If you’re writing with a computer and have access to a spell-check program, use it. The program will check every word in your essay against the words in its own dictionary; it will list or “flag” every word of yours that its dictionary doesn’t have; and in some cases, it will tell you which words in its dictionary resemble yours. If you’ve written *complament*, for instance, the program will furnish two correctly spelled alternatives: *compliment* and *complement*.

Spell checkers, however, will not proofread your essay or correct your misspellings for you. The programs can merely tell you which of your words does not appear in the program dictionary, and suggest one or more similar words that do. Also, spell checkers can seldom identify a word misspelled for its context. If you write a *peace of pie*, most programs will accept the phrase—simply because each of its words appears in the program dictionary. Likewise, when the program suggests *compliment* and *complement* as correctly spelled alternatives to *complament*, you must still choose between these alternatives. If you don’t know what each means, you will need to consult a printed dictionary or perhaps our Glossary of Usage.

Spell checkers can save you time and help you spot misspellings that you might have overlooked. But since no such program is foolproof, you should keep a good dictionary within easy reach of the computer screen. And to improve your spelling generally, you may also want to use one or more of the pre-electronic methods explained below.
34.2 LISTING YOUR SPELLING DEMONS

Keep an analytical list of your spelling demons—words you have trouble spelling. Beside each of the words, write out the correct spelling, as shown in your dictionary. Then, beside the correct spelling of the word, write the letter or letters involved in the error. Your list will look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MISSPELLED</th>
<th>CORRECTLY</th>
<th>ERROR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alot</td>
<td>a lot</td>
<td>al / a l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goverment</td>
<td>government</td>
<td>erm / ern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defensable</td>
<td>defensible</td>
<td>able / ible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imovable</td>
<td>immovable</td>
<td>im / imm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defenite</td>
<td>definite</td>
<td>en / in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34.3 LEARNING HOW TO ADD SUFFIXES

Learn how to add suffixes—extra letters at the end of a word.

1. Change final *y* to *i* before adding a suffix:

   - beauty + ful = beautiful
   - bury + ed = buried
   - tricky + est = trickiest
   - carry + es = carries

**EXCEPTION:** If *y* follows a vowel or if the suffix is *-ing,* keep the *y*:

   - joy + ful = joyful
   - carry + ing = carrying
   - bury + ing = burying

2. Drop silent *e* before adding *-able* or *-ing*:

   - love + able = lovable
Spelling, Hyphen, Apostrophe

\[\text{care} + \text{ing} = \text{caring}\]
\[\text{restore} + \text{ing} = \text{restoring}\]

If any other suffix is added, keep the \(e\):

\[\text{care} + \text{ful} = \text{careful}\]
\[\text{aware} + \text{ness} = \text{awareness}\]

**EXCEPTION:** If the silent \(e\) follows \(c\) or \(g\), keep the \(e\) before -able:

\[\text{change} + \text{able} = \text{changeable}\]
\[\text{peace} + \text{able} = \text{peaceable}\]

3. If the word ends in a single consonant after a single vowel (\textit{forget}) and the accent is on the last syllable (\textit{for get’}), double the consonant before adding -ing, -ed, -or, or -er:

\[\text{for get’} + \text{ing} = \text{forgetting}\]
\[\text{re fer’} + \text{ed} = \text{referred}\]
\[\text{bet’} + \text{or} = \text{better}\]

If the accent is not on the last syllable, do not double the consonant:

\[\text{ham’ mer} + \text{ing} = \text{hammering}\]
\[\text{a ban’ don} + \text{ed} = \text{abandoned}\]
\[\text{al’ ter} + \text{ing} = \text{altering}\]

**34.4 LEARNING HOW TO ADD PREFIXES**

Learn how to add **prefixes**—extra letters at the beginning of a word. When adding a prefix, be careful to add all of its letters, and only those:

\[\text{dis} + \text{satisfaction} = \text{dissatisfaction}\]
\[\text{mis} + \text{fire} = \text{misfire}\]
\[\text{mis} + \text{spell} = \text{misspell}\]
\[\text{un} + \text{necessary} = \text{unnecessary}\]
34.5 RECOGNIZING HOMONYMS

1. Distinguish between homonyms—words that sound alike but have different meanings and different spellings, such as these:
   - bare (noun) vs. bear (noun)
   - brake (noun) vs. break (verb)
   - capital (noun) vs. capitol (noun)
   - cite (verb) vs. site (noun) vs. sight (noun)
   - peace (noun) vs. piece (noun)
   - principal (noun) vs. principle (noun)
   - right (noun) vs. write (verb) vs. rite (noun)
   - there (adverb) vs. their (possessive pronoun) vs. they’re (contraction)

   If you aren’t sure how to spell a homonym, see your dictionary.

2. Distinguish between partial homonyms—words with syllables that sound alike but are spelled differently, such as these:
   - tolerate (verb) vs. separate (verb)
   - supersede (verb) vs. exceed (verb) vs. concede (verb)
   - dominance (noun) (think of dominate) vs. existence (noun) (think of existential)
   - incredible (adjective) (think of credit) vs. irritable (adjective) (think of irritate)

34.6 PLURALIZING SIMPLE NOUNS

1. Form the plural of most nouns by adding -s:
   - book, books

2. Form the plural of nouns ending in ch, s, sh, x, and z by adding -es (pronounced as a syllable):
   - church, churches
   - business, businesses
   - tax, taxes

   EXCEPTIONS: crisis, crises; basis, bases; ox, oxen
3. Form the plural of nouns ending in *fe* by changing *f* to *v* before adding *-es*:
   - wife, wives
   - life, lives

4. Form the plural of nouns ending in *f* by changing the *f* to *v* and then adding *-es*:
   - leaf, leaves
   - thief, thieves

**EXCEPTION:** Some nouns ending in *f* need only *-s* to become plural:
   - chief, chiefs
   - belief, beliefs
   - proof, proofs

5. Form the plural of some nouns ending in *o* by adding *-es*:
   - hero, heroes

Most nouns ending in *o* need only an *-s* to become plural:
   - piano, pianos
   - solo, solos
   - mosquito, mosquitos (or mosquitoes)
   - banjo, banjos (or banjoes)

6. Form the plural of words ending in a consonant plus *y* by changing the *y* to *-ies*:
   - vacancy, vacancies
   - authority, authorities

Words ending in a vowel plus *y* need only an *-s* to become plural:
   - day, days
   - attorney, attorneys

7. Form the plural of some nouns in special ways:
   - datum, data
   - criterion, criteria
   - woman, women

The forms *data* and *criteria* reflect the derivation of the words from Latin and Greek respectively.

8. Form the plural of figures, numbers written as words, capitalized letters, undotted abbreviations, and isolated words by adding *-s* or an apostrophe plus *-s*:
   - the 1990s / the 1990's
   - three YMCAs / three YMCA's
   - twos and threes / two's and three's
four Cs / four C’s

no ifs or buts / no if’s or but’s

9. Form the plural of lowercase letters and dotted abbreviations by adding an apostrophe and -s:
   six s’s and five m’s    three M.A.’s    two c.o.d.’s

10. Some nouns are spelled the same in the plural as in the singular:
   deer, deer    fish, fish    barracks, barracks

### 34.7 PLURALIZING COMPOUND NOUNS

**Compound nouns** are written as separate words (*master chef*), as words linked by a hyphen (*self-esteem*), or as one word (*notebook*). Here are guidelines.

1. If the compound is written as one word, pluralize the final word:
   - notebook    notebooks
   - blueberry    blueberries

   **Exception:** passerby, passersby

2. If the compound is hyphenated or written as separate words, pluralize the major word:
   - mother-in-law    mothers-in-law
   - editor in chief    editors in chief

   A few compounds have alternative plurals: *attorney general*, for instance, may be pluralized as *attorneys general* or *attorney generals*.

3. If the compound has no noun within it, pluralize the final word:
   - also-ran    also-rans

4. If the compound ends in *-ful*, add *s*:
   - mouthful    mouthfuls
1. Use a hyphen to divide a long word at the end of a line:

   The long black centipede walked across the sand with an enormous limp.

Normally you divide a word at the end of a syllable. But do not put syllables of one or two letters on either side of a hyphen, as in *i-tem and *end-ed. If you aren’t sure what the syllables of a word are, see your dictionary.
2. Use a hyphen to form a compound of three or more words:
The older citizens don't want a Johnny-come-lately for mayor.
But they don’t want a stick-in-the-mud either.

3. Use a hyphen to form a compound adjective:
Enrico Caruso was a world-famous tenor.
I wouldn’t touch cocaine with a ten-foot pole.
Spike Lee is a well-known movie director.
Twentieth-century writers include Faulkner and Hemingway.

4. Do not use a hyphen:
   a. Between an adjective and a noun in a noun phrase:
      The twentieth century will soon come to an end.
   b. In a compound predicate adjective:
      Spike Lee is well known.
   c. In compounds made with an adverb ending in -ly, such as widely held.

FORMING COMPOUND NOUNS
Generally, use a hyphen in a compound noun when both items serve as nouns:
   city-state
   poet-critic
   teacher-scholar
Generally, use no hyphen when the first noun serves as an adjective modifying the second:
   stone wall
   city hall
   master chef
   police officer
EXCEPTIONS: Some compound nouns are made with neither a hyphen nor a space (paintbrush, notebook), and some make it hard to tell whether the first item is serving as an adjective or not (beer drinker, cattle prod). If in doubt about hyphenating a particular noun compound, see your dictionary.

ATTACHING PREFIXES

Use a hyphen to join a prefix to a capitalized word:

- un-American
- post-Renaissance
- pre-Reformation

Generally, use no hyphen to join a prefix to an uncaptionized word:

- deemphasize
- nonprofit
- antibodies

EXCEPTIONS: Some words made with prefixes may be written with or without hyphens, but the choice of one or the other affects the meaning of the word; re-cover, for instance, does not mean the same as recover. For words such as this, see your dictionary.

WRITING OUT NUMBERS

Use a hyphen in a number written as two words, provided it is below one hundred:

- Twenty-five applicants have requested interviews.
- Two-thirds of the trees had been cut.
- One-half of the design is complete.

Do not attach a hyphen to the word for any number over ninety-nine:

- Some cars can run over three hundred miles on a tank of gas.
- One speaker earned eight thousand dollars for a single lecture.
- Thirty-five thousand spectators watched the game.

*Thirty-five*, which is below one hundred, is hyphenated, but no hyphen is attached to *thousand.*
34.9 USING THE APOSTROPHE

1. To form the possessive of nouns and abbreviations that do not end in s, use an apostrophe plus -s:

   - a girl’s hat
   - Bill’s car
   - a team’s mascot
   - NATO’s future
   - the C.O.’s orders
   - Dr. T.’s patients
   - men’s activities
   - children’s toys
   - someone’s coat

If a singular noun ends in s (as in James) you may form the possessive by adding an apostrophe plus -s (James’s apartment) or by adding just the apostrophe (James’ apartment). Custom calls for the latter form with Zeus, Moses, Jesus, and ancient Greek names ending in es: Zeus’ thunderbolts, Moses’ staff, Jesus’ teachings, Sophocles’ plays.
2. To form the possessive of plural nouns ending in s, add just an apostrophe:

players players’ uniforms
animals animals’ eating habits
the Joneses the Joneses’ car

3. To indicate that two people possess something jointly, add an apostrophe, and -s if necessary, to the second of the two nouns:

Ann and James’ apartment
Tim and Susan’s wedding album

To indicate that two people possess two or more things separately, use the apostrophe, and -s if necessary, with both of the nouns:

Paul’s and Marysa’s cars
Kitty’s and James’ tests

4. To form the possessive with singular compound nouns, add an apostrophe plus -s to the last word:

my sister-in-law’s career the editor in chief’s policy

5. To form the possessive of certain indefinite pronouns, add an apostrophe plus -s:

someone’s coat no one’s fault everybody else’s jokes

With indefinite pronouns that do not take the apostrophe, form the possessive with of: the plans of most, the hopes of many, the triumphs of few.

6. Use the possessive case with nouns or pronouns followed by gerunds:

The crowd’s cheering could be heard a mile away.
Everyone who hears the young violinist admires her playing.

For more on this point, see 13.11.

7. Use an apostrophe, and -s when necessary, in common phrases of time and measurement:

four o’clock five dollars’ worth
two weeks’ notice a day’s work
our money’s worth a stone’s throw

8. Use an apostrophe plus -s to form the plurals shown above in 34.6, items 8 and 9.

9. Use an apostrophe to mark the omission of a letter or letters in a contraction:

I have finished. I’ve finished.
He is not here. He’s not here.
This does not work. This doesn’t work.
They will not stop. They won’t stop.
You should have written. You should’ve written.

10. Use an apostrophe to mark the omission of numbers in dates:

the election of ‘92 the Great Crash of ‘29

34.10 MISUSING THE APOSTROPHE

1. Do not use an apostrophe to form the plural of nouns:

▶ Five girl’s went swimming.
▶ Two houses’ need paint.

2. Do not use an apostrophe with the possessive forms of the personal pronouns:

▶ This is our thermos; that one is their’s.
▶ Ben’s notes are incomplete; yours’re are thorough.

3. Do not confuse the possessive pronoun its with the contraction it’s (for it is). Use its as you use his; use it’s as you use he’s:

his success he’s successful
its success it’s successful
4. Do not confuse the possessive *whose* with the contraction *who’s* (for *who is*):

   Whose notebook is this?
   No one knows whose painting this is.
   Who’s going to the concert?
   No one has heard of the pianist who’s scheduled to play.

5. Do not use the apostrophe and -s to form a possessive when the construction would be cumbersome:

   **Weak:** Questions about the candidate’s husband’s financial dealings hurt her campaign.
   
   **Edited:** Questions about the financial dealings of the candidate’s husband hurt her campaign.