Spelling Tips 8 – Elided syllables

_Ceremony_ used to present us with a spelling problem when the stress was on the first syllable and all the rest was a blur of indeterminate syllables. Now that we are following the American pattern and giving a secondary stress on -mon-, as in ‘se-ruh-mohn-ee’, perhaps it won’t cause the same problem.

The reason that _Wednesday_ and _secretary_ present a spelling problem to us is that over time we have elided a whole syllable in each word. _Wednesday_ has gone from three syllables to two, _secretary_ from four to three.

The solution has been to fill in the gaps, pronounce the word in an artificial way with every syllable intact, and retain that pronunciation memory as a guide to spelling. We call it rapping the word out, as if you were a rap performer putting the word to a beat. Say _advertisement_ as ‘ad-ver-tize-ment’ and you will have no difficulty with the spelling. Say _Wednesday_ as ‘wed-nes-day’ and your problems are solved.

Here are some more to remember:

**derogatory:** The final _o_ is usually not pronounced. Rap it out as _de_ + _rog_ + _a_ + _tor_ + _y_.

**February:** Many people don’t pronounce the sound of the _r_, but it should always be there when you spell it. Rap it out as _Feb_ + _ru_ + _ar_ + _y_.

**itinerary:** Don’t forget the _ary_ ending (although the _a_ is not pronounced). Rap it out as _i_ + _tin_ + _er_ + _ary_.

**miserable:** This word is usually pronounced without the middle _er_. Rap it out as _mis_ + _er_ + _a_ + _ble_.

**sanctuary:** Don’t forget the _u_ before the _ary_ ending, which you often do not hear when the word is pronounced. Rap it out as _sanc_ + _tu_ + _ar_ + _y_.

**sovereign:** The middle _e_ is not usually pronounced. Rap it out as _sov_ + _er_ + _eign_.

**temporary:** This word has four syllables, although you hear only two when you say it. So concentrate on the _orary_ ending and rap it out as _tem_ + _por_ + _a_ + _ry_.

**vegetable:** Don’t forget the second _e_ which you usually don’t hear when people say the word. Rap it out as _ve_ + _ge_ + _ta_ + _ble_.

**voluntary:** Remember that _voluntary_ ends with _ary_, although the _a_ is usually not pronounced. Rap it out as _vol_ + _un_ + _ta_ + _ry_.

Susan Butler
The Editor
Macquarie Dictionary