

Confusing Words

'E' and 'i' often appear together in words, so it can be difficult to know which way round they're supposed to go. Learn this page and master the 'ie' conundrum.

Learn the 'i' before 'e' rule

Use this rule to decide whether 'i' comes before 'e' or after it.



'i' before 'e' except after 'c' but only when it rhymes with 'bee'.

The whole word doesn't need to rhyme with 'bee', just the 'ie' sound.



Here are some examples of words that follow the rule:

believe

Rhymes with 'bee' so 'i' before 'e'.

receive

Rhymes with 'bee' but follows 'c' so 'i' after 'e'.

neighbour

Doesn't rhyme with 'bee' so 'i' after 'e'.

science

Doesn't rhyme with 'bee' but follows 'c' so 'i' before 'e'.

Some words *break* the 'i' before 'e' rule

Like with every rule, there are exceptions you need to learn.

In these words, the 'ie' sound rhymes with 'bee' but the 'i' comes after 'e'.

protein

seize

caffeine



Suffixes can also make a word break the 'i' before 'e' rule. Suffixes have their own spelling rules (see p.52-53) and it's more important to follow those than the 'i before e' rule.



juicy

juiciest

The 'ie' comes after 'c' because the suffix is 'est'.

fancy

fancied

It's the same here — the suffix is 'ed'.