

The Mechanics
of
English Spelling

by

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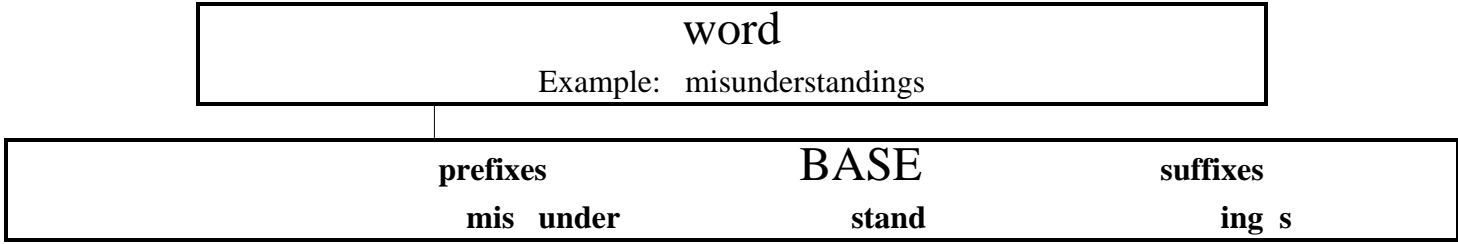
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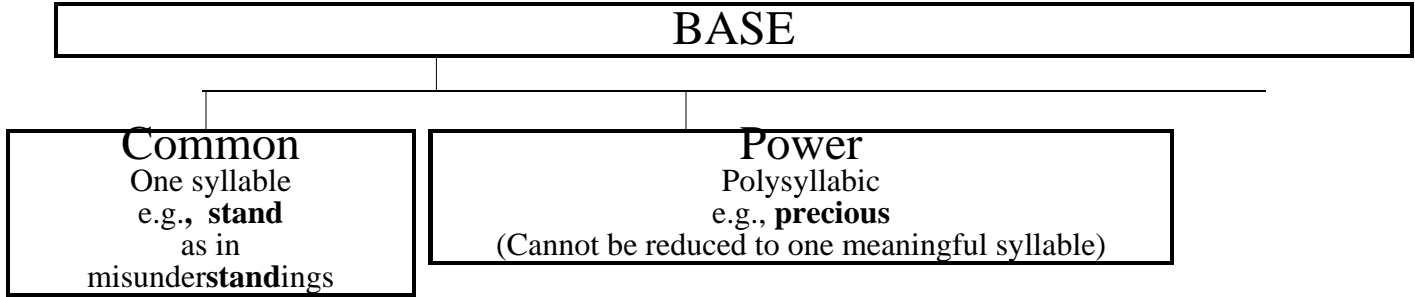
Any word in the English language may be defined as having a **BASE** sound that conveys meaning.

It may have almost any combination of prefixes and suffixes.

Although the concepts of prefixes and suffixes have been taught for years and years, this simple concept of a word containing a **BASE** sound is not taught in any elementary school, middle school or high school text that we have ever seen.

We hope that it soon will be standard teaching and common knowledge.

Of even more consequence is the fact that there are two kinds of bases. One base has one syllable only. The other base has more than one syllable. (See chart on next page)



There are two distinct types of **BASES** in the English Language. One may be called **COMMON** because most ordinary words in our language are of this nature and follow this pattern. The second may be called **POWER** because most of these words in our language carry special or significant meanings.

Sample Words with
Common Bases:

1. *stepping flashing playing*
2. *standing stamping skipping*

Sample Words with
Power Bases:

3. *crucial union patient*
4. *vision mirage unique*

Notice that the sample words with common bases have more letters and more consonant blends than the sample words with power bases. Yet they are easier to read and spell. Why? Because the base words are taught and the suffix -ing is taught. The same cannot be said about the words with power bases. Right? Can students be blamed for not learning what they haven't been taught? No. Can teachers be blamed for not teaching that which they haven't been taught? No. So?

So, those of us who really care about solving the literacy problem, must make the educational world aware of this simple concept. No matter how well students learn to read in grades one through three, if they haven't been taught the spelling patterns of power words, we cannot expect them to now read to learn especially when in grades four on up the curriculum is loaded with new words that have power bases not simple bases.

On the next page read the first paragraph. The following two paragraphs are exactly the same as the first with just a few

Short Vowels

Spellings that occur in
Common Bases (One Syllable)
such as **stand** in
misunderstanding

"a" = a in cat; ai in plaid.

"e" = e in bet; ea in sweat.

"i" = i in Jim;
y in gym.

"AH" = o in dot;
a in wad.

"u" = u in cut.

Spellings that occur in Power Bases (Polysyllabic)
such as **special** in **specialties**

a = a in panic.

e = e in epic.

i = i in mimic;

y in physician;

i_e in definite;

a_e in private;

u_e in minute;

ai in fountain.

"AH" = o in comic;
oi in memoires.

"UH" = a in steward;

e in falter;

i in confirm;

o in onion;

u in lettuce;

ou in courage.

Notice the consistency among the spellings of the short vowels. Generally speaking, there are only two possibilities for any particular pattern. The only **apparent** exceptions come with suffixes such as **-ate**, **-ite**, and **-ute** that are all pronounced "it" as in *private*, *definite*, and *minute*. But since these suffixes are consistent in their pronunciations, they should not be considered "exceptions" to the silent e rule. In fact, because these words have a polysyllabic base we say:

The silent e rule applies **ONLY** to words that have
a **COMMON** (one syllable) **BASE**.

Long Vowels

Spellings that occur in Common Bases (One syllable) such as **state** in **understate**ment

"AY" = ay in tray; ai in train;
ey in they; ei in vein;
eig in reign;
eigh in weigh;
ea in break;
a_e in brake.

"EE" = e in we; ee in wee;
ea in tea;
e_e in Pete;
ie in field;
ei in weird;
ey in key.

"YH" = i in I;
y in my;
igh in high;
ei in stein.

"OH" = o in go;
o_e in vote;
oa in goat;
ow in grow;
ough in dough.

"OO" = u in flu; ou in you
o in to; oo in too;
eu in feud; ew in dew;
ue in due;
ua in dual;
ui in fruit.

Spellings that occur in Power Bases (Polysyllabic) such as **special** in **specialties**

"AY" = e in debut;

fiancêe;

"EE" = i in technique;

"YH" = y in psycho.

"OH" = au in chauffeur;
plateau;

"OO" = ut in debut;
vermouth;

Â resumÂ;
Êe in

et in buffet.

is in debris;
it in esprit;
i_e in petite.

eau in

ot in depot.

ou in

eu in Europe.

Notice that there are **fewer variations** among the spelling of long vowels in the **POWER** bases. These spellings, however, are rarely if ever systematically taught in any spelling or reading series published anywhere.