

Spelling Rules & Common Errors

Write It Right Every Time · Handout 14 of 18

14 / 18

Medical spelling errors can have serious clinical consequences. Mastering these rules will help you spell terms correctly the first time.

Rule 1 — Drop the Combining Vowel Before a Suffix Starting with a Vowel

When a suffix **begins with a vowel** (a, e, i, o, u), drop the combining vowel (usually 'o') from the word root before attaching the suffix.

Word Root	Combining Form	Suffix	Correct Term	Incorrect
gastr	gastr/o	-itis	gastritis	gastroitis
arthr	arthr/o	-itis	arthritis	arthroitis
hepat	hepat/o	-itis	hepatitis	hepatoitis
neur	neur/o	-itis	neuritis	neuroitis
enter	enter/o	-itis	enteritis	enteroitis
oste	oste/o	-oma	osteoma	oste/o/oma

Rule 2 — Keep the Combining Vowel Before a Suffix Starting with a Consonant

When a suffix **begins with a consonant**, keep the combining vowel.

Combining Form	Suffix	Correct Term	Incorrect
gastr/o	-scope	gastroscope	gastrscope
cardi/o	-logy	cardiology	cardlogy
hepat/o	-megaly	hepatomegaly	hepatmegaly
oste/o	-porosis	osteoporosis	ostporosis
neur/o	-logy	neurology	neurlogy
arthr/o	-plasty	arthroplasty	arthrplasty

Rule 3 — Use the Combining Vowel 'O' to Link Two Word Roots

Root 1	Root 2	Combined Form	Example Term
gastr/o	enter/o	gastr/o + enter/o	gastroenterology
cardi/o	pulmon/o	cardi/o + pulmon/o	cardiopulmonary
electr/o	cardi/o	electr/o + cardi/o	electrocardiogram
oste/o	arthr/o	oste/o + arthr/o	osteoarthritis
my/o	cardi/o	my/o + cardi/o	myocardium

50 Most Commonly Misspelled Medical Terms

Misspelled	Correct Spelling	Tip
absess	abscess	double 's' before 'ess'
accomodate	accommodate	double 'c' and double 'm'

Spelling Rules & Common Errors

Write It Right Every Time · Handout 14 of 18

14 / 18

Misspelled	Correct Spelling	Tip
anesthesia	anesthesia	not 'anaesthesia' in US usage
appendicitis	appendicitis	not 'appendisitis'
arrhythmia	arrhythmia	double 'r', then 'hythm'
arteriosclerosis	arteriosclerosis	not 'arteriosclrosis'
asthma	asthma	silent 'th'
bronchitis	bronchitis	not 'bronicitis'
catheter	catheter	not 'cathater'
cellulitis	cellulitis	double 'l'
cirrhosis	cirrhosis	double 'r'
cholesterol	cholesterol	not 'cholesteral'
convalescence	convalescence	ends '-escence'
creatinine	creatinine	not 'creatine'
diarrhea	diarrhea	double 'r'
dilatation	dilation or dilatation	both accepted; 'dilation' preferred
dyspnea	dyspnea	not 'dispnea'
edema	edema	not 'oedema' (US usage)
eczema	eczema	not 'exzema'
hemorrhage	hemorrhage	double 'r', then 'hage'
hemorrhoid	hemorrhoid	double 'r'
hypertension	hypertension	not 'hypertention'
hypothyroidism	hypothyroidism	not 'hypothyroidsm'
ileostomy	ileostomy	not 'iliostomy'
immunodeficiency	immunodeficiency	not 'immunodeficiency'
intubation	intubation	not 'intobation'
ischemia	ischemia	not 'ischimia'
jaundice	jaundice	not 'jondice'
laryngitis	laryngitis	not 'laryngytis'
malignant	malignant	not 'maligant'
melanoma	melanoma	not 'melanomma'
menstruation	menstruation	not 'menstration'
myocardial	myocardial	not 'myocardal'
nausea	nausea	not 'nauseous' for the condition
ophthalmology	ophthalmology	silent first 'h'; 'ophthalm-'
osteoporosis	osteoporosis	not 'ostiaporosis'
palpitation	palpitation	not 'palpation' (different meaning)

Spelling Rules & Common Errors

Write It Right Every Time · Handout 14 of 18

14 / 18

Misspelled	Correct Spelling	Tip
paraplegia	paraplegia	not 'paraplesia'
penicillin	penicillin	not 'penicillan'
peritoneum	peritoneum	not 'peritonium'
pneumonia	pneumonia	silent 'p'; not 'neumonia'
prescription	prescription	not 'perscription'
prognosis	prognosis	not 'prognosos'
prophylaxis	prophylaxis	not 'prophylaxisis'
psoriasis	psoriasis	silent 'p'; not 'soriasis'
resuscitation	resuscitation	not 'ressucitation'
rheumatoid	rheumatoid	not 'rhumatoid'
urinalysis	urinalysis	not 'urinalasys'
varicella	varicella	not 'vericella'

Tricky Pairs — Words That Are Often Confused

Word 1	Meaning	Word 2	Meaning
ileum	Part of the small intestine	ilium	Part of the hip bone (pelvis)
mucus	The secretion (noun)	mucous	The membrane that secretes it (adj.)
palpation	Examining by touch	palpitation	Rapid or irregular heartbeat sensation
peroneal	Relating to the fibula	perineal	Relating to the perineum
prostate	Male reproductive gland	prostrate	To lie face down; to exhaust
sinus	Air-filled cavity in skull	synus	Not a word — common misspelling
trachea	Windpipe	tracheae	Plural of trachea
dysphasia	Language disorder	dysphagia	Swallowing disorder
distal	Away from trunk	digital	Pertaining to fingers/toes
aphagia	Inability to swallow	aphasia	Inability to use language
ileostomy	Opening in the ileum	iliostomy	Not a standard term
epiphysis	End of a long bone	epididymis	Coiled tube on the testis