LESSON 3: Consonant Doubling

dinner dining
writing written
fibber fiber
riding ridden
cuter cutter

Here is one of the most important reading rules of English:

A VOWEL FOLLOWED BY A CONSONANT GROUP WILL BE SHORT AND STR

Notice the stress and vowel quality in these words:

fasten, blister, filter, whisper, battle, mitten, muddy, button, ladder.
The spelling rule that follows from this reading rule is this one:

WHEN ADDING A SUFFIX BEGINNING WITH A VOWEL,
DOUBLE A FINAL CONSONANT FOLLOWING A SHORT, STRESSED VOWEL.

Following this rule, refer + ed is spelled referred; spin + ing is spelled spinning. Notice the conditions under which we do not double a final consonant:

1. when the preceding vowel is long or is unstressed,
2. when adding a suffix beginning with a consonant.

Not all suffixes cause doubling. Here are the ones that do:

- ed  - er  - el (-le)  - ish
- ent (-ant)  - able  - ing  - est
- al  - y  - ence (-ance)
- ee  - en  - ery (-ary)

Study the following words carefully:

prefer  +  ing  ==>  preferring
repel  +  ent  ==>  repellent
regret  +  able  ==>  regrettable
admit  +  ance  ==>  admittance
pig  +  ish  ==>  piggish
commit  +  al  ==>  comittal

Notice the reasons why the consonant does not double in these words:

appear  +  ing  ==>  appearing  (The vowel preceding r is not short.)
suffer  +  ed  ==>  suffered  (The vowel preceding r is not stressed.)
defer  +  ment  ==>  deferment  (The suffix does not begin with a vowel.)
grigid  +  ity  ==>  rigidity  (The suffix -ity does not cause doubling.)

There are two other sets of words which might seem to require doubled consonants but do not do so.
(1) Words which have a prefix ending with a vowel:

- pre + ference ==> preference
- pro + pagate ==> propagate
- pre + paration ==> preparation
- de + monstrate ==> demonstrate

(2) Words which have a short vowel sound but a long vowel spelling:

- come + ing ==> coming
- thread + ce ==> threaded
- hook + er ==> hooker
- wool + en ==> woolen
- threat + en ==> threaten
- blood + y ==> bloody

Exercise A: Consonant Doubling

Double the consonants in the following words if (1) the preceding vowel is short and stressed, (2) the suffix begins with a vowel, and (3) the suffix causes doubling.

a. abut _ ment  b. intermit _ ent  c. prefer _ ed  d. leaf _ y  e. relat _ ed
f. infect _ ed  g. comput _ ed  h. bid _ able  i. benefi _ ed  j. drag _ able
k. regret _ able  l. sum _ ed  m. assum _ ed  n. rebut _ al  o. milit _ ant
p. relat _ ive  q. divin _ ity  r. revis _ ing  s. reg _ ulate  t. remit _ ance

Exercise B: More Consonant Doubling

Make new words by adding suffixes to the words below; Double the final consonants if the conditions listed above apply.

a. equip  b. refer  c. omit  d. rid  e. report  f. commit  g. cater  h. repel  i. consist
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