

Spelling Tips 2 **Silent Letters**

English has acquired words from many different source languages, such as Latin and French, and even more remote languages like Chinese and Japanese. Some of these words settle rather uncomfortably into English with the result that some of the letters don't match the pronunciation. In the list below you will find *aisle* and *corps* from French, and *asthma* from Greek. Others have had letters added to them to make a link with Latin, like the *b* in *doubt*.

Looking on the bright side, silent letters can make all the difference between words which have the same pronunciation. A *llama* (from a South American language via Spanish) should not be confused with a *lama* (from Tibetan), for example. Our visual memory should help us to distinguish between the two words.

Try these memory tips:

aghast: Don't forget the silent *h* after the *g*. Try thinking that you would be **aghast** if you saw a *ghost*. Join these words together, change the *o* to an *a*, and you have **aghast**.

aisle Don't forget the unusual spelling of *ais* (with a silent *s*) to give an 'uy' sound. **Aisle** is spelt and pronounced in this way because it comes from French.

asthma Don't forget the silent *th*. Think about how you get a thick feeling in your chest when you have **asthma** and remember to add in the *th* when you spell it.

corps Don't forget the *ps* at the end. **Corps** has this spelling and sound because it comes from French where it means 'body'. But remember that a **corps** is a group or body of people. Don't confuse it with **corpse**, which is a dead body.

doubt Don't forget the silent *b*. The *b* is left behind from the Latin word it originally came from - *dubitare*.

island Don't forget the *s* after the *i*. You might remember that you can swim all the way around an **island** to remind you of the silent *s*.

llama Don't forget the two *l*'s at the start. The second *l* is silent. Don't confuse this with **lama** (with a single *l*) which is a Buddhist monk or priest.

science Don't forget the silent *c* following the *s* at the start. Also notice that the *ie* after the *c* does not appear to follow the normal rule of *i* before *e* except after *c*. This is because the *i* and the *e* are part of two separate syllables in this word, rather than going together to make an 'ee' sound. **Science** comes from *scientia*, the Latin word for 'knowledge'.

thumb Don't forget the silent *b* at the end. Other words with a similar spelling are *dumb* and *crumb*.

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