Common Spelling Rules

Spelling in American English is not always easy! There are many rules that can help a student to improve their spelling. Here are a few tips and vocabulary words.

Definition of common terms:

**Suffix:** groups of letters attached to the end of a word to change the word’s meaning

**Prefix:** groups of letters attached to the beginning of a word to change the word’s meaning

**Long and Short vowel sounds:** When a vowel sounds like its name in a word, that is called a long vowel sound (example: The “o” in “go” makes an “oh” sound). When the vowel does not sound like its name, it is a short vowel sound.

Some Spelling Rules:

1) Use *i* before *e*, except after *c*, or when sounding like "a" as in "neighbor" and "weigh."

   Examples: piece, chief, perceive, ceiling

   Some exceptions: neighbor, weird, height, neither, weigh, foreign

2) **Drop the final e** in a word before adding a suffix beginning with a vowel (*a, e, i, o, u*) but not before a suffix beginning with a consonant.

   Examples: ride + ing = riding, guide + ance = guidance, like + ness = likeness, arrange + ment = arrangement

3) Change a **final y to i** before a suffix, unless the suffix begins with *i*.

   Examples: party + es = parties, try + es = tries, try + ing = trying, copy + ing = copying

4) **Double a final single consonant** before adding a suffix when the word ends with a single vowel followed by a single consonant AND the consonant ends an accented syllable or a one-syllable word.

   Examples: stop + ing = stopping, occur + ence = occurrence, swim + ing = swimming

5) The letter **q is usually followed by u**.

   Example: queen, quick, quality
6) The letter $s$ never follows $x$.

7) The consonants $v, j, k, w$ and $x$ are never doubled.

8) Adding a prefix to a word does not usually change the spelling.
   Examples: bi + cycle = bicycle, re + act = react

9) To **make a word plural,** if the word ends with a consonant and $y$, change the $y$ to an $i$ and add $es$.
   Example: “baby” plural is “babies”

10) To **make a long vowel sound,** you need to add a second vowel.
    Examples: boat, cheap, paid

11) When **$y$ is at the end of a 2 syllable word,** it usually stands for the long $e$ sound.
    Example: baby, penny, candy

12) If a **one syllable word has 2 vowels,** the first vowel is usually long and the second is usually silent.
    Example: wheel, leaf, team

13) Words **ending in a vowel and $y$** can add the suffix -ed or -ing without making any other change.
    Examples: buying, delaying, employed

14) When the **letters ey are at the end of a 2 syllable word,** they usually stand for the long $e$ sound.
    Examples: donkey, valley, money

These are not all of the spelling rules in the English language, but these rules should help with many common mistakes. Learning English is a long process, but with lots of practice, you will improve!