

« Silent letters »

A silent letter is the one that is spelled but not pronounced. These letters can come at the beginning, middle and end of words. By now, most of us are familiar with the silent “e” that is found at the end of a great many words in English, but perhaps not so familiar with the others.

Silent “b”

When “b” is found after an “m”, the “b” is silent.

Examples:

_ limb /l ɪ m/

_ thumb /θ ʌ m/

_ dumb /d ʌ m/

Silent “c”

There is only one example of when the “c” is silent and that is in the word “**muscle**”.

Example:

_ muscle /mʌsəl/

Silent “d”

There is no specific rule for when the “d” is silent, but there are a few common words in which it is not pronounced.

Examples:

_ Wednesday /wenzdei/

_ sandwich /sænwiʃ/

Silent “e”

As mentioned above, the “e” at the end of words is silent.

Examples:

_ cope /kəʊp/

_ lite /laɪt/

_ skate /sket/

Silent “g”

“G” is generally not pronounced when it is followed by an “n”.

Examples:

- _ sign/saɪn/
- _ foreign/fɔːrən/
- _ align/əlaɪn/

Silent “gh”

There are many words in English that have the letter combination “gh”. In this letter combination, the “gh” is not pronounced.

Examples:

- _ thought/ɒt/
- _ right/raɪt/
- _ daughter/dɔːtər/
- _ brought/brɔːt/
- _ caught/kɔːt/

Silent and Pronounced “h”

The “h” is not pronounced when it follows a “w”.

Examples:

- _ what/wɑːt/
- _ when/wen/
- _ where/wer/

In addition, there are several words in English that begin with an “h” that is not pronounced. There is no rule for when the “h” at the beginning of a word is pronounced, although when it is a noun and it is not pronounced, it must be used with the article “an” rather than “a”.

Examples:

Silent “h”

- _ (an) hour/aʊr/
- _ (an) herb/ɜːrb/
- _ honest/ɑːnəst/

Pronounced “h”

- (a) hospital/hɑːspɪtl/
- (a) hotel/həʊtel/
- happy/hæpiː/
- high/haɪ/
- history/hɪstəriː/

Silent “k”

The “**k**” at the beginning of words is not pronounced if it is followed by an “**n**”.

Examples:

- know/nəʊ/
- knife/naɪf/
- knee/niː/

Silent “l”

The “**l**” is frequently not pronounced when it is found before: “**d**”, “**f**”, “**m**” or “**k**”.

Examples:

- half/hæf/
- calm/kɑːm/
- walk/wɔːk/
- could/kʊd/

Silent “n”

When “**n**” follows an “**m**” at the end of a word, it is not pronounced.

Examples:

- autumn/ɔːtəm/
- hymn/hɪm/

Silent “p”

The “**p**” is not pronounced when used at the beginning of many scientific related words, as with the prefixes “**psych-**” or “**pneu-**”.

Examples:

- psychology/saɪkɑːlədʒi/
- pneumonia/nʊməʊnjə/

Silent “s”

The “s” is silent when it comes before an “l” in the following two related words:

Examples:

- island/aɪlənd/
- isle/aɪl/

Silent “t”

A silent “t” is found in several common words.

Examples:

- listen/lɪsn/
- often/ɔːfən/
- Christmas/krɪsməs/
- castle/kæsl/

Silent “u”

“U” is not pronounced when it comes after a “g” and before another vowel.

Examples:

- guitar/gəʔɑːr/
- guess/ges/
- guide/gaɪd/

Silent “w”

“W” is silent when it comes before an “r” at the beginning of a word or in several pronouns.

Examples:

- write/raɪt/
- wrong/rɔːŋ/
- who, whose, whom/huː/ /huːm/ /huːz/