

## Adding suffixes to words

During Phase Six, children should also start to learn spelling conventions for adding common endings (suffixes) to words. Most children will have taken words with suffixes in their stride in reading, but for spelling purposes they now need more systematic teaching both of the suffixes themselves and of how the spelling of base words may have to change slightly when suffixes are added. Some grammatical awareness is also helpful here: just knowing that the regular past tense ending is spelt **-ed** is not enough – children also need to be aware that the word they are trying to spell is a past tense word. Without this awareness, they may, for example, spell **hopped** as **hopt**, **played** as **plaid**, **grabbed** as **grabd** and **started** as **startid** – perfectly accurate phonemically, but not correct. Conversely, once they have understood that the **-ed** ending can sometimes sound like /t/, they may try to spell **soft** as **soffed**, unless they realise that this word is not the past tense of a verb. (See 'Introducing and teaching the past tense' on page 170).

These are examples of common suffixes suitable for Phase Six:

- **-s** and **-es**: added to nouns and verbs, as in **cats**, **runs**, **bushes**, **catches**;
- **-ed** and **-ing**: added to verbs, as in **hopped**, **hopping**, **hoped**, **hoping**;
- **-ful**: added to nouns, as in **careful**, **painful**, **playful**, **restful**, **mouthful**;
- **-er**: added to verbs to denote the person doing the action and to adjectives to give the comparative form, as in **runner**, **reader**, **writer**, **bigger**, **slower**;
- **-est**: added to adjectives, as in **biggest**, **slowest**, **happiest**, **latest**;
- **-ly**: added to adjectives to form adverbs, as in **sadly**, **happily**, **brightly**, **lately**;
- **-ment**: added to verbs to form nouns, as in **payment**, **advertisement**, **development**;
- **-ness**: added to adjectives to form nouns, as in **darkness**, **happiness**, **sadness**;
- **-y**: added to nouns to form adjectives, as in **funny**, **smoky**, **sandy**.

The spelling of a suffix is always the same, except in the case of **-s** and **-es**.

### Adding **-s** and **-es** to nouns and verbs

Generally, **-s** is simply added to the base word. The suffix **-es** is used after words ending in **s(s)**, **ch**, **sh** and **z(z)**, and when **y** is replaced by **i**. Examples include **buses**, **passes**, **benches**, **catches**, **rushes**, **buzzes**, **babies**. (In words such as **buses**, **passes**, **benches** and **catches**, the extra syllable is easy to hear and helps with the spelling.) Words such as **knife**, **leaf** and **loaf** become **knives**, **leaves** and **loaves** and again the change in spelling is obvious from the change in the pronunciation of the words.

### Adding other suffixes

Other suffixes have just one spelling. As with **-s** and **-es**, many can be added to base words without affecting the spelling of the base word. Adding a suffix may sometimes mean, however, that the last letter of the base word needs to be dropped, changed or doubled, and there are guidelines for this. Once children know the guidelines, they can apply them to many different words. Only three kinds of base words may need their last letters to be changed – those ending in:

- an **-e** that is part of a split digraph (e.g. **hope**, **safe**, **use**);
- a **-y** preceded by a consonant (e.g. **happy**, **baby**, **carry**);
- a single consonant letter preceded by a single vowel letter (e.g. **hop**, **red**, **run**). This simplified version of the guideline applies reliably to single-syllable words. Later, children will need to learn that in words of more than one syllable, stress also needs to be taken into account.

### General guidelines for adding other suffixes

Children should be taught to think in terms of base words and suffixes whenever appropriate. Suffixes are easily learned and many base words will already be familiar from Phases Two to Five.

1. If a base word ends in an **e** which is part of a split digraph, drop the **e** if the suffix begins with a vowel (e.g. **hope** – **hoping**; **like** – **liked**: the **e** before the **d** is part of the suffix, not part of the base word). Keep the **e** if the suffix begins with a consonant (e.g. **hope** – **hopeful**; **safe** – **safely**).
2. If a base word ends in **y** preceded by a consonant, change the **y** to **i** before all suffixes except those beginning with **i** (e.g. **happy** – **happiness**, **happier**; **baby** – **babies**; **carry** – **carried**). Keep the **y** if the suffix begins with **i**, not permissible in English (e.g. **baby** – **babyish**; **carry** – **carrying**), as **ii** is not permissible in English except in **taxiing** and **skiing**.
3. If a base word ends in a single consonant letter preceded by a single vowel letter and the suffix begins with a vowel, double the consonant letter. Another way of stating this guideline is that there need to be two consonant letters between a 'short' vowel (vowel sounds learned in Phase Two – see also the note on page 187) and a suffix beginning with a vowel (e.g. **hop** – **hopped**, **hopping**; **red** – **redder**, **reddest**; **run** – **running**, **runner**).

In all other cases, the suffix can simply be added without any change being made to the spelling of the base word. This means that for words in 1 and 3 above, the spelling of the base word does not change if a suffix beginning with a consonant is added (e.g. **lame** + **ness** = **lameness**; **glad** + **ly** = **gladly**). Similarly, no change occurs if the base word ends in any way other than those mentioned in 1, 2 and 3 above.