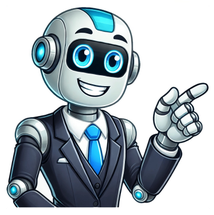
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Have you ever heard someone say, Don’t forget, “I before e, except after C”? Odds are you have, as this is a common spelling rule, but it has its exceptions. In this article, we’ll teach you what this spelling pattern is and how it doesn’t apply to some compound words, superlatives, and more. The “I before e except after c” is a mnemonic device that was first recorded in 1866 in the Manual of English Spelling. A helpful rhyme was created to help people remember the rule too. The “I before E Except after c” full rhyme is as follows. The rule says you should have the letter “i” before “e.” However, when there is a letter “c” in the word, the letter “e” will go first before the letter “i.” For instance, words with “cei” like “ceiling” do not follow the I before E spelling rule. Many words in the English language follow this mnemonic rule. Some common examples of words that follow this rule are: Deceive Receipt Receive Conceit Yes, there are exceptions to the rule. For instance, the word “concierge” follows the “cie” spelling even when the letter “c” is present. Words like “cueing” have ‘-ing’ inflections are also exceptions to the I before c Except after C pattern. In general, there are four exceptions to the rule. Here is a closer look at each one: Words that have an “ei” but no “c” often fall into the category of being an exception to the rule. For instance, when you pronounce the word “eight,” the letter “ei” are pronounced like “a” Here are more words with an “ei” spelling but no “c”: EightBeigeVeinFreightReignWeight Heifer Words that have the long “A” sound (or like the letter “i”) are also part of the “I before e except after c” exception. Common examples of a word that is spelled with an “ie” but produces the long “A” sound include: Lingerie Sleight Height Heist Similar to the long “A” exception, there is a long “E” exception. This exception is more common than the long “A” exception. Words spelled with an “ie” will produce the “ee” sound. In the case of this exception, the letters “I” and “E” act as a digraph. A digraph is a combination of two letters that form a single sound. Common examples of the long “E” exception are: Achieve Believe Seize Yield Relief Sovereign The “I before e except after c” spelling pattern doesn’t apply to words with “c” that are pronounced with “s” or “sh” sounds. Here are some examples: Ancient Glacier Conscience Deficiencies Aside from the rhyme, you should also pay attention to the pronunciation of the word. For example, if the word makes the long “E” sound and has a letter “c,” it most likely follows the rule. However, when the word makes a long “A” sound but without the letter “c,” it will most likely have an “ei” spelling. Once you get the hang of this spelling rule, you will be a master speller in no time. Mnemonic rule of thumb for English spelling For other uses, see I before E except after C (disambiguation). This article contains phonetic transcriptions in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). For an introductory guide on IPA symbols, see Help:IPA. For the distinction between [ ], / / and ⟨ ⟩, see IPA § Brackets and transcription delimiters. "I before E, except after C" is a mnemonic rule of thumb for English spelling. If one is unsure whether a word is spelled with the digraph ⟨ei⟩ or ⟨ie⟩, the rhyme suggests that the correct order is ⟨ie⟩ unless the preceding letter is ⟨c⟩, in which case it may be ⟨ei⟩. The rhyme is very well known; Edward Carney calls it "this supreme, and for many people solitary, spelling rule".[1] However, the short form quoted above has many common exceptions; for example: ⟨ie⟩ after ⟨c⟩: species, science, sufficient, society ⟨ei⟩ not preceded by ⟨c⟩: seize, vein, weird, heist, their, feisty, foreign, protein The proportion of exceptions can be reduced by restricting application of the rule based on the sound represented by the spelling. Two common restrictions are: excluding cases where the spelling represents the "long a"[n 1] sound (the lexical sets of FACE /eɪ/ and perhaps SQUARE /ɛər/). This is commonly expressed by continuing the rhyme "or when sounding like A, as in neighbor or weigh". including only cases where the spelling represents the "long e"[n 1] sound (the lexical sets of FLEECE /iː/ and perhaps NEAR /ɪər/ and happY /i/). Variant pronunciations of some words (such as heinous and neither) complicate application of sound-based restrictions, which do not eliminate all exceptions. Many authorities deprecate the rule as having too many exceptions to be worth learning.[2][3][4][5] The Middle English language evolved from Old English after the Norman conquest, adding many loanwords from Norman French, whose sounds and spellings changed and were changed by the older English customs. In French loanwords, the digraph ⟨ie⟩ generally represented the sound [eː], while ⟨ei⟩ represented [ɛː]; ⟨ie⟩ was later extended to signify [eː] in non-French words. In the Great Vowel Shift, sounds [eː] and [ɛː] were raised to [iː] and [eː] respectively. Later, the meet–meat merger saw the vowel in many [eː] words change to [iː], so that meat became a homonym of meet, while conceive now rhymed with believe.[6][7] Early Modern English spelling was not fixed; many words were spelled with ⟨ie⟩ and ⟨ei⟩ interchangeably, in printed works of the 17th century and private correspondence of educated people into the 19th century.[citation needed] The mnemonic (in its short form) is found as early as 1866, as a footnote in Manual of English Spelling,[8] edited by schools inspector James Stuart Laurie from the work of a Tavistock schoolmaster named Marshall.[9] Michael Quinion surmises the rhyme was already established before this date.[10] An 1834 manual states a similar rule in prose;[11] others in 1855 and 1862 use different rhymes.[12][13] Many textbooks from the 1870s on use the same rhyme as Laurie's book.[10] The restriction to the "long e" sound is explicitly made in the 1855 and 1862 books, and applied to the "I before E except after C" rhyme in an 1871 manual.[14] Mark Wainwright's FAQ posting on the alt.usage.English newsgroup characterises this restricted version as British.[15] The restriction may be implicit, or may be explicitly included as an extra line such as "when the sound is e" placed before[15] or after[16] the main part of the rhyme. A longer form excluding the "long a" sound is found in Rule 37 of Ebenezer Cobham Brewer's 1880 Rules for English Spelling, along with a list of the "chief exceptions":[17] The following rhymes contain the substance of the last three rules:— i before e, Except after c, Or when sounded as "a", As in neighbor and weigh But seizure and seize do what they please. "Dr Brewer" is credited as the author by subsequent writers quoting this form of the rhyme,[18][19][20] which became common in American schools.[10] A Dictionary of Modern English Usage discusses "i before e except after c". Henry Watson Fowler's original 1926 edition called the rule "very useful", restricting it to words with the "long e" sound, stating further that "words in which that sound is not invariable, as either, neither, inveigle, do not come under it", and calling seize "an important exception".[21] The entry was retained in Ernest Gowers's 1965 revision.[22] Robert Burchfield rewrote it for the 1996 edition, stating 'the rule can helpfully be extended "except when the word is pronounced with /eɪ/"', and giving a longer list of exceptions, including words excluded from Fowler's interpretation.[23] Robert Allen's 2008 pocket edition states, "The traditional spelling rule ' i before e except after c ' should be extended to include the statement 'when the combination is pronounced -ee- '".[24] Jeremy Butterfield's 2015 edition suggests both "when ... pronounced -ee-" and "except when ... pronounced -ay-" as extensions to the rhyme, as well as listing various classes of exception.[25] In 1932 Leonard B. Wheat examined the rules and word lists found in various American elementary school spelling books. He calculated that, of the 3,876 words listed, 128 had ei or ie in the spelling; of these, 83 conformed to I-before-E, 6 to except-after-C, and 12 to sounded-like-A. He found 14 words with i-e in separate syllables, and 2 with e-i in separate syllables. This left 11 "irregular" words: 3 with cie (ancient, conscience, efficiency) and 8 with ei (either, foreign, foreigner, height, leisure, neither, seize, their). Wheat concluded, "If it were not for the fact that the jingle of the rule makes it easy to remember (although not necessarily easy to apply), the writer would recommend that the rule be reduced to 'I usually comes before e,' or that it be discarded entirely".[2] Sandra Wilde in 1990 claimed the sounded-like-E version of the rule was one of only two sound–letter correspondence rules worth teaching in elementary schools.[27] The rule was covered by five of nine software programs for spelling education studied by Barbara Mullock in 2012.[26] Edward Carney's 1994 Survey of English Spelling describes the ["long-e" version of the] rule as "peculiar":[1] Its practical use is ... simply deciding between two correspondences for /iː/ that are a visual metathesis of each other. It is not a general graphotactic rule applicable to other phonemes. So, although seize and heinous (if you pronounce it with /iː/ rather than /eɪ/) are exceptions, heifer, leisure with /e/≡⟨ei⟩ or rein, vein with /eɪ/≡⟨ei⟩ are not exceptions; ⟨ie⟩ is not a usual spelling of /e/ or /eɪ/. As to the usefulness of the rule, he says:[28] Such rules are warnings against common pitfalls for the unwary. Nevertheless, selection among competing correspondences has never been, and could never be, covered by such aids to memory. The converse of the "except after c" part is Carney's spelling-to-sound rule E.16: in the sequence ⟨cei⟩, the ⟨ei⟩ is pronounced /iː/.[29] In Carney's test wordlist, all eight words with ⟨cei⟩ conform to this rule, which he thus describes as being a "marginal" rule with an "efficiency" of 100%.[29] Rarer words not in the wordlist may not conform; for example, in haecceity, ceilidh, and enceinte the ei represents /iː.ɪ/, /eɪ/, and /æ/ respectively.[30] Mark Wainwright's FAQ posting interprets the rule as applying only to the FLEECE vowel, not the NEAR vowel; he regards it as useful if "a little common sense" is used for the exceptions.[15] The FAQ includes a 1996 response to Wainwright by an American, listing variations on the rule and their exceptions, contending that even the restricted version has too many exceptions, and concluding "Instead of trying to defend the 'rule' or 'guideline', "i' before 'e' except after 'c'", why don't we all just agree that it is dumb and useless, and be content just to laugh at it?"[31] Kory Stamper of Merriam-Webster has said the neighbor-and-weigh version is "chocked with tons of exceptions", listing several types.[3] On Language Log in 2006, Mark Liberman suggested that the alternative "i before e, no matter what" was more reliable than the basic rule.[4] On the same blog in 2009, Geoff Pullum wrote, 'The rule is always taught, by anyone who knows what they are doing, as "i before e except after c when the sound is 'ee'."'[16] Teaching English Spelling (Cambridge University Press, 2000) provides a system of sound–spelling correspondences aimed at correcting common spelling errors among native and ESL students. The chapter "The sound 'e' (/iː/)" has sections on spellings "ee", "ea", "-y" and "ie and ei", the last of which uses "I before E except after C" and lists five "common exceptions" (caffeine, codeine, protein, seize, weird).[32] The 2009 edition of Support for Spelling, by the English Department for Education,[5] suggests an "Extension activity" for Year five (10-year-olds): Children investigate the rule i before e except after c. Does this always apply? What sound does ie make in these words? In the Appendix, after a list of nine "useful spelling guidelines", there is a note: The i before e except after c rule is not worth teaching. It applies only to words in which the ie or ei stands for a clear /ee/ sound and unless this is known, words such as sufficient, veil and their look like exceptions. There are so few words where the ei spelling for the /ee/ sound follows the letter c that it is easier to learn the specific words: receive, conceive, deceive (+ the related words receipt, conceit, deceit), perceive and ceiling. There were widespread media reports of this recommendation, which generated some controversy.[10][16] The Oxford Dictionaries website of Oxford University Press states "The rule only applies when the sound represented is 'ee', though. It doesn't apply to words like science or efficient, in which the –ie- combination does follow the letter c but isn't pronounced 'ee'."[33] David Crystal discusses the rule in his 2012 history of English spelling.[34] He first restricts it to the /iː/ vowel, then accounts for several classes of exception. He states that, while the exceptions are fewer and rarer than the words that follow the rule, there are too many to learn by heart; the factors are "too great to reduce to a simple rule", but "a basic knowledge of grammar and word-history" can handle them.[34] Educationalist Greg Brooks says the long-e qualification "is hardly ever mentioned, perhaps because it is difficult to explain to children"; the except-after-C part "works very poorly"; and the mnemonic "should be consigned to oblivion".[35] The following sections list exceptions to the basic form; many are not exceptions to the augmented forms. Words that break both the "I before E" part and the "except after C" part of the rule include cheiromancies, cleidomancies, eigenfrequencies, obeisances and oneiromancies, as well as Pleistocene from the geologic time scale. Some large groups of words have cie in the spelling. Few common words have the cei spelling handled by the rule: verbs ending -ceive and their derivatives (perceive, deceit, transceiver, receipts, etc.), and ceiling. The BBC trivia show QI claimed there were 923 words spelled cie, 21 times the number of words that conform to the rule's stated exception by being written with cei.[36] These figures were generated by a QI fan from a Scrabble wordlist.[37] The statistic was repeated by UberFacts.[38] The vowel represented by ie in words spelled cie is rarely the "long e" vowel of FLEECE (/iː/), so few words are exceptions to the version of the rule restricted to that sound. Among them are specie, species. For those with happy-tensing accents, the final y in words ending -cy has the FLEECE vowel, and therefore so do inflected forms ending -cies or -cied (fancied, policies, etc.). If the vowel of NEAR (/ɪər/) is considered as "long e", then words ending -cier may also be exceptions. Possible examples include: fancier, if pronounced with two rather than three syllables; or financier, if stressed on the final syllable or pronounced with a happy-tensing accent. These are exceptions to the basic and "long a" versions of the rhyme, but not to the "long e" version. Types include: Adding suffix -er to root in -cy, giving a two-syllable ending -cier; For example, fancier (adjective "more fancy", or noun "one who fancies") Words of Latin origin with a root ending in c(i) followed by a suffix or inflexion starting in (i)e; such as fac or fic "do; make" (efficient, stupefacient, etc.) soc "sharing; kin" (society) sci "know" (science, prescient, etc.) Others: ancient, concierge, glacier Many words have ei not preceded by c. In the sections that follow, most derived forms are omitted; for example, as well as seize, there exist disseize and seizure. Words are grouped by the phonemes (sounds) corresponding to ei or ie in the spelling; each phoneme is represented phonetically as at Help:IPA/English and, where applicable, by the keyword in John C. Wells' lexical sets. An asterisk* after a word indicates the pronunciation implied is one of several found. Some have an /iː/ variant more common in America than Britain (e.g. sheikh, leisure, either have /eɪ/, /ɛ/, /aɪ/ respectively). Words where ei, not preceded by c, represents the vowel of FLEECE (/iː/), are the only exceptions to the strictest British interpretation of the "long e" version of the rhyme. Less strict interpretations admit as exceptions those words where eir, not preceded by c, represents the vowel of NEAR (/ɪər/). Some categories of exception: Many proper names, often because they are adopted from other languages. Fowler says the rule "is useless with proper names";[21] Carney says "As one might expect of any rule, there are likely to be even more exceptions in names, many of which are Scottish":[39] forenames and surnames Keith, Neil, Sheila, Stein, etc. placenames Leith, Keighley, Rheims, Raleigh, etc. Eid in the names of Muslim holidays (Eid ul-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, etc.) others like Cassiopeia Chemical names ending in -ein or -eine (caffeine, casein, codeine, phthalein, protein, etc.). Here -ein(e) was originally pronounced as two syllables /iː.ɪn/ Scottish English words (deil, deid, weill, etc.) Mark Wainwright writes "There are many exceptions in Scots, so speakers with a large Scots vocabulary may as well give up on this rule."[15] Other exceptions: /iː/ FLEECE either*, heinous*, inveigle*, keister, leisure*, monteith, neither*, obeisance*, seize, seizin, sheikh*, teiid /ɪər/ NEAR madeira, weir, weird. (This sound may also be spelled ier, as in pierce.) There are many words where ei, not preceded by c, represents the vowel of FACE (/eɪ/). There are a few where eir, not preceded by c, represents the vowel of SQUARE (/ɛər/). These groups of words are exceptions only to the basic form of the rhyme; they are excluded from both of the common restricted forms. /eɪ/ FACE With eigh spelling: eight, freight, heigh-ho*, inveigh, neigh, neighbo(u)r, sleigh, weigh Others: abseil, beige, capoeira,[40] cleidoic, deign, dreidel, feign, feint, geisha, glei, greige, greisen, heinous*, inveigle*, nonpareil*, obeisance*, peignoir*, reign, rein, seiche, seidel, seine, sheikh*, skein, surveillance, veil, vein. (While Carney says this sound is never spelled ie,[41] the last vowel in lingerie* is often the FACE vowel.). /ɛər/ SQUARE heir, their. (This sound is never spelled ier) These are exceptions to the basic and "long a" versions of the rhyme, but not to the "long e" version. This is a dynamic list and may never be able to satisfy particular standards for completeness. You can help by adding missing items with reliable sources. /aɪ/ PRICE German origin: einsteinium, gneiss, leitmotiv, Rottweiler, stein, zeitgeist. Others: eider, either*, feisty, heigh-ho*, height, heist, kaleidoscope, neither*, seismic, sleight (This sound may also be spelled ie, but only at the end of a morpheme as in die, pies, cried.[42]) /ɪ/ or /ə/ (see weak-vowel merger) counterfeit, cuneiform*, foreign, forfeit, reveille*, sovereign, surfeit /ɛ/ DRESS heifer, leisure*, nonpareil*, peignoir*. (This sound is spelled ie in the word friend.) /æ/ TRAP reveille* /ɜ/ NURSE O'Beirne e and i in separate segments (and often separate syllables or morphemes) Prefixes de- or re- before words starting with i (deindustrialize, reignite, etc.) Inflection -ing of those verbs with roots ending in -e that do not drop the e (being, seeing, swingeing, etc.) Others: albeit, atheism, cuneiform*, deify*, deity*, herein, nuclei, onomatopoeia The rhyme is mentioned in several films and TV episodes about spelling bees, including A Boy Named Charlie Brown, The Simpsons episode "I'm Spelling as Fast as I Can", The Pen Is Mightier Than the Pencil episode of The Odd Couple, and an episode of Arthur; and also in the musical The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, when Huckleberry Finn is being taught how to read. The rhyme was used as a climactic plot device in the 1990 TaleSpin episode "Vowel Play" when Kit corrects Baloo's spelling by reciting the second half ("or when sounding like A, as in neighbour or weigh") of the mnemonic. I Before E (Except After C): Old-School Ways To Remember Stuff was a miscellany released in the UK for the Christmas 2007 "stocking filler" market,[43] which sold well.[44] "I Before E Except After C" is a song on Yazoo's 1982 album Upstairs at Eric's. The Jackson 5's 1970 hit "ABC" has the lyric "I before E except after C". "I before E except after C" was a 1963 episode of the TV series East Side/West Side. I Before E is the name of both a short-story collection by Sam Kieth and a music album by Carissa's Wierd, in each case alluding to the unusual spelling of the creator's name. Until the 1930s, Pierce City, Missouri was named "Peirce City", after Andrew Peirce. A 1982 attempt to revert to the original spelling was rejected by the United States Census Bureau.[45] Comedian Brian Regan employs the rule in a joke on his debut CD Live in the track Stupid in School, where he states it as "I before E, except after C, and with sounding like A, as in neighbor and weigh, and on weekends and holidays and all throughout May, and you'll always be wrong no matter what you say!"[46] ^ a b The labels "long a" and "long e", discredited among educators, are used here as umbrella terms for multiple lexical sets and diaphonemes. Carney, Edward (1994). A survey of English spelling. Psychology Press. ISBN 978-0-415-09270-8. Retrieved 25 February 2011. Upward, Christopher; Davidson, George (2011-09-15). The History of English Spelling. John Wiley & Sons. ISBN 978-1-4443-4297-0. Retrieved 24 March 2016. ^ a b Carney 1994, §2.8.2 pp.67–68 ^ a b Wheat, Leonard B. (May 1932). "Four Spelling Rules". The Elementary School Journal. 32 (9). 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Orthographic aids; or, Mnemonics for spelling and exercises in derivation. London: Longman. p. 9. Retrieved 25 February 2011. The Diphthong ei when it sounds like long e,Most frequently follows the consonant c;Reverse it, and then if it still sound the same,It follows a consonant not c by name,Except in such words as—counterfeit, seizure,Plebeian and Proper Names such as Madeira. ^ Mongan, James Roscoe (1862). The practical spelling book (2nd ed.). London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co. pp. 13, fn. Retrieved 27 February 2011. Unless preceded by a c, / The i is placed before the e. ^ Colquhoun, John Stuart (1871). "Rules for Spelling English Words". A compendious grammar and philological hand-book of the English language. Griffith & Farran. p. 15. Retrieved 27 November 2014. ^ a b c d Wainwright, Mark (September 1997). "I before E except after C". alt.english.usage. Archived from the original on 14 May 2011. Retrieved 25 February 2011. ^ a b c Pullum, Geoff (22 June 2009). "I before E". 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Retrieved 25 February 2011. ^ United Press International (1 September 1982). "Bureau sticks with 'i' before 'e'". The Bulletin. Bend, Oregon. p. 15. Retrieved 28 February 2011. ^ Wikiquote:Brian Regan Retrieved from " Have you ever stumbled over the spelling of a word and wished for an easy rule to follow? The English language can be tricky, especially when it comes to the infamous i before e except after c rule. This guideline helps you navigate some common spelling challenges, but it’s not as straightforward as it seems.The “i before e except after c” rule serves as a guideline for spelling certain English words. This rule suggests that in most cases, when using the letters “i” and “e,” the letter “i” should come first, unless it follows the letter “c.” However, this rule has exceptions.The basic principle states: spellings like “believe” and “grief” follow the “i before e” pattern. Conversely, words such as “receive” and “deceive” illustrate instances where “e” comes before “i.” This simple guideline helps with many common words but doesn’t cover all scenarios.This spelling rule dates back to the 19th century. It originated from attempts to simplify English spelling for learners. Many educators promoted this mnemonic device to aid memory retention. Despite its popularity, numerous exceptions emerged over time, leading to debates about its effectiveness in teaching proper spelling skills.While the “i before e except after c” rule serves as a helpful guideline, many exceptions exist. Recognizing these exceptions enhances your understanding of English spelling.Several words clearly violate this rule. Here are some examples:Receive: The “e” comes before “i.”Deceive: Again, “e” precedes “i.”Ceiling: This word starts with “c,” but it follows the exception.Protein: Despite not following the guideline, it’s commonly used in various contexts.These terms illustrate that English contains numerous unpredictable spellings.You might notice differences in spelling based on regional variations. For instance:American English tends to favor certain forms like “neighbor” and “weigh,” where the rule doesn’t apply.In contrast, British English often retains spellings such as “aluminium,” which also deviates from the standard guideline.These inconsistencies highlight how language evolves differently across regions.Understanding the “i before e except after c” rule helps navigate spelling challenges. You can apply this guideline in various writing situations to enhance clarity and correctness.Consider these common words that follow the rule:BelieveReceive (note the exception here)GriefCeiling (another exception)You see how some words align with the guideline while others don’t. It’s essential to recognize both types when writing, as it improves your overall spelling accuracy.To help remember this spelling rule, keep these strategies in mind:Use Mnemonics: Create a catchy phrase like “I before E except after C.”Visualize Words: Picture words that fit or break the rule; it reinforces memory.Practice Regularly: Write sentences using new vocabulary to strengthen retention.These methods make remembering exceptions easier and improve your spelling skills over time.Understanding the “i before e except after c” rule enhances spelling skills. This guideline simplifies certain spelling challenges, but it’s not foolproof. Here are effective strategies and resources for teaching this rule.Use Visual Aids: Create charts or posters that illustrate examples like “believe” and “receive.” Visual tools help reinforce learning.Interactive Activities: Engage students with games that require identifying correct spellings based on the rule. Competition can boost interest.Practice Worksheets: Distribute worksheets featuring both compliant words and exceptions, such as “ceiling” and “deceive,” to encourage practice in real contexts.Mnemonics: Encourage students to create their own mnemonics related to the rule. Personal connections make memorization easier.Online Quizzes: Websites offer quizzes focused on the “i before e except after c” rule. These interactive platforms provide immediate feedback.Educational Apps: Use apps designed for spelling practice that incorporate this guideline, helping you learn through repetition.Flashcards: Create flashcards listing both regular and exception words. Regular review reinforces memory retention effectively.These strategies and resources equip you with practical tools to master English spelling while navigating its complexities confidently. The “i before e, except after c” rule is a general guideline for spelling words in English. It means that in a combination of the letter i and e, we should write –ie-. Only after a letter c should we write –ei-. -ie- words shield tie relieve piece friend believe field die lie yield Here are some -ei- which follow the ‘ei after c’ rule ceiling receipt perceive receive conceit It’s worth remembering that this rule is not perfect: there are many exceptions. Here are some -ei- words which don’t follow the ‘ie only after c’ rule seize vein reins weight height weird foreign leisure By reading and writing words often, you should get used to their correct spelling. As we can see, the “i before e, except after c” rule is only a rough guideline. In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. Thank you very much for your cooperation. Download 30 Ask the Teacher lessons Join my courses Today’s question is, “Teacher, can you explain the ‘i before e except after c’ rule?” There’s a rhyme that English speakers often use to remember whether to spell words with IE or EI, and it goes: “I before E except after C, or when sounded as A as in neighbor and weigh.” Let’s look at the words that follow this rule… and the exceptions to it! “I” before “E” These words follow the “i” before “e” rule. In all of them, IE is pronounced like EE: achieve belief cashier chief field niece piece shield thief yield But we do have some exceptions: weird seize leisure either/neither caffeine protein Except after “C” These words show that when after “c,” it is “e” before “i” ceiling conceit deceit perceive receipt But wait! There are exceptions: the word species (referring to a type of animal) the word policies (plural of “policy”) A few more common words that end in -cy and become -cies in the plural: pharmacies deficiencies vacancies Or when sounded as “A” When the vowel sounds like “A” as in “day,” then it is EI: neighbor weigh/weight beige vein IE and EI can have many other sounds as well: This is where the rule starts to fall apart, and you just need to remember the spelling of each word individually: height (rhymes with “might”) lie (rhymes with “why”) friend (rhymes with “end”) foreign (“eign” sounds like “in”) efficient (rhymes with “mint”) counterfeit / forfeit (last syllable sounds like “fit”) glacier (last syllable rhymes with “her”) science (here the “i” and the “e” are in separate syllables) The English language is complicated – there are rules, exceptions, and exceptions to the exceptions! I’m here to help make it clear to you, so you can speak English confidently. Come check out my English courses to take your English fluency to the next level. Download 30 Ask the Teacher lessons The English language is a fascinating puzzle. It’s filled with rules, exceptions, and everything in between. One such rule is the “i before e, except after c” rule. It’s a handy guide for spelling words that use both i and e. But like any rule, it has exceptions. Some words don’t follow this rule, making English spelling a bit tricky. In this article, we’ll explore: Whether you’re a language learner, a teacher, or just a curious reader, this guide will help you navigate the complexities of English spelling. Let’s dive in! The AI writing partner for anyone with work to do Understanding the “i before e, except after c” rule The “i before e, except after c” rule is a mnemonic device. It helps us remember how to spell certain words in English. The rule means that when the letters i and e appear together, i usually comes first, before e. But if they follow the letter c, e comes before i. You can see this in the word “believe,” where the i comes before the e, and in the word “ceiling,” where the letter c is followed by e before i. This rule is a general guideline. It does not apply to all words, but it is useful for many. Here are some key points to remember about this rule: It applies to words where i and e are together and pronounced as one sound. It doesn’t apply to words where i and e are pronounced separately, as in “deity.” It’s a rule of thumb, not a strict law of the English language. The origin and reason behind the rule The “i before e, except after c” rule has been around at least since the 19th century. It’s believed to have originated from Latin language rules. The rule is based on pronunciation patterns. In many words, i and e together make a specific, long “e” sound—that is, the vowel sound in “whee.” This rule helps us predict the spelling of those words. Common words that follow the rule Many common words follow the “i before e, except after c” rule. Here are a few examples: believe field relief ceiling deceive receive These words are great examples of the rule in action. They can help you remember how to apply the rule when spelling. When to apply the “i before e” rule The “i before e” rule is most useful when you’re unsure about the spelling of a word. If you pause while writing and wonder whether you want ei or ie, this rule can guide you. It’s also helpful when you’re learning new words. If you hear a word you’re not acquainted with, the rule can help you guess the spelling. However, remember that it’s a rule of thumb. It’s not always correct, but it’s right often enough to be useful. Exceptions to the rule As with many rules in English, the “i before e, except after c” rule has its exceptions. These exceptions can be tricky, but they’re part of what makes English so interesting. Words where e comes before i without a c There are many words where e comes before i without a c. These words are exceptions to the rule and can be confusing. Here are some examples: weird seize leisure heinous either These words don’t follow the usual pattern. But with practice, you can learn to spell them correctly. Remember, English is full of exceptions. It’s part of what makes the language so rich and diverse. Words with c that break the rule There are also words with c that break the rule. In these words, i comes before e even after c. Here are some examples: science conscience sufficient deficiency omniscient These words remind us that the “i before e, except after c” rule is not absolute. It’s a guideline, not a law. Ways of keeping the rule straight It can be challenging to remember when the rule applies and when it doesn’t. But don’t worry—there are tips and tricks to help you remember. One way is to use an expanded version of the rule. For example, you could use a rhyme like “i before e, except after c, or when sounded as a, as in ‘neighbor’ and ‘weigh.’” Another tip is to practice. Write down words that follow the rule and those that don’t. Practice spelling them until they become second nature. Remember, it’s OK to make mistakes. That’s how we learn. So don’t be afraid to try, even if you’re not sure. Grammarly is here to help Feeling overwhelmed with spelling rules or need quick help in a pinch? Don’t worry—Grammarly’s got your back. Use Grammarly’s free AI-powered spell-checker to fix spelling mistakes, confusing grammar, and more in a few clicks. Just paste in your text and let Grammarly do the rest. Conclusion: the importance of flexibility in spelling Mastering the “i before e, except after c” rule can improve your spelling. But remember, English is a flexible language. It’s full of exceptions and regional variations. So, while rules can guide us, they’re not always absolute. Embrace the quirks and complexities of the English language. It’s what makes it unique and interesting. Perhaps the best known spelling convention in English is “I Before E, Except After C,” meaning that I comes before E in most words, except when both letters immediately follow C. Due to the simplicity of the rule and its easily remembered rhyming mnemonic, it is often one of the first rules taught to those learning English spelling.However, even though the basic element of the rule is straightforward, it is actually quite a bit more complicated. In fact, the full rhyme typically goes like this:“I before E, Except after C,Or when sounding like AAs in neighbor or weigh.”As we can see, we have to use a word’s pronunciation to decide whether or not I does indeed come after E. And this is not just limited to the “A” sound (/eɪ/) described in the rhyme—there are many exceptions and special cases that we have to consider when deciding whether I should come before E.We’ll begin by looking at the foundations of the rule, and then examine the various instances in which it doesn’t apply (or the rule changes slightly).The “I before E” rule is most useful if we focus on instances when E and I are put together as vowel digraphs—that is, two vowels working together to form a single speech sound.With this in mind, the basic rule “I before E, except after C” is fairly reliable when IE or EI function as digraphs that produce the sound /i/ (the way the letter E is said aloud as a word). The second half of the rhyme—“Or when sounding like A”—alludes to the fact that E often comes before I without C when EI is pronounced /eɪ/ (the way the letter A is said aloud as a word). This is especially common when EI is followed by a silent GH, as in:freight (/freɪt/) eight (/eɪt/) inveigh (/ɪnˈveɪ/)neighbor (/ˈneɪbər/)sleigh (/sleɪ/)weight (/weɪt/)(Remember this when using these roots in other words, as in eighteen or weightless.)In some words, EI also produces this pronunciation before a single silent G or simply on its own. For instance:deign (/deɪn/)beige (/beɪʒ/)feign (/feɪn/)reign (/reɪn/)rein (/reɪn/)surveillance (/sərˈveɪləns/)veil (/veɪl/)vein (/veɪn/)Less commonly, the digraph EI produces the sound /aɪ/ (the way the letter I is said aloud as a word).There are only a few common root words in which this is the case: feisty (/ˈfaɪsti/)height (/haɪt/)heist (/haɪst/)sleight (/slaɪt/)Just be sure not to confuse the spelling for slight (an adjective meaning “small in size, degree, or amount”) with sleight (a noun meaning “skill or dexterity” or “a clever trick or deception”)—they both sound the same, but have slightly different spellings.Even when we narrow the “I before E” rule

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