

Silent Letters



L.C. Can I investigate, spell and read words with silent letters

Etymology of Silent Letters

Silent letters are the letters in words that are not pronounced but make a huge difference to the meaning and sometimes the pronunciation of the whole word.

Etymology – study of word origins and their history

Most of these silent letters were pronounced for centuries then they became silent but the spelling was already fixed with these spellings, and now they show the history of the word.

- 1. What's the origin of words with the silent k and g? Knife, knock, know, knee, gnat, gnaw?**
- 2. Why is there a silent b in plumber?**
- 3. Why are there silent letters in doubt, debt, receipt?**
- 4. What's the origin of the words with the silent 'gh' like daughter, night, light, bright, dough, bough (branch of a tree) and why is 'gh' in cough and enough pronounced with a 'f'?**
- 5. Why is there a silent s in island?**

1. Knife, knock, know, gnat, gnaw are all Viking words which used to be pronounced but we leave the letters in there to see the origin and history of the word (in Sweden they still say the silent letter in knife - kneefe)
2. Plumber comes from the Latin word "plumbum" for lead (lead pipe was used by Roman plumbers!)
3. 16th century academics messed around with our spelling by wanting to make it more Latin and so added letters to words like debt, doubt and island.
4. That difficult -gh- letter pattern is from the Anglo- Saxons - daughter, night, cough, dough, bright... the -gh- used to be -h- and pronounced like the Scottish loch, a hard sound - until the French invaded and messed around with our spelling and added the g. Then the -gh- became silent or pronounced with a 'f' sound
5. The spelling of the word iland was modified to the present spelling, island because of an etymological association of this word with Old French word isle. ... Its spelling was changed in the 15th century as it was taken from the French word isle.

Let's look at some rules for silent letters:

A silent **b** occurs after **m**, before **t**.

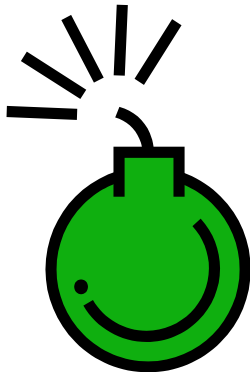
lamb**b**



thumb**b**



bomb**b**



debt**b**

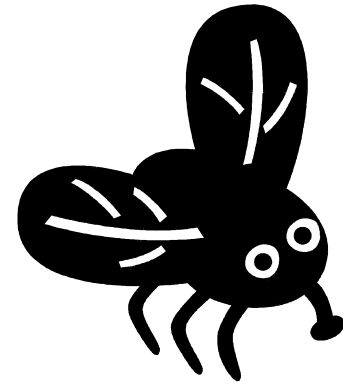


A silent **k** and a silent **g** are found
before **n**.

gnome



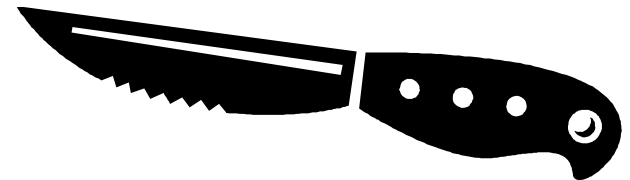
gnat



knee



knife

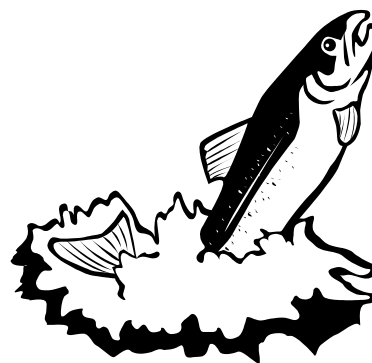


A silent **l** follows vowels **a, o, u**.

cal**l**f



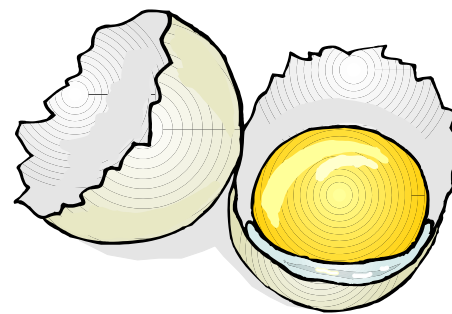
sal**l**mon



ch**l**alk



y**l**k

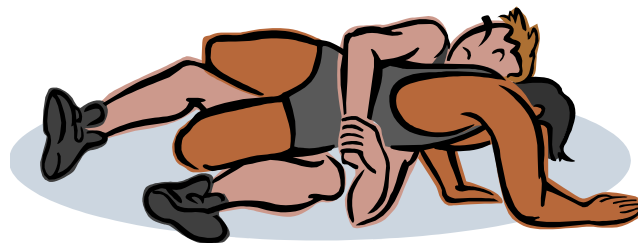


A silent **w** often goes before **r**

wrapper



wrestle



wrist



wreck



