
successive
succumb
suffrage
Sumatran
summoned
sumptuous
superficiality
superstitious

supine
supplemental
supplicate
supremacy
surcease
surety
surmountable
surrealist
surveillance
suterberry
swale

a low-lying stretch of land.

sycophant
syllabus
symmetrical
symposium
synapse
syncretize
OR syncretise*
syndactylism
syndic
syndicate
syntonize
syntrophism
syringe

t

tabella
tabernacle

why is it so hard to spell English words?

Ever wonder why spelling in English can be so confusing? Here's the scoop: English didn't just grow on its own—it *borrowed* words from tons of other languages! That means it's a big mix (or hodgepodge!) of words, sounds, and spellings that don't always match up.

There are **26 letters** in the alphabet but around **44 different** sounds—so things can get a little wild! Take the letter 'x'—it sounds different in “extra,” “mix,” and “example.” And what about the vowel sounds in “weigh” and “way?” They *sound* the same but look totally different!

So, if spelling feels tricky sometimes, you're not alone. That's what makes spelling bees so exciting!



tabetisol
tabia
tableau
tablinum
tabulate
taciturn
tagua

a palm yielding ivory
nuts.

tahona
tai chi
taiga
tailleur
takin
talisman
talmouse
tambourine
tamworth
tangerine
tapioca
tappet
taqueria
tarlatan**
OR tarleton
Tasmanian
taverna
taxidermy
taxonomic

tectonic
teemed
Tejano
telepathic
tellurian
telmatology
temblor
tempean
tempestuous
tempura
tenaciously
tenement
tenendum
tentacled
tenue
tenurial
tercentenary
terminus
terra-cotta
Terran
terrarium
tertiary
tetrapteran
Thailand
theologian
theomachy
theorem
theosophy
theriatrics

thrasonical
Thuban
thwartwise
tiffany
timorous
titration
tomfoolery
tomium
tommyrot
tomography
tonneau
toorie
topgallant
topiary
toploftical
toponymic
torsion
torsk
torticollis
tosh
toties quoties
toxicosis
tractability
traiteur
tramontana
transcend
transducer
transhumance
transience

spelling meets sports

Did you know some of the Scripps National Spelling Bee's biggest fans are *major* sports teams and organizations? From the Tennessee Titans (the very first major league partner) to the Dallas Sports Commission—which has cheered on champs and finalists like three Octochamps in 2019 and 2025's champion Faizan Zaki—our regional partners bring the excitement of the game to spelling!

Other star players include the Carolina Panthers (who proudly represent six spellers across North Carolina and South Carolina), the Omaha Sports Commission, Diamond City Sports, the Columbus Blue Jackets, the Richmond Raceway, and Circuit of the Americas.

Together, these sports teams and commissions help create a winning spirit across the country—proof that spelling and sports make an unstoppable team!



transmissibility
transmontane
transpicuous
transpiration
transposable
trapezoid
traumatropism
travails
treadle
trepanation
trepidation
triage
tributary
trice
tricenary
triceratops
triclosan
triforium
trigeminal
triglycerides
trillium
triste
trituration
trophic

nutritional.

troubadour**
OR troubador
Truckee
trygon
tsk-tsked
tumpline
tungsten
turbidity
turbinado
turducken

turgor
turken
turophile
turpentine
tutelage
tutti-frutti
twain
twang
tympanum
typhology

U

ubiquity
Ukrainian
ulna
ultradian
umbelliferous
umbilical
umbrage
una corda
unchristened
unctuous
ungulate
unilaterally
unilocular
univocal
unravel
unremitting
unsurpassed
untenable
upsilon
urgund
urubu

an American vulture.

usurper
utilitarian

V

vaccination
vagabonds
vainglorious
valerian
valiant
vallecula
valuator
Vandyke**
OR Vandyck
vaporetto
varactor
varicose
variegated
varsha
Vatican
vaudeville
vehemence
vellication
velours
veneer
vengeance
venial
venomous
ventail
ventifact
ventricle
ventriloquy
ventripotent
veracity
verboten
verism



find the Bee on social media

Want to join the spelling fun all year long? If you're 13 or older, you can follow the Scripps National Spelling Bee on Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and TikTok!

Share your spelling wins, get cool tips, and see what other spellers are buzzing about. Don't forget to use **#spellingbee** to join the conversation and connect with friends around the world!

veritable
vermicide
vertiginous
vespertine
vestibule
vetoed
vicarage
vicarious
vicenary
viceroys
victimology
vigil
vincible
virga
virtuoso
virulence
vis-à-vis
viscosity
vitriolic
vituline
voir dire
volatile
volition
volumetric
Vulcan
vulnerable

W

wainwright
wallaby
Walter Mitty
wapentake
wasabi
weazen
wedel
Weimaraner
wejack

a woodchuck.

werf
whelked
wherry
Wiccan
widdershins
Winnebago
wisteria**
OR wistaria
withernam
woebegone
wolfsbane
wootz
Worcestershire

Y

yabbies
yacata
yawmeter
Yoruba

Z

zeitgeist
zeppelin
zirconium
zoetic
zoolatry
zoopraxiscope
zootomy
zooty
zori

a flat thonged sandal
usually made of straw,
cloth, leather, or rubber.

zowie
zurna
zygote

a fertilized egg.

beyond the letters

Spelling is awesome—but knowing what words mean? That's next-level cool! That's why the Scripps National Spelling Bee added **vocabulary questions** to the mix!

They first showed up on the written test in 2013, and in 2021, they became part of the oral rounds at the National Competition.

Why do we love vocabulary so much? Because spelling isn't just about putting letters in the right order—it's about really **understanding** the words you're learning. The more you know about a word, the better you'll remember it—and the more fun you'll have using it!

Who knows? You might discover a word that leads to your next favorite hobby, subject or even future career!





a big-time spellebrity

If you've watched the Bee before, you've probably seen his face. You've definitely heard his voice. We're talking about the head pronouncer of the Bee, Dr. Jacques Bailly. Dr. Bailly isn't just the head pronouncer—he's also a former champ! He won the Bee back in **1980** and became our head pronouncer in **2003**.

But wait—there's more! When he's not dazzling spellers with pronunciations, Dr. Bailly is a **professor of Classics at the University of Vermont**, where he teaches ancient languages and literature.

difficulty level:

three bee



You've come a long way, and now you're ready for the toughest words of all—rule-breakers, oddballs and brain-benders you might not run into every day. Organized alphabetically, this final section is your chance to stretch your spelling skills to the max and show just how far you've come. You're not just spelling now, you're mastering!

Words with a single asterisk (*) indicate a primarily British spelling. A double asterisk (**) indicates the spelling that is more widely used. A complete list of the words that were added to this year's study list can be found on page 51.

a

à fond
à la grecque
ab aeterno
abaculus
abomasum
abraum
accordatura
aceituna
acerola
acetabulum
acharya
Achernar
acicula
acidophilus
acoel
acrogeria
acropachy
ad ignorantiam
ad nauseam
adscititious
advowson
Aegilops
aegrotat
aerocele
aerophilatelic
aes rude
Aesculapius
Aesir
aethalium
affiche

Aglaia
agrypnia
ahuatle
Ahuehuete
Ahura Mazda
ailanthus
aileron
aistopod
Aitutakian
ajimez
akkum
alamiqui
alate
alcarraza
alfiona

a medium-sized silvery or bluish-purple surf fish of the California coast.

Alfvén
alisier
alleluiatic
allochroous
almuerzo
alouatte
alpargata
altazimuth
amaryllis
amelogenin
amertoy
andouille
angiitis
aniseikonia

Anno Hegirae
anomaliped
anosognosia
antenatus
Antigua
Apabhramsa
ape-ape
aperçu
Apostogramma
apocryphal
apodeipnon
apophyge
Apostolici
appetitost
Aramaic
Araucana
Ardhamagadhi
Ardipithecus
ardoise
arenaceous
aretalogy
arte povera
as nas

a Persian card game.

ascites
aspidistra
Assyrian
astaxanthin
astilbe
Asura
asylee

atabal
attacca
au bleu
au courant
au jus
auftaktigkeit
auwai
avgolemono
azotea
azulejo

b

baboen
baccate
bagwyn
bahr
bailiwick
balata
balbriggan
banh mi
Barnumesque
Bartókian
Barylambda
batamote
battue
battuta
Baucis
bavarois
Beauceron
beaumontage
Beaux arts
beccafico
Bêche-de-Mer
becquerel
ben trovato

Beowulf
berceuse
berghaan
Bernoulli effect
Bessemer
betsimisaraka
Bewusstseinslage
Bezier curve
bhai
bhangra
bhikshuni
bibimbap
bijou
billet-doux
biloculine
bisbigliando
bismillah

— used as a Muslim invocation.

blottesque
bocconcini
Bohairic
Boise
Bolognese
boniface
bonne bouche
bordereaux
Bosc
botryoidal
boudin
boulevardier
bouleversement
boutade
bowssen
bozzetto
Braeburn

bricole
brouhaha

Read the story behind the word on page 94!

bruschetta
buccal
buñuelo
burelage
burgee
Burkinabe

c

cabochon
cabotage
ca'canny
cacaxte
cachexia
cacoëthes
Caerphilly
caesious
cahiers
caique
cairn
caisson
calabash
calamondin
calenture
caliche
callirrhoë
caló
calusar
calvities
camarilla
Camembert
canaille



on a global scale

At only 12 years old, **Jody-Anne Maxwell** from **Kingston, Jamaica** made history as the very first international champion of the Bee—winning it all in **1998!**

She showed the whole world that amazing spellers come from everywhere. Could you be next?

canions
cannelon
cantatrice
caprify
Caracas
carcajou
carnifices
caroche
carrageenan**
OR carrageenin
OR carrageenin

Carrickmacross
cartouches
caryatid
Casimir effect
Castalia
casus belli
catachresis
cataphora
catarrh
catjang

a tropical woody herb.

catlinite
Caughnawaga
cavalletti
caveola
cecidium
cephalopod
Cereus
cermet
certiorari
cestui
chalaco

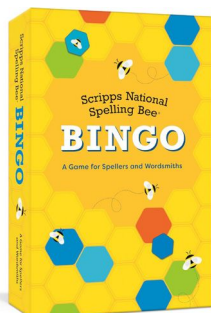
chalaza
chalumeau
chalybeate
Chamonix
champignon
Charon
charybdis
chastushka
chasuble
chaudron
chauve-souris
chemocline
cheongsam
chèvre
chevrotain
chiaroscuro
chopine
chorten
choucroute
Chudic
churinga
ciénaga
OR cienega

ciliopathy
cioppino
cire perdue
cirri
ciseaux
clerihew
cloaca
Clypeaster
cobalamin
coccygeal
cochineal

cocorico
colcannon
colloque
colluctation
collyrium
colporteur**
OR colporter
colubrine
concatenate
concours
connoisseur
consanguine
consigliere
conteur
contrapposto
contretemps
copernicium
corvée
corybantic
coryphée
cotoneaster
coulbiac
coulisce
couloir

a deep gorge.

coulrophobia
courgette
couverture
creances
criollismo
crokinole
croquemouche
croquignole



bee ready to bingo!

Scripps National Spelling Bee Bingo is a fun, fast-paced twist on bingo for ages seven and up! Spell, define, and use words to fill your beehive-shaped board and win. With easy and hard words chosen by the Bee's editorial team, plus 12 exciting game variations, it's perfect for family game night or spelling parties.

Order yours today at Amazon, Walmart, Target, Barnes & Noble, and independent bookstores near you!



cryptozoa
cushag
cynghanedd
cynocephali
cywydd

d

daguerreotype
Darjeeling
darmstadtium
decastich
Deimos
démodé
demurrage
Déné
dentifrice
derring-do
Deseret
desiccate
Devanagari
dghaisa
dhurrie
diapason
diaphanous
Dies Irae
distelfink
Djibouti
domnei
doxycycline
drahthaar
drimys
Dubhe
Dubuque
duxelles
dvandva
Dvorak
dysphasia

e

ecchymosis
echelon
echinoderm
ecribellate

edamame
effete
Egeria
eisteddfod
eleemosynary
ellachick
eluate
embouchure
emolument
en arrière
Enoch Arden
epideictic
epinicion
epistemology
epistemophilia
epixylous
Equatoguinean
Erewhonian
ergatogyne
Eris

a dwarf planet.

erythroblast
Esau
escarole
escheator
esclandre
espadrille
espial
estancia
estrepe
ethylene
eudiometer
Euroclydon
exchequer
exsiccosis

f

Fafnir
faipule
farfalle
farouche
farrago

Fatimid
fatshedera
fauchard
fauteuil
fauxbourdon
Feldenkrais
fellahein
OR fellaheen
ferruginous
fête champêtre
fetticus
fin de siècle
Firbolg

an early people of Ireland.

flehmen
force majeure
frabjous
fracas
freiyo
freycinetia
frijolillo
funori
furan
Furneaux
furuncle

g

gabarit
gabbro
Gaia
gaillardia
galatea
galena
gallivat
garam masala
Gaspesian
gasthaus
gattine
gayatri
Geatish
geeldikkop

a serious photodynamic disease of southern African sheep.

gegenschein
 Gehenna
 geländeläufer
 gelilah
 gendarme
 genet
 genizah
 gesellschaft
 giallolino
 gigue
 ginglymus
 Giorgionesque
 Gippsland
 glabella
 glaxis
 glengarry
 gliriform
 glyceraldehyde
 Gondwana
 goondie
 graywacke
 griot
 Grundriss
 Gruyère
 guan
 guapena
 Guarnerius
 guayabera
 guerite
 guichet
 Guidonian
 Gurmukhi
 gyascutus
 gyokuro
 gypsophila

h

haikai
 halala**
 OR halalah
 halcyon
 Hamtramck
 Hankul

hapalonychia
 hardanger
 hashkabah
 haupia
 hebdomadal
 heiau
 hei-tiki

a greenstone charm in the shape of a human figure worn as a neck pendant by the Maoris.

hellebore
 hemocuprein
 hemorrhage
 hennin
 henotheism
 hepatectomy
 Herodotean
 Hessian
 hexenbesen
 hieracosphinx
 Hippolyta
 hirsute
 Hohokam
 holobenthic
 hominin
 homoscedasticity
 hordeolum
 houppebande
 Hsia
 Huallaga
 huerta
 Huguenot
 Humboldt
 hutia**

OR jutia

OR utia

hypaethral
 hyssop
 hysteresis
 hysteron proteron

i

Iceni

ichthyology
 icosahedron
 ikebana
 immie
 in medias res
 in nuce
 in silico
 incunabula
 inglenook
 ingluvies
 insouciance
 integument
 internecine
 interregnum
 Inugsuk
 Inuk

a member of the Inuit people.

isabelita
 Ishihara test
 ivermectin

j

Jacqueminot
 Jahiliya
 janthina
 jasmone
 je ne sais quoi
 jerboa
 jocote
 joropo
 Jumada

k

Kairouan**
 OR Qairouan
 kakapo
 kaleidoscope
 kalimba
 kalopanax
 kangri

Kannada
kapparah
katakana
katana
kathakali

a lyric dance drama of southern India based on Hindu literature.

keeshond
kentledge
kerril
kiaat
kipuka
Kitksan
kiva
Kjeldahl
koh-i-noor
Koine
kaji
konditorei
korrigan
kovsh
krewe
kriegspiel
Kuiper Belt
Kutani
kuvasz
kyphoplasty

L
La Tène
laccolith
lanceolate
langrage
Latinxua
lebensraum
leberwurst
lebkuchen
lelse
lierre
ligas
lilliputian
limaçon
Lullaillaco
lobscouse
loggia
logodaedaly

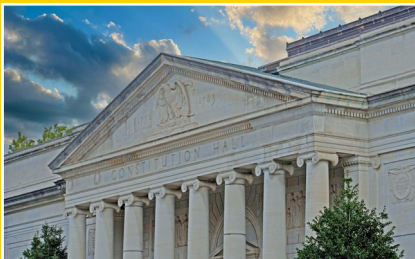
Read the story behind
the word on page 87!

logothete
lokelani
loquitur
louche
loupe
luftmensch
lunulae
Lupercalia

m
Machiavellian
macigno
mackinaw
macushla
maerl
magainin
maillot
majuscule
Makgadikgadi Pans
makhorka
mamaliga
manchineel
Mandelbrot set
mandorla

a pointed oval figure
typically composed of
two intersecting arcs.

mandragora
mangeao
mange-tout
mangonel
Manu
Marathi
marcel
marcescent
maringouin
martinoe



the bee's new home

In 2026, the National Competition made its way to a new home – two new homes in fact! The competition was held at DAR Constitution Hall and the host hotel was the JW Marriott Washington, D.C. Spellers enjoyed being steps from the National Mall and the White House.

mascarpone
massasauga
masseter
mässig
matelote
maxixe
mediobrome
medulla
meiosis
mele
Menaia
Merak
Metonic cycle
micellar
microfiche
mille-feuille
millegrain
minnelied
miombo
Mirach
miscible
mittimus
moline
mondegreen

Read the story behind
the word on page 88!

MOOC

morion
mortadella
motherumbung
mozo
muesli
muktuk
muliebrity
myeloma
myocommata

n

Nabal
nacelle
nahcolite
naricorn
nataka
naumachia
navarch
navarin
neem

a large tropical Asian tree
having a bitter bark used
as a tonic.

neophyte
Nephilim
nephoscope

Ner Tamid
nescience
Nethinim
Nicoise
nidicolous
nimiety
niminy-piminy
nisi
nismus
ni-Vanuat
niveau
nodosity
nomocanon
notturmo
noumenon
nouveau
nouvelle cuisine
Novanglian
nuoc mam
nymss

o

Oaxaca
obeisant
Oenone
oeuvre

consonants 101: double trouble?



Not sure if a word has one consonant or two? Here's a handy tip: check if the word has a **suffix** (like a verb that's been changed to show tense).

Often—but *not always*—words double the consonant right before the suffix! For example:

- The speckled frog **hopped** off the log.
- The horse **plodded** down the lane.
- The train **chugged** down the tracks.

Notice how the vowel right before the doubled consonant is a **short sound**?

Can you find other words where the vowel is short and the consonant doubles?
What about words with a long vowel sound where the consonant stays single?

Give it a try and become a consonant detective!

olecranon
onomatopoeia
onychorrhexis
oolite

a rock consisting of small round grains resembling the eggs of fish.

oopuhue
Oort cloud
oppidan
Orinoco
ormolu
orphéon
oryx
ostium
ouananiche
oud
oviparous
oxyacetylene

p

paella
pahoehoe
Palaihnihan
palooka
pampootie
panacea
Panathenaea
Panchen Lama
panettone
panjandrum

Read the story behind the word on page 89!

pannose
pappardelle
pareidolia
Parmentier
parquet
parterre

a garden having an ornamental and diversified arrangement of beds or plots separated by paths.

parti pris
pas seul
pasilla
paskha
pastitsio
patois
Patripassianism
pejorate
perciatelli
perianth
perruche
petechia
Philistine
philopatry
phloem
Phobos
photovoltaic
piatti
pierrot
piloncillo
pistou
pitanga
Plantagenet
pneumatocyst
pochoir
podagra
podotheca
point d'appui
polyandry
popoi
portugais
porwile
pot-au-feu
pothos
potpourri
pou sto
poudre B
pounamu
prajna
pralltriller
pratique
presidio
prêt-à-porter
prion
prodissoconch

promyshlennik
pruritus
psalmody
pschent
Ptolemaic
ptyxis
pudibund
pulvillus
pylorus
Pythagorean
Pyxis

q

qiyas
Quadrantid
Quaoar
quattrocento
quintain
Quito

the capital of Ecuador.

quoc-ngu
quonk
Quonset

r

raclette
rafflesia
railleux
rajpramukh
Ramkokamekra
rapparee
rapprochement
Rastafarian
Rayleigh wave
recamier
redingote
renvoi
rescissible
veille
rhododendron
ricketsial
rijsttafel

rinceau
risorgimento
risposta
Robigalia
rocaille
roi fainéant
rond de jambe
rondeau
rooseveltite
roquette
rosemaling
rouille
rubaiyat
rubefacient
ruelle

a narrow street or alley.

runcible spoon
rupicolous
ruscus
ryas
Ryeland
Ryukyu

S

sacalait
saccharide
saeta
Sagittarius
sakura
salmagundi**
OR salmagundy

salomónica
samsara
Sangamon
sangfroid
sanglier
sannyasi
sansculotte
santon
Saashyant
Sapporo
saussurite
savoir faire

a seemingly instinctive ability to act appropriately in a particular situation.

Sawan
scaberulous
scagliola
Schedar
schefflera
schnecken
schuyt
schwegel
sciolistic
sclaff
scobiform
scrofula
selah
semaphore
seraya
serin
serval

sesquipedalian
sessile
seton
Sfax
sforzando
Shangri-la
Shawwal
Shiba Inu
shtetlach
silique
siscowet
sitao
skaamoogs
Skeltonic
skerrick
smriti**
OR smrti
sobornost
soirée
sororal
sostenuto
souari nut
sous vide
spiedini
sprechstimme
sravaka
stevedore
Strelitzia
Strigolniki
stroganoff
struthious
stupa

Join the Word Club!

Looking for a cool new way to study? Check out the **Word Club** app—it's totally **free** on the App Store and Google Play!

With Word Club, mastering the *2026-27 Words of the Champions* is super fun! Choose from quizzes and study games for both spelling and vocabulary. Plus, you get expert audio pronunciations straight from the Bee's very own head pronouncer, **Dr. Jacques Bailly**.

Get ready to level up your spelling skills anytime, anywhere!



stygian
succès fou
succorance
OR succourance*
Sufi
sumi-e
supercilious
surreptitious
svarabhakti
Svengali
swainsona
sybaritic
synanthrope
syncope

t

taal
tachycardia
tachyon
taedium vitae
tamari
tambour
tam-o'-shanter
tandoori
tannined
tantième
taoiseach
tapetum
tarpaulin
Tchefuncte

Tegucigalpa
telamon
teledu
temalacatl
tempeh
teneramente
teocalli
terai

a double felt sun hat.

teraphim
teratism
terra nullius
Terre Haute
tessitura
Teutonic
thalassic
Theravada
thesmothete
thimerosal
Thomism
thuluth
tic douloureux
tichodrome
tikka
Tillamook
tilleul
tinamou
tinnient
tintinnabulary
tmesis

toccata
toey
toggenburg
Tok Pisin
topazolite
toreutics
torii
toril
totipalmate
tourelle
tournedos
tournure
trichinosis
triduum
trillado
triskelion
tristeza
trochee
trotteur
trous-de-loup
trouvaille
tsukupin
tullibee
tusche
Typhoean

u

ubi sunt
ubiquinone
uintjie
ululate

adjectives vs. nouns: the /us/ sound showdown!

"Wait... my word ends in an /us/ sound! Is it **-us** or **-ous**?!"

Don't panic—there's a smart trick to help you decide!

Just ask for the **part of speech**!

If it's a **noun** (a person, place or thing), **-us** is usually the way to go.

But if it's an **adjective** (a describing word), then **-ous** is probably your best bet.

So remember: before you spell, check if it's a **thing** or a **thing-describer**—and you'll be one step closer to spelling victory!



unakite
unguiculate
uraeus

a stylized representation of the sacred asp appearing on the headdress of ancient rulers.

urfirnis
usufruct

V

vaalhaai
valvata
varicella
verisimilitude
vexillologist
viaticum
vicissitudes
vigneron
vilipend
villanelle
Villavicencio
villi
vinaceous
vituperative

W

wabeno
Waf
wahine
Wampanoag
wapiti

waringin
waterzooi
weka

a flightless New Zealand bird of thievish disposition.

weltschmerz
wentletrap
werowance
whydah
OR whidah
wigan
witch of Agnesi
wobbegong
wongshy

X

xerogel
xiphophyllous

Y

yakitori
yertchuk
yosenabe
Yponomeuta
yttriferous
yuga
yuloh

Z

zacate
zaibatsu
Zamboni
Zanni

a madcap clown in masked comedy traditionally from Bergamo, Italy.

zapateado
Zdarsky tent
zemi
zimocca
zortzico
zugzwang

Read the story behind the word on page 95!

Zyzomys



it's all Greek to me

Ever wonder why some English words sound like they came from another language? That's because most English words were **borrowed** from other languages—like Greek, Latin, French, and more!

We took those words, made them part of our everyday language, and now they're *officially* English. Cool, right? So when you spell tricky words, you're actually traveling around the world!

buzz through bee history!

Celebrate 100 years of spelling greatness at our history microsite:
history.spellingbee.com

Launched in honor of the Bee's **centennial in 2025**, this site is your all-access pass to the Bee's past. Explore every year of the Bee's history, meet all former champions, discover every winning word, and learn about the officials and directors who've shaped the competition.

Plus, you'll find fun facts, surprising stories, and audio interviews with dozens of past champs. Whether you're a spelling superfan or just curious, there's something for everyone.



words that are new this year!

Every year, Words of the Champions gets a fresh update to keep your spelling journey exciting! We retire some words that have been around for a while to make room for brand-new challenges. These new words are here to stretch your skills, spark your curiosity and give you even more to explore.

Check out the list below to see all the new additions for this year—your next favorite word might be waiting! Words with a single asterisk (*) indicate a primarily British spelling. A double asterisk (**) indicates the spelling that is more widely used.

Please note: These words are included in the full list in the previous pages. We've compiled them here for ease of studying.

a

abolitionists
abrader
Abrahamic
Abyssinian
accountable
acetabulum
ad ignorantiam
adagietto
advowson
aerophobia
agrarian
agroecotype
alamiqui
alfiona
amelogenin
amendment
amimia
amphioxus
Amratian
anaplasma
anarchic
ancistroid
andirons
anticlimactic
antiresorptive
apodeipnon
Araucana
arte povera
aspic
Assyrian
atabal
atrio

aufmerksamkeit
aureate
aurene
avowedly
Azilian

b

baobab
Barbados
barbican
barnacle
barrio
battuta
bavarois
béarnaise
beatnik
beau
beguine
behavior*
OR behaviour
beloid
berghaan
berok
betsimisaraka
bezoar
bhai
bijou
billet-doux
biloculine
blandest
blotter
bocconcini
bombardier

boneen
bonne bouche
bonus
bourgade
bourgeoisie
bowssen
brace
brackish
brassicas
bricole
brittle
burrito

c

callirrhoë
calvados
calyx
cannelon
cantilever
Caodaism
Caribbean
caroche
carotenoid**
OR carotinoid
casus belli
catecholamine
catlinite
Caughnawaga
ceinture
celandine
cestui
chalaco
channelopathy

chanterelle**
OR chantarelle
chaparral**
OR chapparral
chapter
chapon
charnel
chaton
chaudron
chauvinism
chemocline
chiaroscuro
chilarium
chromotrichial
Chudic
churinga
circuit
ciseaux
clavicle
cloaca
cloamen
Clypeaster
cobra
cocorico
colewort
collapse
colloidal
collyrium
comitatus
commissar
comparsa
composure
concurrent
condor

confound
confrontation
congeners
consorting
contamination
contend
corinth
corvée
corvid
cotangent
couloir
courtoisie
coverage
crasis
crenation
crinoid
criollismo
crippled
croquette
croupier
ctetology
cuartel
culprit
cunette
cyborg
cycle
cyrillic
cywydd

d
danicism
danzón
dariole

debarrass
defeat
demoted
denim
destructive
détraqué
devoir
diallelon
dicrotic
diddly-squat
Dies Irae
dinanderie
dinette
disco
disreputable
distelfink
donatio
draisine
drenched
drimys
dysautonomia
dyschromatopsia

e
eccrinology
ecesis
echinulate
eclogue
ecossaise
ecribellate
efflorescence
eglomise
ellachick



did you know?

Did you know the Scripps National Spelling Bee has crowned **co-champions** several times—in 1950, 1957, 1962, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2019?

And guess what? In **2019**, there were **EIGHT** winners, famously called the **Octochamps**! That's spelling teamwork at its finest.

One of those Octochamps, **Saketh Sundar**, is currently studying **neuroscience and linguistics at Harvard** and contributed to the language tips found at the end of this book.

enterprising
 entrapment
 epistemophilia
 equipoise
 erythema
 ethmoid
 evangelical
 eventual
 eveque
 evident
 expenditures
 exsiccosis
 extol
 OR extoll*

f

Fafnir
 farinose
 fauteuil
 filiferous
 fra diavolo
 Franglais
 frater
 freijo
 freycinetia
 frigid
 frijolillo
 frondeur
 fumigate
 funereal
 furiously

g

gangplank
 garam masala
 garçon
 geeldikkop
 geländeläufer
 gesture
 gewgaw
 gigue
 glaucophane
 glisten
 goblet
 goûter
 grandomania

h

haab
 haché
 haggis
 Hankul
 Hansa
 hardanger
 haricot
 hashkabah
 hastula
 heckelphone
 helical
 Helsinki
 hemocuprein
 Hohokam
 Huguenot

Hyades
 hydrargyrum
 hyoid

i

illumine
 immobilize
 OR immobilise*
 impluvium
 inconcinnity
 ingluvies
 insisted
 introspection
 inveigle
 OR enveigle*
 Isabelita

j

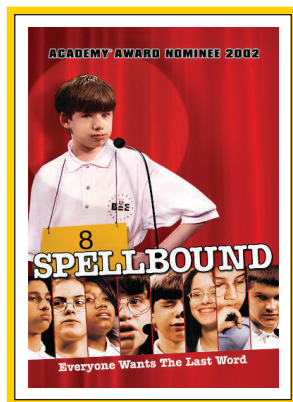
jonquil
 Juglar
 jupe

k

Kairouan**
 OR Qairouan
 katydid**
 OR catydid
 kiaat
 kibosh**
 OR kybosh

Bee in the spotlight

Did you know the Scripps National Spelling Bee was the star of a super cool documentary called *Spellbound*? It was nominated for an Academy Award in 2002!



konimeter
kovsh
kuvasz

I

la bamba
lanai
lignin
liniment
Linotype
litterateur
lobster
loculus
lolloped
loquat
lunette
lysis

M

magainin
magus
makhorka
makluk
malacca
maladroit
malambo
malaxage
mamaliga
mammoth
mancando
manchineel
mangeao
manicure
manna
manubrium
Manxman
maraschino
Mardi Gras
marram
Martinique
masjid
massasauga
massefer

matelote
maxixe
mazzard
measurable
meemies
menat
merotomize
merry
Mesoamerican
minnelied
moggan
monotreme
Montreal
morigeration
mormorando
motmot
mundane
muskrat
myocommata
myrrh

N

nataka
navaid
navarch
navarin
nelson
neophilia
neophyosis
Neorican
Nephilim
nephroscope
niece
nifty
nigella
nodiak
nomocanon
non sequitur
nonet
nouvelle cuisine
nuoc mam
nymss
nystagmus

O

oberek
offal
omphacite
ontology
opodeldoc
oppress
ordonnance
orfeverie
orvietan
osmagogue
osteomalacia
ostreger
ouananiche
oviform

P

pablo
padrone
palmaris
pantophagous
parboil
parietal
paskha
pasture
patel
peccant
pellicle
perigon
periwig
persienne
persimmon
personeity
petunia
phalanx
physiognomy
Pilates
pilchard
pillar
pirouette
popoi
poudreuse
poulaine
pounamu

precinct
preterite
OR preterit
production
pronounced
prostaglandin
provolone
Ptolemaic

q

Quadrantid
quadrid
quintain
quoits

r

Ramkokamekra
rapidly
ravelment
redhibition
Reggiano
repatriation
resipiscence
revetment
rhythymia
rheumatism
rijsttafel
rootage
roquette

s

sabretache

sabutan
sacalait
salomónica
sanction
santon
saussurite
scabbard
schuyt
scope
screeching
scrimmage
serfdom
Shangri-la
sheaf
shtetlach
singe
sitao
skeleton
solano
solarium
sonnet
souari nut
soufflé
spackle
spaetzle
OR spätzle
spicigerous
spiritoso
splintered
spumoni**
OR spumone
starling
stipend
stolid
stratagem

strepitoso
stubbornness
suffused
sulkiness
sumi-e
suterberry
swindler
synapse
syncretize
OR syncretise*
syndic

t

tabella
tabetisol
tabloid
tactfully
tahona
tailleur
tantième
taqueria
tarnish
tellurian
tempean
tenendum
terrorism
timorous
torticollis
tortoni
totipalmate
tournure
trajectory
transpicious

study buddy since 1950

Words of the Champions was first published all the way back in 1950! For generations, spellers have used it to learn new words, build their confidence and get ready for the big stage.



triclosan
trombone

U

udon
uintjie
unsightly
urfirnis
urgrund
urubu

V

vaalhaai
Vandyke**
OR Vandyck
vane
vapid
variance
venison
ventripotent
vertiginous

Villavicencio
visa
voir dire
vulnerable

W

wanness
wapentake
warily
wastrel
waterloo
waterzooi
weazen
werowance
whelked
winches
wobbegong
wombat
worcestershire



our namesake

The first National Spelling Bee buzzed to life in 1925, but it wasn't until **1941** that **Scripps-Howard Newspapers** (now called **The E.W. Scripps Company**) took charge of the whole show.

Scripps is based in **Cincinnati, Ohio**, a city nicknamed the Queen City. But here on the Bee Team, we like to call it, "**The Queen Bee City!**"

language patterns and root word study





As you progress through your spelling bee journey, you'll study *Words of the Champions* to prepare for your county, district, regional and state spelling bees. But what happens when you're given a word that isn't on the list, maybe one you've never seen before?

That's where knowing language patterns can become your secret weapon and make studying for the spelling bee more fun. Champion spellers over the years have discovered that understanding where words come from doesn't just help them spell better, but it turns studying for the bee into an exciting game where unfamiliar words become puzzles you can solve. You start to notice patterns, decode roots and learn surprising stories behind words of the English language.

English, after all, is a language built from many others. Centuries of migration, conquest and trade have shaped it. Much of its structure and vocabulary comes from the Indo-European language family, consisting of Romance languages (descended from Latin), Germanic languages (descended from early German), some South Asian languages (descended from Sanskrit) and others like Persian and Gaelic. Though English is a Germanic language, it exhibits strong Latin, Greek and French influences in both vocabulary and spelling, and most of the words we use in everyday speech come from one of those four languages.

Non-Indo-European languages from East Asia, the Middle East, South India, Africa and the Americas have had a less direct impact on commonly used vocabulary, but many words reflecting cultural topics have entered English through trade and colonialism. In this section, we'll explore how languages across the globe influenced English and how recognizing their patterns, meanings and histories can help you become a stronger speller and more knowledgeable of different cultures around the world.

Greek

Greek is the oldest surviving language of the Indo-European family. The ancient Greeks were pioneers in science, math and medicine, so it's no surprise that many Greek-derived words in the spelling bee come from those fields. Even though Greek is part of the Indo-European language family with the Romance Languages and Germanic Languages, it is considered a language isolate within that family. This means it's not closely related to any other language.

Some important patterns to know about Greek are: **the /f/ sound is pretty much always spelled with *ph*, and words with a short /i/ sound (like “pig”) are typically spelled with a *y*.** You can see both these patterns at play in words like *physical* and *anaglyphy*.

But the challenge in words of Greek origin is that they often have consonant sounds that can be spelled in different ways. For example, the /k/ sound might appear as *ch* in *allochroous*, *c* in *cataphora* or *k* in *kyphoplasty*. And the /z/ sound can be spelled with an *x*, as in *xiphophyllous* or a *z* in *cryptozoa*.

One of the best tools for navigating Greek-derived words is knowing roots. Roots are the building blocks of words that help you figure out both how a word is spelled and what it means. Let's look at some examples together:

- *Allochroous* contains the root *allo*, meaning “other,” and *chroa*, meaning “color.” The word describes something that changes color.
- *Cataphora* includes the root *cata*, meaning “down,” and *phor* meaning “to carry.” It refers to a grammatical structure where a word carries down a reference to another word or phrase later in the sentence.
- *Xiphophyllous* includes the Greek roots *xiphos*, meaning “sword,” and *phyllous*, meaning “having leaves.” Aptly, this word means “having sword-shaped leaves.”
- *Cryptozoa* includes the root *crypt* meaning “hidden,” and *zoa*, meaning “animal.” It refers to small animals that live hidden on the forest floor.

From just those four examples, you can see how useful roots can be in learning the spelling and meaning of words. **Something important to know about Greek roots is that they are most often linked by the letter *o* within a word**, which is different from Latin roots as you will see later.

Next is a table of common roots you will see in words of Greek origin with their definitions and a few examples from *Words of the Champions*. Note that this list is not intended to be comprehensive but rather to give you a broad introduction to some important roots. To research further, dive into Merriam Webster's Dictionary of Prefixes, Suffixes, and Combining Forms and you can learn some new roots!



Merriam-Webster Unabridged

Greek Roots

Root	Meaning	Examples from <i>Words of the Champions</i>
------	---------	---

acr	height, tip	acral, acrogeria, acropachy, acrostic
aer	air	aerocele, aerophilatelic
allo	other	allochroous, allonym
ana	up, back	anabathmoi, anabolic, anachronism, anaglyphy, analects, anaphylaxis
anti	against, opposite	antipathy, antithesis
apo	away from, off, separate	apocryphal, apophyge, Apostolici, apostrophe, apothecary, apotheosis, apotropaic
cata	down, against	catachresis, catadromous, catalepsy, catalyst, cataphora
chrom	color	monochrome, achromatic, heterochromia
derm	skin	epidermis, echinoderm, placoderm, taxidermy
dia/di	through, across, apart	diacritic, diadem, dialect, dialysis, Dianthus, diapason, diaphanous, diaspora, diathermy, diatonic, diatribe
di	two	diaulos, dihedral, dimorphism
dys	bad, abnormal	dysgraphia, dyspeptic, dysphasia, dystopia
epi	upon, on, over	epideictic, epidermis, epidural, epinicion, epiphany, episcopal, epistaxis, epistemology, epithet, epixylous
eu	good	eucalyptus, eurasia, eudiometer, euphonious, Euroclydon
glyph	carve	anaglyphy
gnos	knowledge	telegnosis, anosognosia, Gnostic
graph	write	demographics, dysgraphia, hagiographer, haplography, logographic, scenographer, tomography
gyn	woman	ergatogyne, perigynous
holo	whole	holobenthic, hologram, holotype
hydro	water	hydriotaphia, hydrocortisone, hydrophobia
hypo	under, beneath, less	hypochondria, hypogeous, hypotenuse, hypaethral
logo	word, reason	logical, logodaedaly, logographic, logothete
meta	beyond, change	metaplasia, metatarsal
mono	one, single	monochrome, monoclonal, monopolize
neo	new	neonatology, neophyte, neoterism
pan	all	panacea, Panathenaea, panchreston, panopticon
para	beside	parabola, parallax, parameters, paraplegic, parazonium
path	feeling, disease	antipathy, ciliopathy, neuropathy, osteopath, pathogen
patr	father	patronymic
peri	around	periaktos, perianth, perigynous, periodontist, peripheral
phon	sound	heterophony, euphonious, sousaphone, cacophonous
phor	bearing	adiaphorism, cataphora, semaphore, loutrophoros
photo	light	photogenic, photovoltaic
pod	foot	podagra, podotheca
poly	many	polyandry, polyester, polygenous, polypeptide, polysemy, polysyllabic
pyr	fire	pyrope, pyrotechnics
scop	look, view	zoopraxiscope, retinoscopy, kaleidoscope
syn	together, with	synanthrope, syncope, syndactylism, syndicate, syntonize, syntrophism
tachy	fast	tachycardia, tachyon
tele	distant, far	telepathic
theo	god	theologian, theomachy, theosophy
troph	nourishment, growth	trophic, atrophy, syntrophism
zoo	animal	zoolatry, zoopraxiscope, zootomy

Romance Languages

Latin

Perhaps no language has had a greater influence on our everyday English than Latin, whether directly or through its daughter languages, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. Latin first entered English as the language of the Roman Empire, which spanned from modern-day Turkey to Britain and was influential especially in fields like science, religion and law. French contributed thousands of words after the Norman Conquest of 1066, especially in the fields of government, fashion and literature. Italian words arrived during the Renaissance through art, food and music, while Spanish and Portuguese terms came into English primarily through contact between English and Spanish and Portuguese speakers in the Americas.

Because Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian all share a common origin, many words from these languages passed through Latin. You can see this in the French word *sangfroid* which originates from Latin *sanguis* meaning “blood” and *frigidus* meaning “cold.” And even directly into English, Latin has left a major mark. Almost a third of commonly used English words come straight from Latin, making their spellings feel very familiar. So, if you’re given a Latin word in a spelling bee and you’re unsure how to spell it, go with your first instinct from all the words you use in your daily life because it’s often right.

That said, Latin does have some patterns worth remembering. For example, **the /k/ sound in Latin is typically spelled with a c.** The letters *k*, *z* and *w* are very rare in Latin, so beware of using them. Also, Latin plurals are spelled with an *ae* at the end if they end in /ee/ (*lunulae*) or with an *i* if they end in /ahy/ (*stimuli*, *Apostolic*). **The /oo/ sound and the /yoo/ sound are spelled with a u** as seen in *elocution* and *cumulus*. The /ah/ sound can sometimes be spelled with *au* as seen in *laudatory* or *fraudulent*.

Like Greek, Latin is a heavily root-based language. **But where Greek roots are typically connected with an o, Latin usually uses an i to link roots.** Again, the provided list of roots is not comprehensive but is a good jumping off point to begin your studies.

Latin Roots

Root	Meaning	Examples from <i>Words of the Champions</i>
ante	before	ante, antenatus
com/con/col	with, together	collimate, comminatory, conglutinant
-col-/-colous	living in	nidicolous, rupicolous
cumb	to lie down	recumbent, succumb
contra	against	contrapposto, contradictory
dis	apart, not	discombobulate, discountenance, discreetly, disemogue, dissonance, disjunct, disparate
duc	to lead	production, transducer
flor	flower, bloom	floribunda, floruit
-ferous	bearing, carrying	cruciferous, drupiferous, fructiferous, umbelliferous
loqu	to speak	grandiloquence, somniloquy, loquitur
man	hand	manacle, manuscript
mater/matr	mother	maternity, matrimony
noct	night	nocturnal, noctambulist
non	not	nonchalance, nonvolatile
omni	all	omnilegent, omniscient
ped	foot	anomaliped, sesquipedalian
pinn	feather	pinnate
pater/patr	father	Patripassianism
punct	point	acupuncture, punctuation
roga	to ask	prerogative, interrogative
trans	across/beyond	transmontane, transference
quadr	four	quadriceps, quadrilateral, quadrillion
uni	one	unilaterally, unilocular, univocal
vor	to eat	forbivorous, frugivore, locavore

French

Although words from French can look confusing, they are more phonetically constructed than you may think! The French language uses specific vowels, vowel combinations and consonants to represent specific sounds.

French is the origin of a true word of the champion, Faizan Zaki, who spelled *éclaircissement* to become the 2025 Scripps National Spelling Bee champion. This word can be broken down fairly simply, if you know the French phonetic patterns!

First, the /ay/ sound at the beginning is spelled as *é* because this character carries that pronunciation, while a plain *a* is often pronounced in French as a schwa or as a short /a/. Second, *clair* is straightforward due to the fact that this part comes directly from French *clair* meaning *clear*, which is mentioned in the definition! The *cisse* part is obvious once you learn that a *c* is what makes the /s/ sound before an *i*. Then, you know that the *s* has to be doubled to make a soft /s/, as a singular *s* is often pronounced as a /z/. We know that this part of the word ends with an *e* because this vowel makes the previous *i* long (/ee/) the same way a “silent *e*” makes vowels long in English words, like “bake” or “hive.” It is also used to connect the suffix, *ment*, to the rest of the word. Finally, *ment* is a common ending to many French-derived words that are the noun form of verbs that are processes. (Examples: *embezzlement*, *engagement*, *advertisement*, *aggrandizement*, *annulment*.)

Next you will see groups of words that came from French that share common phonetics. Use the column on the right to identify the letters that make the vowel sound in the words we’ve used as examples. We’ve filled in the first one for you.



Common sound	Examples from Words of the Champions	What letters make this sound in these French-derived words?
/oo/	rouille, sous vide, louche, loupe, farouche, embouchure, houpelande	ou
/azh/	burelage, cabotage, corsage	
/eek/	silique, pratique	
/sh/	chevalier, chamotte, château	
/ay/	exposé, frappé, mélange, passé, coryphée, démodé	
/ay/	je ne sais quoi, traiteur, liaise, polonaise, questionnaire	
/ahd/	façade, boutade	
/ny/	vigneron	
/oh/	mauve, château, tableau, tonneau, au bleu, au courant, au jus	
/et/	ailette, courgette, raclette, fanchonette, minette	
/ahy/	trouvaille, canaille, rocaille, tailleur	

More tips for French-derived words:

- The double *ll* in French-derived words can be pronounced either as an *l*, similarly to a *y* (like in Spanish) or it can be nearly omitted, only relaying a slight sound in the word.

Examples: *par excellence, pointelle, pointillage, shallot, vaudeville, andouille, canaille, espadrille, railleur, mille-feuille, tilleul, guillotine, gaillardia*

- French is notorious for its silent letters! Here are some words that have maintained a more authentic French pronunciation; look out for words like these when you study.

Examples: *grande dame, joie de vivre, lerot, paletot, vis-à-vis, au jus, au courant, Beaux arts, cahiers, canaille, fauxbourdon, genet, guichet, maringouin, je ne sais quoi, pas seul, point d'appui, rapprochement, roi fainéant, rouille, trous-de-loup*

- Words derived from French have consistent pronunciations of the letter *s*. When it is by itself and situated between vowels, it is very likely pronounced as a /z/, but when it is doubled, it becomes soft as /s/. (This characteristic is shared with the German-derived words, too!)

Examples:

- /s/: *impasse, casserole, lassitude, passé, coulisse, soirée, corsage, danseur*
- /z/: *chastise, exposé, vis-à-vis, alisier, ardoise, berceuse*

Italian

Words from Italian have some distinguishing characteristics to look out for! To begin, the letter(s) *c*, *cc* and *ch* make some unique sounds.

The *c* makes a different sound depending upon the vowel which it precedes. In the word *cantatrice*, the last *c* makes a /ch/ sound: [kahn-tuh-TREE-chay]. It functions the same in *quattrocento*, *macigno*, *cello* and *cioppino*.

The *c* followed by an *i* or *e* results in a /ch/ sound. If there is a pair of vowels that follow the *c*, then the second vowel is the one that gets pronounced, as in *perciatelli* [pur-chuh-TEL-lee].

Before *a*, *o* and *u*, the *c* or *cc* remains a hard /k/ sound, as in *focaccia* and *accordatura*.

Another way to make a /k/ sound is with the letters *ch*. The words *scherzo*, *gnocchi* and *bruschetta* show this. However, as words become anglicized, the *sch* can become a /sh/, as in *bruschetta*, for which the /sk/ is heard in the secondary pronunciation ([broo-SHET-uh] vs. [broo-SKET-uh]).

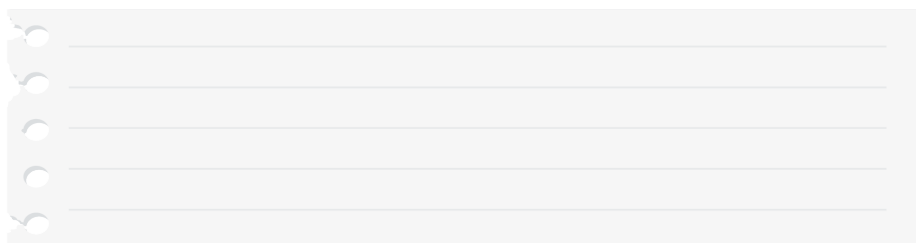
The *g* and *gg* can also be tricky. **The Italian language does not use the letter *j***, so the *g* in combination with the *i* is used to make that sound. The words *loggia*, *agio*, *giallino* and *Giorgionesque* demonstrate this. The *i* is used to soften the *g* while the second vowel is the one that gets pronounced.

In Italian, the letter combination *gn* is pronounced similarly to a /ny/ sound, as in *gnocchi*, *Bolognese* and *witch of Agnesi*. When anglicized, these /ny/ sounds tend to become a plain /n/, but the /ny/ sound may be part of the secondary pronunciation, so don't forget to ask for any alternate pronunciations! In this case, *gnocchi* is first pronounced [NAH-kee] and an alternate is [NYAH-kee].

The *gl* letter combination tends to make a plain /l/ sound. Consider the words *scagliola*, *bisbigliando* and *consigliere*.

Even though there are plenty of helpful hints in these words, **Italian is notorious for its double letters**. In Italian, the doubling of the consonants is distinguishable and can carry different meanings for words. The syllable is elongated. For example, the Italian words “fato” vs. “fatto” (“fate” vs. “done”) only sound slightly different from one another. However, these distinctions are often lost when words are anglicized, making them hard to spell. There are words like *perciatelli* whose pronunciation tries to convey the double *l* at the end, but many Italian-derived words do not. This makes it important to get into the dictionary and study!

Finally, words from Italian do not normally contain the letter *y* since the letter is not a part of their alphabet. Instead, if you hear that sound, it is likely formed using the vowel combination *io*, as in *scagliola*, *arpeggio* and *grazioso*. There are plenty of vowel patterns in Italian, so dive into the dictionary and see what you notice! Use the space below to record any Italian-derived words you find while paging through *Words of the Champions*.



Spanish

The Spanish language follows a very phonetic system where each sound has corresponding letter(s) that represent it. However, when these words enter English, their pronunciation can change, especially when it comes to vowels.

Let's see what we can learn from the words *coqui* and *zacate*.

If you hear a long /e/ sound (as in *bee*) at the end of the word, consider the stress. If the stress is on the last syllable, the word most likely ends with an *i* (which would be given a tilde [í] in Spanish). But if the stress is on the penultimate syllable, the word most likely ends with an *e*.

Coqui (naturally, *coqui*) is pronounced [koh-KEE]. *Zacate* is pronounced [zuh-KAH-tee]. Here, we can see that understanding the pronunciation can tell us how the sound will be represented in writing.

In Spanish the sounds /koo/, /kah/ and /koh/ are always spelled as *cu*, *ca* and *co* respectively. The sounds /kee/ and /kay/ are always spelled as *qui* and *que*. **The letter *k* does not exist as part of that alphabet.** (Examples: *curare*, *zacate*, *simpatico*, *coqui*, *quesadilla*.)

The letters *c*, *s* and *z* can all represent the /s/ sound. It's important to ask for all pronunciations of a word to make the best attempt at spelling it.

Before *i* and *e*, a *c* makes an /s/ sound. (E.g. *cilantro* and *cereza*.)

Before *a*, *o* and *u*, the /s/ sound can be either an *s* or a *z*.

Looking again at *zacate*, the primary pronunciation is with a /z/, and the secondary pronunciation is with a /s/. With this information, you can best guess that the first letter is a *z*. But what if your word is *almuerzo*, whose only pronunciation is with an /s/ sound? There is no information here that gives us a hint, so this is an instance that shows how important it is to get into the dictionary and study! (The same is true for the word *mozo*.)

The *y* and the *ll* in Spanish often make the same sound (/y/), but anglicization often changes authentic sounds, at times turning the *ll* /y/ sound into a straightforward /l/. Still, there are words like *Lullaillaco*, *quesadilla*, *pasilla*, *trillado* and *piloncillo* that maintain the /y/. There are also words like *cordillera* that try to convey the sound (with [kor-dil-YER-uh]) but still fail to do so completely.

Another useful thing to know is how to handle the /EE-yuh/ sound in a word. When the word is a place name, it tends to end with *ía* as in *taquería*. But if the word is an object noun (instead of a place noun) or an adjective, it is much more likely to end with *illa*, as in *quesadilla* and *camarilla*. There is a difference here, though, in the primary pronunciations! *Quesadilla* is pronounced primarily with the /EE-yuh/ sound, but *camarilla* is pronounced [kam-uh-RIL-uh] primarily and as [kam-uh-REE-yuh] secondarily, so don't forget to ask for all the information! Use the space below to record any Spanish-derived words you find while paging through *Words of the Champions*.

Germanic Languages

The Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family includes German, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian and, of course, English. These languages all evolved from a shared ancestor spoken in northern Europe thousands of years ago. Germanic languages are known for their strong consonantal sounds, flexible word order and ability to form compound words. While English has absorbed many words from Latin, Greek and French, its core vocabulary and structure are still deeply rooted in its Germanic origins.

German

Despite its closeness to English, words of German origin can look and sound super scary and foreign. Fortunately, they usually follow reliable patterns for spelling. Although they're often long and have strange letter combinations, once you know what to listen for, you can often spell them just by sound.

Let's see what patterns we can learn from this sentence:

“Einstein chased a Weimaraner into a konditorei, where he tripped over a box of sauerkraut and knocked over some schnecken and a hexenbesen.”

If you hear an /ahy/ sound in a German word, it's most likely spelled *ei*. *Einstein* is pronounced [AHYN-stahyn]. *Weimaraner* (a gray hunting dog) also begins with that same /ahy/ sound spelled *ei* [vahy-muh-RAH-nur]. If you see those two vowels in the opposite order such as in *kriegspiel*, it's usually spelling the long /e/ sound, [KREEGZ-peel].

Weimaraner also shows us that **if you hear a /v/ sound in German, it's usually spelled with a *w*.** The same thing happens in *weltschmerz*.

If you hear an /au/ sound (like the ow sound in “cow”), it's almost always spelled *au*. *Sauerkraut* (fermented cabbage) is a great example: [SAU-ur-kraut]. Both parts use *au* to spell /au/.

Now let's look at the /k/ sound in *sauerkraut*. German usually spells it with a *k* or *ck*, but rarely just a *c* by itself. *Konditorei* (a pastry shop) also starts with a /k/ sound, and it's spelled with a *k*, as expected (and an *ei* for the /ahy/!). But sometimes, in the middle of a word, the /k/ sound is spelled *ck*. *Schnecken* (coiled pastries) shows this: [SHNEK-un].

Speaking of *schnecken*, the /sh/ sound in German is almost always spelled *sch*. Words like *gesellschaft*, *weltschmerz*, *luftmensch* and *schnell* all follow this pattern. But there are exceptions, like in an alternate pronunciation of *kriegspiel*.

Now, let's take a closer look at *hexenbesen* (a shrub), pronounced [HEK-sun-bay-zun]. First, it shows that **the /z/ sound in German is often spelled with an s**, just like in *kriegspiel* and *gesellschaft*. When studying German, you will notice that words with more authentic pronunciations will pronounce a z as a /ts/ sound, as in *zeitgeist*, *weltschmerz*, *zugzwang* and *Alzheimer*.

Second, it also shows **the /ay/ sound is typically spelled with e**. That long /ay/ appears in the *be* of *besen*. You'll also see this in *weltschmerz*, *edelweiss* [AY-dul-vahys] and *gegenschein* [GAY-gun-shahyn]. You can also see here that there are two *S*s in the word *edelweiss*, making it a soft /s/ instead of a /z/ sound.

Dutch & Afrikaans

Dutch is a Germanic language spoken primarily in the Netherlands and parts of Belgium, while Afrikaans arose in southern Africa in the 17th century when Dutch settlers colonized it. Over time, their Dutch began to evolve due to isolation from Europe and contact with other languages spoken in the region, which led to a distinct language of Afrikaans developing. Even though Afrikaans is distinct from Dutch, words in English of those origins share many of the same spelling patterns. Here are some unique quirks of Dutch and Afrikaans spelling worth knowing.

The /oo/ sound is usually spelled *oe*, as in *baboen*. **The /ay/ sound is often spelled *ee***, like in *keeshond*. The /oh/ sound is sometimes spelled *oo*, such as in *skaamoo* or *Oort cloud*. The /ah/ sound is frequently spelled *a* such as in *ladang* and *catjang*.

Scandinavian Languages

Slightly north of Germany is the region of Scandinavia, where languages like Norwegian, Swedish, Icelandic and Danish are spoken. Finnish, spoken in Finland, is interestingly a non-European language with closer ties to Hungarian. These languages have not influenced English in significant ways as they are spoken by relatively small populations, and each of them they have contributed a few dozen or less words to English. With the Germanic link, many consonants are spelled similarly to how they are in languages like German and Dutch. For the vowels, **the /ah/ sound is usually spelled with an *a*** as seen in *slalom* but the schwa can really be spelled with anything: an *a* in *fulmar*, an *o* in *anorak*, an *e* in *lefse*, and a *u* in *tungsten* or *pulka*.

Languages of East Asia and the Pacific

The languages of East Asia are distinctly different from those of the Indo-European language family. In fact, the most commonly spoken languages of East Asia, such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean, are not even linguistically related to each other! They each belong to separate language families, and they developed independently over thousands of years, shaped by different histories, although they have interacted via trade and conquest.

Japanese

Japanese has contributed many words to English—especially ones that show up in spelling bees—largely due to globalization in the 20th and 21st centuries. Many of these words describe uniquely Japanese concepts or practices that don't translate neatly into English. As a result, each borrowed word often carries a fascinating story along with it, from food like *tempura* to practices like *aikido* (a martial art) and *ikebana* (flower arranging) making them both interesting to learn about and fun to spell. There are several recurring patterns to know in words originating from Japanese.

The long /ay/ sound in Japanese words is typically spelled *ei*, as in *Heian* or *sensei*. It can also be spelled *e*, usually at the end of a word, as in *edamame*, *anime* and *yosenabe*.

The long /e/ sound is usually spelled *i*, like in *torii*, *enoki* and *funori*. In some cases, it may appear as *e*, such as in *matsutake*. A word like *karaoke* might seem to end in a long /e/ sound, but if you ask for alternate pronunciations, you'll hear one with a long /ay/, which is actually closer to the original Japanese.

Read the story behind the word *karaoke* on page 86!

The /ahy/ sound is usually spelled *ai*, like in *zaibatsu* or *haikai*. **The long /oo/ sound tends to be spelled with *u*,** as in *tempura*. The /ah/ sound is frequently represented by *a*, though sometimes *o* appears, too. Examples include *ikebana*, *wasabi* or *katakana*. One reliable pattern in Japanese that you may have observed is that **the /k/ sound is almost always spelled with a *k*, not a *c*.**

Other East Asian Languages

Compared to Japanese, other East Asian languages like Chinese and Korean show less consistency. Chinese-origin words especially can vary widely in spelling due to anglicization, which is the process of making words from other languages appear more like English words. For example, the /ee/ sound appears in very different spellings: *pongee*, *fang shih*, *wongshy*, *tai chi*. This is because unlike Japanese, Chinese words entered English through a much less standardized process. *Pongee* came from the Chinese “benji,” and *wongshy* came from “huang-chih.” However, English has borrowed fewer words from Chinese and Korean than from Japanese, so you’re less likely to see them. But if you do get one you haven’t seen before, the best strategy is to keep things simple and trust your ear.

Austronesian Languages

The Austronesian language family, spoken across a vast region from Southeast Asia to the Pacific Islands, has contributed several words to English. In Southeast Asia, key sources include Tagalog and Malay. These languages generally feature phonetic spelling (spelled how it sounds), though colonial histories have influenced their words as they reached to English. Tagalog shows traces of Spanish spelling, while Malay includes Dutch-influenced forms.

Further east, Pacific Island languages such as Samoan, Hawaiian and Maori have also introduced new words to English vocabulary, often through contact with American and New Zealander English speakers. These languages are also highly phonetic, but something unique to them is that individual vowels are clearly pronounced and you will rarely see combinations of vowels making one single sound. This can actually make words easier to spell! For example, in Hawaiian, *oopuhue* (a type of jellyfish) is pronounced [oh-oh-puh-HOO-ee], with each vowel distinctly enunciated. Similarly, the Hawaiian word *pahoehoe* illustrates how *o* and *e* correspond to the /oh/ and /ee/ sounds. A recurring pattern is **the use of e to represent the /ay/ sound at the end of words**, as in *wahine*, a word shared by both Hawaiian and Maori.

One of the trickier sounds in these languages is the /ee/ sound, which can be spelled with either *e*, as in *ape-ape*, or *i*, as in *lokelani*. While there are no steadfast tricks to learn to tackle this sound, keep the variability of spellings of this sound in mind when studying.

Languages of South Asia

South Asia is one of the most populous and linguistically diverse regions on Earth, home to hundreds of distinct languages across several major language families. Estimates vary, but over a thousand languages are spoken in India alone! Because of this diversity, words from South Asian languages often appear in spelling bees, usually related to the unique customs of religion, philosophy, food, animals and traditional arts of the Indian subcontinent.

Sanskrit

Sanskrit has brought many words to English, particularly in religious and philosophical contexts. As the classical language of Hinduism, Buddhism and much of ancient Indian literature, it has contributed many spiritual terms of these religions to English. Sanskrit is an Indo-European language and shares some language structures with ancient languages like Latin and Greek.

Sanskrit words show some unique spelling patterns, especially with consonants. Many consonants are aspirated, meaning they're pronounced with an added puff of air. For example, Sanskrit includes distinctions between sounds by adding an *h* next to the consonants *b*, *d* and *t*. Words like *bhikshuni*, *kathakali*, *Apabhramsa*, *Ardhamagadhi* and *svarabhakti* demonstrate this pattern.

In Sanskrit-derived words, **the /ah/ sound is often spelled as just *a***, while **the long /ee/ sound is typically spelled *i***, as in *Devanagari*.

Other South Asian Languages

Hindi and Urdu, the largest languages in South Asia, are related to Sanskrit but also have Arabic and Persian influences due to historical contact with the Mughal Empire, so you may also encounter spellings with *kh*, such as in *rajpramukh*. At the end of some Hindi and Urdu words, the /ah/ sound may actually be spelled *ah* as we see in Arabic.

Words from South Indian languages like Tamil and Telugu are less common but do appear occasionally in spelling bees. These languages belong to the Dravidian family, which is linguistically distinct from Indo-European languages like Hindi and Sanskrit, so their patterns don't carry over. They have distinct sounds, scripts and grammatical systems. Due to British colonization, most of these words entered English through heavily anglicized forms as we saw earlier with words of Chinese origin. For example, *bandicoot* comes from the Telugu word "pandikokku." Those two look nothing alike! In these cases, it's often safest to spell the word the way an English speaker would have heard or interpreted it at the time.

Languages of the Middle East

The Middle East is the birthplace of civilization and written language, as well as the birthplace of three major world religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam—so languages from this region have indubitably had a large influence on the English language. The four most spoken languages in this region are Arabic, Hebrew, Persian and Turkish.

Hebrew

Hebrew is an ancient language from the Semitic family traditionally used for Jewish religious texts. Another origin you might see is Yiddish, a language influenced by Hebrew that developed among Ashkenazi Jews in Central and Eastern Europe. It blends German and other European languages with Hebrew. Yiddish tends to follow more Germanic language patterns than Hebrew, especially in pronunciation and structure.

Words from Hebrew mostly come from religious contexts. **One noticeable feature is the frequent use of double letters**, such as in *kapparah* and *akkum*. Another common pattern is that words often end in *ah*, like *gelilah* and *genizah*. Asking for alternate pronunciations is always super helpful for words of Hebrew origin as it might lead you to a different but correct spelling.

Arabic

Arabic is the most commonly spoken language of the Middle East and the main language of Islam. It also belongs to the Semitic language family, the same family as Hebrew. Because of this, Arabic shares some features with Hebrew, such as the *ah* ending in certain words like *bismillah*, though this is less frequent in Arabic with words like *halala* and *Jahiliya* not following this pattern. Arabic also tends to use double letters, as seen in *Shawwal* and *fellahin*. **The /ee/ sound is often spelled with i**, as in *hadith* and *qiyas*. The word *qiyas* also highlights another common Arabic feature: **the /k/ sound is frequently spelled with q (without a u after it)**, to represent a sound that doesn't exist in English but is like a /k/, only further back in the mouth.

Due to Europe's storied trading partnerships with the Middle East and the influence of Arabic-speaking Moors in Spain, many Arabic words entered English through European languages like Spanish or Italian. So, when you hear a word of Arabic origin, check whether it passed through one of those languages as its spelling may follow European patterns instead.

Persian

Persian, or Farsi, is the most widely spoken language in modern-day Iran. While Arabic influenced Persian vocabulary, Persian itself is not a Semitic language, and it is an Indo-European one more closely related to Hindi and Urdu. Historically, Persian cities like Baghdad were major centers of culture and learning, helping to spread Persian words into English. When spelling a Persian word, it may help to think of the spelling patterns found in Sanskrit, Arabic or Hindi, and words of Persian origin often also went through one of these languages.

Turkish

Turkish is a language of the non-Indo-European Turkic family and is unrelated to any other large language that has donated words to English. While words of Turkish origin are relatively uncommon in English, it is worth knowing that **the /ee/ sound is spelled with an *i***, and the **/ahy/ sound is spelled with *ai***. Otherwise, keep it simple!

Other Language Families

So far, we have mostly discussed words from Asian and European languages which have long and well-documented histories of contact with English. These interactions began far before the relatively recent conquests of the Americas and Africa by European powers. As such, this next group of etymologies has a significantly smaller level of contribution to the English language than the languages we discussed earlier, and there are rarely any patterns that unite these languages. But understanding how they entered English might provide some clues when spelling a word.

Languages of Africa

Much like the Indian subcontinent, the continent of Africa is also linguistically diverse, home to over a thousand different languages. Understanding the migration patterns that led to the development of all these languages can be an interesting endeavor, but for the purposes of spelling bees, there are not many words in the English language from the continent of Africa. Some of the most spoken languages include Swahili, Yoruba, Igbo and Amharic. You may also sometimes just hear the origin as from an African native name, meaning the precise origin is not known. For words of Swahili origin, it's good to know that there is notable Arabic influence, due to centuries of trade along the East African coast. Amharic, spoken in Ethiopia, is a Semitic language with ties to Hebrew and Arabic. For the other languages, there are no clear patterns, but it's worth exploring the dictionary to see what cool words and stories you can discover from the African continent, as there are a manageable number of words.

Languages of the Americas

Indigenous languages of North America include Algonquian, Hopi, Chinook and Ojibwa. Like the words of African origin, you may also be told that the origin of a word is from an American native name. These words mostly went through American English, so spellings often reflect American phonetic conventions. An example is the Algonquian word *wejack* with a *ck* ending that seems intuitive to American English speakers.

South American indigenous languages include Araucan, Tupi, Nahuatl, Taino and Quechua. These words entered English by passing through Spanish and/or Portuguese first, so they usually have some Spanish or Portuguese influence in their spelling. Something to know about Nahuatl in particular is that it has a lot of words ending in /ee/ spelled with *e*, like *ahuehuete* and *cacaxte*.

Languages of Eastern Europe

Despite geographic proximity and being part of the Indo-European language family, languages of Eastern Europe – also known as Slavic languages – have not had an outsized effect on the English language. Words of Russian, Polish and Czech origin are relatively uncommon in English and tend to describe specific cultural practices of Eastern Europe as we saw with several languages of Asia. Still, there are a few patterns worth noting. **The /k/ sound is often spelled with a *k*** as seen in *chastushka* and *promyshlennik*, and **the schwa sound is often spelled with an *a*** as seen in *purga*.

Other Origins

Words from People or Places

Some words in the spelling bee come from the names of people or places; these are called eponyms. You will always be given the language or country of origin, which is helpful because it tells you what language patterns to apply.

For example, take the word *Llullaillaco*. Its origin is listed as a South American geographical name. Since Spanish is predominantly spoken in South America, you can infer that the /y/ sound is likely spelled with *ll*, following Spanish patterns.

Words derived from a U.S. or American name are a bit trickier. Due to the country's diverse immigrant populations, the spelling can be unpredictable. In these cases, memorization is the best way to learn.

A fun way to study these is by looking at maps and researching interesting names of parks, bodies of water or cities. Then, check if they're listed in Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, and you might just discover a cool word!

Trademarks

Words that originate from a trademark can be tricky. There are no inherent patterns, as they are usually associated with a brand that was coined by an individual or group of people rather than a word that has passed through several languages. However, there are not too many words originating from trademarks in the English language. It is certainly worth exploring trademarks in Merriam Webster's Unabridged Dictionary via the Advanced Search function, and you'll get to learn about some pretty interesting products along the way!

Imitative Words

If you hear that a word's etymology is of imitative origin with no other hints given, it means the word entered the English language as a reference to a specific sound. Examples include *kazoo* or *zowie*. These words mimic natural sounds and typically follow English spelling conventions. Since these words were likely coined by English speakers to sound like what they describe, there are no consistent linguistic patterns, so just spell them the way they sound in English.



conclusion

This section is meant to be a jumping off point for your studies of language patterns and roots and give you some historical and linguistic context for how different languages interacted and influenced English. It is not meant to be comprehensive, and you'll likely discover new patterns and roots in further studies!

For influential languages like Latin, German, Greek and French, you'll begin to recognize their distinct roots and word patterns you learned from this section and your own exploration. For languages with a smaller influence, we recommend taking some time to explore Merriam-Webster Unabridged's Advanced Search function and trace the specific words they've contributed to English.

As you explore the vastness of the English language, remember each and every word carries a story shaped by centuries of cultural exchange. And when you're at the microphone, keep in mind that asking about the language of origin is perhaps the most useful question, guiding you with valuable clues about a word's history and spelling.

Use the space below to record some words from *Words of the Champions* that you'd like to explore further.

Shrey Parikh's

path to victory



Here are the words that Shrey Parikh spelled onstage to become the 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee champion.

regular spelling		
naricorn	gelsemia	Metohija
deracinate	Bhubaneswar	Telei
cartomancy	potto	Philepitta
authigenic	Pluchea	
cronstedtite	hwyl	

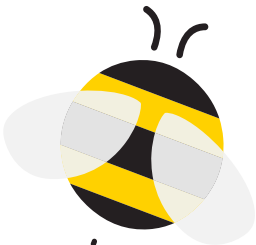
spell-off		
torrone	flaith	balintawak
enthymeme	semele	tessaraconter
Denebola	rusell	taurokathapsia
fais-dodo	sawder	rapakivi
cywyddau	campernelle	paroemia
pohutukawa	Nicol	melengket
monadnock	Zamenis	teraglin
émeute	Tharparkar	homelyn
nannofossil	tlachtli	chikungunya
tongkang	madoqua	bromocriptine
Natchitoches	retarius	

Are you ready for a challenge?

Test your knowledge of roots and language patterns! Try to match these words that Shrey spelled with their languages of origin. Then, get into the **dictionary** to learn more about these words and how they were formed.



Merriam-Webster Unabridged



Match each word on the left with its language of origin on the right.

regular spelling rounds				
	word	pronunciation	origin	
☐	1. naricorn	<i>NAR-uh-korn</i>	French, from a part that passed from Greek to Latin to Italian to French plus a Greek part	A
☐	2. deracinate	<i>dih-RAS-ih-nayt</i>	German, formed from a Swedish name and a German element	B
☐	3. cartomancy	<i>KAHR-tuh-man(t)-see</i>	Welsh	C
☐	4. authigenic	<i>ah-thuh-JEN-ik</i>	Latin	D
☐	5. cronstedtite	<i>KRAHN-stet-ayt</i>	No origin given in our dictionary	E
☐	6. gelsemia	<i>jel-SEE-mee-uh</i>	Latin to French plus English element	F
☐	7. Bhubaneswar	<i>bu-vuh-NAYSH-wur</i>	English, from a German word made of Greek and English elements	G
☐	8. potto	<i>PAH-toh</i>	Latin	H
☐	9. Pluchea	<i>PLOO-shee-uh</i>	Niger-Congo	I
☐	10. hwyl	<i>HOO-il</i>	Latin, from an Italian word, which formed it from a Persian-derived Arabic word	J
☐	11. Metohija	<i>meh-TOH-hee-yah</i>	South Asian geographical name	K
☐	12. Telei	<i>TEH-lay</i>	Latin, from a French name	L
☐	13. Philepitta	<i>fil-uh-PIT-uh</i>	Balkan geographical name	M

bonus challenge: spell-off words!				
☐	1. enthymeme	<i>EN-thuh-meem</i>	Louisiana French	A
☐	2. iguape	<i>ee-GWAH-pay</i>	Greek and Latin elements	B
☐	3. fais-dodo	<i>FAY-doh-DOH</i>	Greek	C
☐	4. cywyddau	<i>kuh-WUH-thahy</i>	Nahuatl	D
☐	5. pohutukawa	<i>poh-hoo-tuh-KAH-wuh</i>	Brazilian place name	E
☐	6. Natchitoches	<i>NAK-uh-tahsh</i>	Welsh	F
☐	7. flaith	<i>flah</i>	Maori	G
☐	8. semele	<i>SEM-uh-lee</i>	Tagalog	H
☐	9. rusell	<i>RU-sul</i>	Greek to Latin	I
☐	10. sawder	<i>SAH-dur</i>	No origin given in our dictionary	J
☐	11. tlachtli	<i>TLAHCH-tlee</i>	Latin to French to English	K
☐	12. balintawak	<i>buh-lin-tuh-WAHK</i>	Irish Gaelic	L
☐	13. bromocriptine	<i>broh-moh-KRIP-teen</i>	Russian to Yiddish	M

Tackling Vocabulary

Vocabulary has been part of the Scripps National Spelling Bee for years now and might be part of the spelling bee experience in your area! You may have a round of oral vocabulary on stage or be asked vocabulary as part of a written test. In both cases, you'll be choosing the best answer from a list of options.

In vocabulary, you don't receive any of the usual information about the word that you get in spelling – for example, the part of speech or etymology. But you can get the exact spelling of the word being asked – either in print, or from the pronouncer.

Vocabulary may be new to you, so let's talk about some ways to develop this skill. First, just like in spelling, keep your antennae up. Whenever you see a word that you've never seen before – in a book, or on a website, or in a school textbook – make a note of it. Ask someone what it means or look it up in a dictionary.

Next, make sure you use our free Word Club app! All of the words on the School Spelling Bee Study List and in Words of the Champions are in the app, along with vocabulary questions about each one.

Sometimes, though, you may be faced with a word whose meaning you don't quite know. Maybe it's totally new to you, or you've seen it before but can't put your finger on what it means.

Here's an example:

A person described as boorish:

- a. dresses with style or flair**
- b. resembles a male hog in appearance**
- c. behaves in a rude and insensitive manner**
- d. is highly skilled at juggling**

Let's say you're totally stumped here. Before we guess, though, let's pull out our toolkit. First, are there any roots that we know? Much of English is built out of Greek and Latin roots and you can use them to figure out meanings, roots like "thermo," relating to heat, and "geo," relating to earth or the ground. (Check out some common Latin and Greek roots from pages 59 to 60.)

Unfortunately, the only one that's really apparent here is "boor" and this isn't an obvious one, so we can move on.

Next: let's look at answer choices that seem unlikely, because they don't really feel like they would exist as actual English words. One has to wonder, for example, whether English really has its own word to describe someone who is good at juggling. So that seems like one we can eliminate as unlikely.

Third, look for answer choices that are just tricks involving sound similarities. For example, "boorish" might make us think of the word "boar," which is a kind of wild pig. Answer choice B is clearly trying to trick us by using the similarity of "boorish" to "boarish" (which is also a word in the dictionary).

We are now down to A and C. Often, even when we don't know exactly what a word means, we have a certain feeling associated with it. This might be from having heard or read it, or it might even come from the sound the word makes. If you called someone "boorish," does it seem like you would be saying something nice or something mean?

We have one positive answer choice (about dressing with style) and one negative answer choice (about being rude). Think about what feeling this word gives you and make an educated guess.

If you guessed C, you are correct!

Just remember, when you get a word that you don't quite know, or have never seen in your life, take your time. Think about each choice and go through the process above: see if you spot some roots, eliminate the unlikely choices and the sound tricks, and finally see if you can associate a particular feeling with this word.

Then, make your choice! The worst that can happen is that you end up learning a new word!



word stories, themed lists and games



boondoggle

Definition:

an impracticable or useless project wasteful of time and money.



How did the silly-sounding word “boondoggle” come to be used for wasteful spending? Improbably enough, it all started with the Boy Scouts and their crafting projects. Credit goes to a scoutmaster from Rochester, New York, who taught his scouts in the late 1920s how to braid together brightly colored leather strips. The resulting bit of handiwork, which they called a “boondoggle,” could hold a scout’s neckerchief in place or could be worn like a hatband. When the Rochester scouts attended the World Scouting Jamboree in England in 1929, they presented “boondoggles” to the VIPs in attendance, and the craft caught on with scouts worldwide after that.

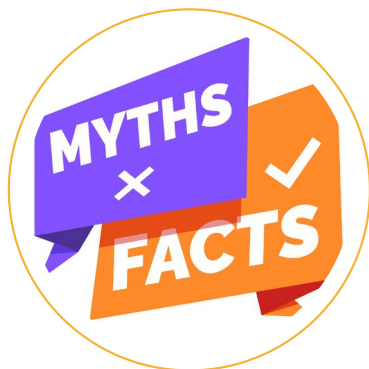
These colorful little doodads became national news in 1935 when New York City’s Board of Aldermen held a hearing about relief programs in the city during the Great Depression. A witness explained that some people on relief were being taught to make “boondoggles” from leather and canvas. The aldermen thought this was a ridiculous waste of time, and newspapers in New York and around the country grabbed on to the story, putting “boondoggles” into headlines about the hearing.

Within months, the meaning of “boondoggle” shifted to become a kind of metaphor for useless work. Opponents of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal policies picked up on the word to criticize what they saw as wasteful government projects. That Rochester scoutmaster—who told reporters he came up with the word as a funny nickname for his newborn child—unwittingly created an enduring term in our political lexicon.

debunk

Definition:

to expose the sham pretensions or exaggerated claims of.



When shady claims need some fact-checking, we often call that “debunking.” The word hit the mainstream in a 1923 novel by William E. Woodward called, appropriately enough, “Bunk.” The protagonist of the book calls himself “a professional debunker,” explaining, “Debunking is simply an intellectual deflation. It’s the science of reality. That’s my business.” Woodward himself would go on to do some important historical debunking, writing a biography of George Washington in 1926 in which he dispelled such famous myths as Washington chopping down the cherry tree.

While Woodward is credited with popularizing the word “debunk,” he was just adding the “de-” prefix to “bunk,” a term for nonsense with roots in American usage going back about a century earlier. “Bunk” started off as a shortened form of “bunkum,” which got its current meaning thanks to a long, windy speech that a North Carolina congressman named Felix Walker gave on the floor of the House of Representatives in 1820. He warned his colleagues, “I shall not be speaking to the House, but to Buncombe,” referring to Buncombe County in his district back in North Carolina.

“Speaking to Buncombe” became political shorthand for pointless rhetoric, and that got boiled down to “speaking Bunkum.” In the 1840s, “bunkum” came to be used on its own for insincere talk, further shortened to “bunk” by the end of the 19th century. So when Woodward wrote his novel “Bunk,” people knew exactly what that meant—and how valuable a service “debunking” could be.

discombobulate

Definition:

to upset : to confuse :
to disconcert.



The disconcerting word “discombobulate” sounds a bit like it comes from Latin, except for that peculiar “bob” syllable in the middle of it. In fact, that syllable is a clue that the word is really only posing as Latin, and it can be traced back to a time when Americans enjoyed coming up with funny-sounding words that achieved a comic effect by mimicking classical roots from Latin and Greek.

Back in 1825, during a time of great creativity in American English, an item in a Georgia newspaper referred to military plans getting “discomboberated.” Later in that decade, the word appeared in humor columns as “discomboborated.” In those forms, there was perhaps an echo of the word “bobbery,” meaning “confusion” or “noise.” After that, the word further transformed into “discombobulate,” maintaining the silly “bob” element but changing its final syllables to “-ulate.” That Latin-sounding ending may have been influenced by another bit of fake Latin that was popular at the time: “absquatulate,” meaning “to abscond with.”

If being “discombobulated” means to become upset or confused, then can you rectify the situation by becoming “recombobulated”? That light-hearted variation on the theme has been floating around since at least 1970, though it’s not in the dictionary (yet). If you fly out of Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee, you might see a sign for the “Recombobulation Area,” where you can recompose yourself after passing through airport security.

karaoke

Definition:

a device that plays instrumental accompaniments for a selection of songs to which the user sings along.



Japanese vocabulary includes many words derived from English, adapted to fit the language's sound patterns. Sometimes a word borrowed from English will get combined with a preexisting Japanese term. For instance, "tonkatsu" meaning "pork cutlet" takes the Japanese word "ton" for "pork" and adds "katsu," which comes from "katsuretsu," the Japanese version of English "cutlet."

"Karaoke" is another such Japanese-English hybrid. The first part, "kara," means "empty" in Japanese, and also serves as a root for "karate," as the art of self-defense literally means "empty hand." The second part, "oke," is a shortened form of the English word "orchestra," or "ōkesutora," as it was adapted when entering the Japanese language. "Karaoke" began as a term in Japan's music industry for instrumental backing tapes used for singers when a full orchestra wasn't available, so instead they would be accompanied by an "empty orchestra."

Sing-along karaoke machines using pre-recorded tapes date back to the early 1970s in Japan, and they rapidly became a popular form of interactive entertainment in nightclubs. A decade later, karaoke was introduced to American nightlife, and the word came with it. Thus, an English-derived term that entered Japanese made the return trip to English, much like such words as "anime" (from "animation") and "cosplay" (from "costume play").

logodaedaly

Definition:

arbitrary or capricious coinage of words.



Though it's not a word that gets used much these days, "logodaedaly" is a useful term to describe the act of manipulating words, particularly the cleverness necessary to come up with new ones. The roots, from Greek by way of Latin, tell the story. The first part, "logo-," is more straightforward, as it goes back to "logos," Greek for "word," also seen in "logophile" (a lover of words), "logomachy" (a war of words), and "logorrhea" (excessive wordiness).

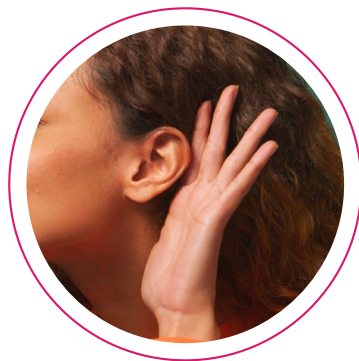
The second root, "daedaly," might look familiar if you know about characters from Greek mythology, and indeed the root is related to Daedalus, whose name literally means "the cunning one." Daedalus, according to myth, was a master craftsman and architect who built the labyrinth on Crete that housed the Minotaur. He also made the wings that allowed him and his son Icarus to fly, until Icarus flew too close to the sun and the wax melted.

Inspired by the Greeks, ancient Romans used "logodaedalus" for a person skilled in using or crafting words. Later, in English, "logodaedalist" took on the same meaning. Nathaniel Bailey's 1727 dictionary defined "logodaedalist" as "an Inventer or Forger of new Words, and strange Terms." Thus "logodaedaly" (like Latin "logodaedalia" before it) could refer to making new words, or craftiness with language more generally.

mondegreen

Definition:

a word or phrase that results from a mishearing of something said or sung.



It's always handy when a word is an example of what it defines, and that's the case with "mondegreen." It refers to something misheard, typically from a song or verse, and the word itself is based on a funny lyrical misinterpretation.

In 1765, Bishop Thomas Percy published a collection of ballads and popular songs called "The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry." Percy's "Reliques" would circulate for centuries to come, and reciting verses from it became a popular pastime. One ballad called "The Bonnie Earl o' Moray," about the murder of a 16th-century Scottish earl, begins with these lines:

Ye Highlands and ye Lowlands,
Oh where have you been?
They have slain the Earl o' Moray
And laid him on the green.

Flash-forward to 1954, when a writer named Sylvia Wright recounted in an essay about how her mother would read to her from Percy's "Reliques" when she was a child. But instead of "...and laid him on the green," Wright thought the line was "...and Lady Mondegreen"! There was no one actually named Lady Mondegreen, of course. But Wright decided that mishearings like this should be named "mondegreens," noting that people's misinterpretations are often "better than the original." Collecting mondegreens has continued to this day, with websites devoted to cataloguing such examples as "All the lonely Starbucks lovers" from Taylor Swift's "Blank Space." (She's really singing "Got a long list of ex-lovers.")

panjandrum

Definition:

a powerful personage or pretentious official.



If you had to guess where “panjandrum” came from, you might think it’s made up of classical elements, possibly from the Greek prefix “pan-” meaning “all” and an ending that seems like it could be related in Latin to “conundrum,” meaning a riddle or a puzzling question. But the real puzzler is that neither “conundrum” nor “panjandrum” are from Latin at all, but instead were playfully made up simply to sound like Latin. “Conundrum” found favor in the 1640s among students at Oxford University, probably as an in-joke related to their Latin curriculum.

“Panjandrum” entered the language about a century later, and it also started off as a joke. The story goes that around 1755 an Irish actor named Charles Macklin boasted that he could memorize any stretch of text after hearing it only once. His friend Samuel Foote rose to the challenge and presented Macklin with a string of nonsense, including this line: “And there were present the Picinnies, and the Joblillies, and the Garyulies and the Grand Panjandrum himself.”

Foote’s fanciful concoction would inspire later writers to imagine what a “panjandrum” might be. In 1825, the writer Maria Edgeworth included Foote’s lines in a book of children’s stories, and in 1885, the illustrator Randolph Caldecott published a picture book called “The Great Panjandrum Himself,” repurposing Foote’s nonsense. That helped solidify a meaning for the made-up word, understood to refer to a mysterious figure of great power, or else a pompous, self-important person in a position of authority.

shindig

Definition:

a usually large often overly lavish party.



While “shindig” sounds like it was created simply by combining the words “shin” and “dig,” perhaps suggesting a strenuous dance move one might attempt at a party, the actual origins are a bit more complicated than that.

Etymologists don’t know for sure, but some scholars have suggested that the roots of “shindig” lie in a game similar to hockey that was played in Scotland and northern England in the 17th century. That game was called “shinny” or “shinty,” which may have come from the cry of “shin ye” that players would make while wielding curved sticks. The game and its name made their way to North America, and to this day, Canadians use “shinny” to refer to informal pick-up hockey games played outdoors.

By the 19th century, Americans came up with another variation, “shindy,” and that word got used not just for the hockey-style game but for more general amusements and merry-making. Newspapers in the 1840s began referring to social gatherings with lively dancing as “shindigs,” taking the earlier word “shindy” and expanding it further. Since “dig” could refer to a thrusting gesture, it likely evoked dancing in which the feet vigorously push against the floor. Regardless of how those dances worked exactly, a “shindig” came to mean any big boisterous party. Nowadays a “shindig” doesn’t even have to be that big or boisterous, as party hosts might invite you to a little shindig where no dancing is required.

blarney

Definition:
smooth wheedling talk.



.....

How did the name of a village in Ireland's County Cork become associated with persuasive flattery and deceptive nonsense? The village of Blarney has an Irish derivation: the name is from "An Bhlarna," meaning 'the little field.' It is also the site of Blarney Castle, which dates back to the 15th century and contains a key bit of Irish lore. In the castle's southern wall is the Blarney Stone, and according to legend, anyone kissing the block of limestone will acquire "the gift of the gab," or eloquent speech. It's not an easy task, though, since you have to lean over backwards on the edge of a high parapet to kiss the stone.

It is said that England's Queen Elizabeth I attempted to take over land rights from the lord of Blarney Castle, but the lord sweet-talked his way out of the queen's plan. The playwright Oliver Goldsmith also included a flattering character named Lady Blarney in his 1766 play "The Vicar of Wakefield." A few decades later, people started using "blarney" on its own for charming but empty chatter. "Blarney" became a popular word in American English too. It likely had an effect on the slang term "baloney," which started off as an Americanized version of "bologna" sausage. Because "baloney" sounds like "blarney," that word also came to refer to nonsensical or deceitful talk.

anorak

Definition:

a garment shorter than the arctic parka but of similar style made of heavy windproof fabric for sports or military wear as either a jacket or a pullover.



Across the Arctic region, from the northern reaches of Canada to Greenland, the indigenous Inuit people speak a number of related languages. Speakers of Inuit languages have historically used the word “annuraaq” for a waterproof, hooded jacket, a key piece of outerwear when braving the Arctic climate. In the 1800s, European whalers frequented the coast of Greenland and adopted both the jacket and the Inuit word for it. It was borrowed first into Danish and German before finding its way into British English by the late 19th century. In American English, that type of winter garment has been more commonly known as a “parka,” which originated from the Aleutian Islands off of Alaska.

In British usage, the word “anorak” took a peculiar turn. As it became used for outdoor clothing suitable for rainy weather, the term also became associated with certain people who spend a lot of time outdoors. Particularly, the clothing has been popularly linked to railway enthusiasts, or “trainspotters,” who keep track of different trains they see. In fact, British people often call trainspotters “anoraks” after their favorite kind of clothing, and that term has been extended to anyone with a similarly obsessive interest that might seem boring to outsiders.

malapropism

Definition:

a blundering use of a word that sounds somewhat like the one intended but is ludicrously wrong in the context.



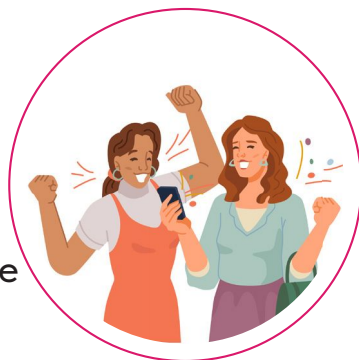
A malapropism is what happens when someone humorously misapplies a word where it doesn't belong, and it comes from a literary character who often committed just that kind of blunder. The Irish playwright Richard Sheridan wrote a popular comedy in 1775 called "The Rivals," and one of Sheridan's characters was Mrs. Malaprop. Her name is a hint to her linguistic style, because it comes from "malapropos" (originally from French "mal à propos"), meaning "in an inappropriate or irrelevant manner."

Mrs. Malaprop was constantly using language in an inappropriate manner, much to the delight of Sheridan's audiences. For instance, she said, "He is the very pineapple of politeness," when the appropriate word would be "pinnacle" instead of "pineapple." Another of her goofs is "She's as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile" — with "allegory" going where "alligator" should be. Such ridiculous misuse of words, by the early 19th century, could be called a "malaprop" or a "malapropism." Linguists have investigated how we may occasionally blunder into using a word that sounds somewhat like the one intended but is inappropriate to the context. Beyond being a source of humor, malapropisms can tell us how we organize words in our brain and sometimes retrieve the wrong one.

brouhaha

Definition:

publicity, attention, or excitement far beyond the merits or importance of its cause.



.....

“Brouhaha” is an evocative word for a commotion or an uproar, suggesting a lot of unnecessary sound and fury. English has many words with that general meaning, and they are often a bit silly-sounding, like “foofaraw,” “hubbub,” “kerfuffle,” or “hullabaloo.” As for “brouhaha,” it began appearing in English in the early 19th century; one source from 1810 refers to “hisses, hoots, and groans — laughter, clappings and brouhaha.” But the word has a much older history in French, going back to the 15th century or so.

Why the French began using the term is a bit mysterious, and scholars have proposed many theories. In French works of drama, it appears to have been used as a noise made by characters portraying the devil, crying “brou, ha, ha!” as a kind of evil laugh. One theory suggests that it comes from a Hebrew phrase, “barukh habba,” meaning “welcome,” or more literally, “blessed be the one who comes,” as the phrase is used as a greeting at Jewish weddings and other occasions. Another theory relates the “brou” part of the word to the French verb “rabrouer” meaning “to taunt.” But perhaps it simply originated as a bit of noisy nonsense, and there is no need to look for any deeper meanings.

zugzwang

Definition:

the necessity of moving in chess when it is to one's disadvantage.



Chess players might be familiar with situations, typically towards the end of a game, where a player must move, but any move will put the player at a disadvantage. Chess enthusiasts tend to give names to every aspect of the game, and this is no different. When such a situation arises, it is known as “zugzwang.” That comes directly from German, where “zug” means “move” and “zwang” means “obligation,” so together they mean “obligation to move.” (German “zug” is historically related to English “tug,” with both suggesting a pulling motion.) Following German sound patterns, it’s pronounced something like “tsook tsfahng.” At the turn of the 20th century, the German chess champion Emanuel Lasker introduced the term “zugzwang” into chess materials that he wrote for an English-speaking audience.

Words from chess have a habit of making a metaphorical leap into general use. “Endgame,” “stalemate,” and “gambit” are three examples that can be found in the gamesmanship of politics and other human endeavors. Likewise, “zugzwang” now sometimes gets used beyond the chessboard to describe scenarios in which a person can only make moves that cause difficulties. For instance, if a military leader is stuck in a no-win situation where all potential options seem to lead to a loss, the leader could be said to be in a state of zugzwang.

themed lists

let's get clinical

Just a few of many medical terms that can be found in this year's *Words of the Champions*.

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. anaphylaxis | 9. phlebotomy |
| 2. syncope | 10. torticollis |
| 3. cholera | 11. varicose |
| 4. dysautonomia | 12. retina |
| 5. gingivitis | 13. neuropathy |
| 6. kinesiology | 14. metatarsal |
| 7. lobectomy | 15. umbilical |
| 8. obstetrician | 16. nystagmus |

literary language

Words you might hear in English class.

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. onomatopoeia | 8. rhyme |
| 2. alliteration | 9. sonnet |
| 3. hyperbole | 10. rhetoric |
| 4. anachronism | 11. idiomatic |
| 5. subjunctive | 12. cliché |
| 6. adage | 13. apostrophe |
| 7. euphemism | 14. polysyllabic |

bird is the word

Shake your tailfeathers with these high-flying avian appellations!

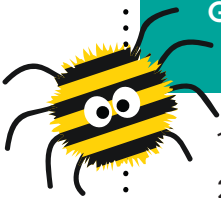
- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. canary | 13. limpkin |
| 2. condor | 14. lorikeet |
| 3. kingfisher | 15. merganser |
| 4. plover | 16. motmot |
| 5. starling | 17. osprey |
| 6. anhinga | 18. pochard |
| 7. auklet | 19. prion |
| 8. cygnet | 20. serin |
| 9. fulmar | 21. siskin |
| 10. harrier | 22. tinamou |
| 11. jacamar | 23. turken |
| 12. kiskadee | 24. urubu |



buggin' out

Give yourself the creepy-crawlies with these words for and about insects.

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. bumblebee | 7. imago |
| 2. chrysalis | 8. lousicide |
| 3. frass | 9. spiracle |
| 4. wasp | 10. tetraapteran |
| 5. cicada | 11. pulvillus |
| 6. hibernaculum | 12. multivoltine |





express yourself

Tap into your creative side with these words all about the art of painting.

1. Beaux arts
2. blottesque
3. Giorgionesque
4. mediobrome
5. diptych
6. portrait
7. daubster
8. impasto
9. scenographer
10. monochrome



there's a word for that?

Check out these words with such oddly specific definitions, you'll be surprised they even exist!

1. coulrophobia
2. incunabula
3. muktuk
4. vexillologist
5. zugzwang
6. vicenary
7. turducken
8. octonocular
9. ex libris

music

Some categories are so big that they can easily be divided into other categories – for example, music! Here, in no particular order, are fifty words related to music from *Words of the Champions*.

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. strepitoso | | 26. tambourine |
| 2. fipple | | 27. battuta |
| 3. cancion | | 28. toccata |
| 4. MIDI | | 29. sostenuto |
| 5. accordatur | | 30. psalmody |
| 6. Requiem | | 31. cymbals |
| 7. Guarnerius | | 32. chalumeau |
| 8. embouchure | | 33. serenade |
| 9. glissando | instruments | 34. arpeggio |
| 10. diatonic | | 35. fife |
| 11. rebab | | 36. notturno |
| 12. sousaphone | musical direction | 37. da capo |
| 13. althorn | | 38. teneramente |
| 14. attacca | | 39. tintinnabulary |
| 15. scherzo | | 40. boogie-woogie |
| 16. kazoo | types of composition | 41. karaoke |
| 17. orchestra | | 42. una corda |
| 18. movimento | | 43. fortissimo |
| 19. disco | | 44. tessitura |
| 20. trombone | | 45. troubador |
| 21. arietta | | 46. mancando |
| 22. mormorando | | 47. marimba |
| 23. melismatic | | 48. oboe |
| 24. clarinet | | 49. rhapsody |
| 25. schnell | | 50. cantatrice |

What patterns do you notice? For example, what language is dominant in the “musical directions” category? Think of all of the words left over that didn’t fit into these three categories. What other groups could you make out of these music words?

About the Scripps National Spelling Bee®

The Scripps National Spelling Bee is the nation's largest and longest-running educational program. By inspiring the exploration of words, the Scripps National Spelling Bee illuminates pathways to lifelong curiosity, celebrates academic achievement and enriches communities. Visit spellingbee.com for more information about the Bee and to check if your school is enrolled. The Scripps National Spelling Bee is administered on a not-for-profit basis by The E.W. Scripps Company.



About Scripps

The E.W. Scripps Company (NASDAQ: SSP) is a diversified media company focused on creating connection. As one of the nation's largest local TV broadcasters, Scripps serves communities with quality, objective local journalism and operates a portfolio of about 60 stations in 40 markets. Scripps reaches households across the U.S. with national news outlet Scripps News and popular entertainment brands ION, Bounce, Grit, ION Mystery, ION Plus and Laff. Scripps is the nation's largest holder of broadcast spectrum. Scripps Sports serves professional and college sports leagues, conferences and teams with local market depth and national broadcast reach of up to 100% of TV households. Founded in 1878, Scripps is the steward of the Scripps National Spelling Bee, and its longtime motto is: "Give light and the people will find their own way."

spooky scramble answers: 1) SKELETON, 2) CHUPACABRA, 3) OCTONOCULAR, 4) BAGWYN, 5) BALEFUL, 6) HEARSE, 7) MALADY, 8) TENTACLED, 9) QUERENT, 10) VENOMOUS, 11) MAGUS, 12) MUMMIFIED, 13) BEWITCHED 14) MORTICIAN **Final answer:** PHANTASMAGORIA

the anagram game answers: 1) NATION, 2) CAUTION, 3) CITADEL, 4) REMOTE, 5) ASPIRE, 6) REPRODUCE 7) RINGLETS, 8) CHARIOT, 9) AMUSED, 10) LATRINES, 11) CAPERS, 12) SPICES, 13) ALERTED, 14) PURSUER



words of the
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