

Spelling Rules for "Silent E"

Although the list of words that end with a "silent e" is long, the unpronounced letter is not a pesky spelling quirk intended to confuse English students. Instead, "silent e" does multiple important jobs in written English.

1.) Show Vowel Sounds

The "silent e" tells the first vowel to say its name.

mad-made
met-mete
bit-bite
not-note
cut-cute

Many grammar books describe the change in vowel sound with a "silent e" as a change from a "short vowel" to a "long sound." However, unlike Old English, Modern English no longer has short or long vowels.

2.) Show Consonant Sounds

The "silent e" tells a C or G to make a soft sound and a TH to make a voiced sound.

ice
age
breathe

The "silent e" also tells an S to make an s sound instead of a z sound.

moos-moose
pleas-please
teas-tease
tens-tense

3.) Distinguish Homophones

aw-awe
brows-browse
by-bye
cops-copse

4.) Add a Vowel to a Syllabic Consonant

The rules of English spelling state that every syllable must have a vowel. A "silent e" following a syllabic L prevents words from violating the spelling rule.



able
aisle
apple
bubble
circle
google

5.) Stop Words from Ending in U and V

The rules of English spelling state that words cannot end with a u or v. A "silent e" following a u or v prevents words from violating the spelling rule.

argue
blue
drive
wave

Note that words borrowed from other language such as chateau, jujitsu, and tofu and abbreviations such as flu and gov can end in a u or v. Native English words cannot.

6.) Show the History of a Word

In some words with historically long vowels, the final e indicated the length of the vowel. The remaining "silent e" is a historical carryover. The effect is especially common in words that historically had an f rather than a v.

come
done
give
love
some
were

In some words, multiple rules apply.

bathe
eve
give
love
rave
wage
wreathe

For more information and examples, see <https://parentingpatch.com/the-functions-of-silent-e-in-written-english/>

