Common Spelling Rules

Spelling in American English is not always easy! There are many rules that can help students 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 improvement can be made!