

The Simplified Spelling Society

presents

CUT SPELLING

A HANDBOOK

**to the simplification of written English by
omission of redundant letters.**

*"To change all would be too much, and to change one is
nothing" – Samuel Johnson, 1755*

**First prepared 1988–1992 by a Working Group
of the Simplified Spelling Society consisting of
Paul Fletcher, Jean Hutchins, Christopher Jolly
and chaired by Christopher Upward.
Revised and expanded for this second edition 1995–96.**

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Christopher Upward, Birmingham, England, February 1996.

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

Impact of the first edition

The first, limited, edition of the Handbook to Cut Spelling (CS) was published in 1992, and in just over a year all its 250 copies had been distributed. The general response was sufficiently positive for the Simplified Spelling Society to decide that the Handbook could not be allowed to remain unavailable for long. There were two possibilities: either a simple reprint could be produced to meet the immediate continuing demand, or else, with an inevitably longer delay, a revised and expanded edition could be prepared which would build on the experience gained during the intervening period. In late 1995 the opportunity arose to produce such a second edition, which now appears as this volume.

The first edition of the Handbook aroused wide interest. The publicity generated by its launch was considerable and enduring. Over the airwaves CS was covered by the BBC World Service, with further specific broadcasts going to New Zealand, Nigeria and South Africa, as well as being heard from numerous national and local radio stations in the United Kingdom. Press reports were syndicated across the United States, and appeared at least in France, Germany and the Netherlands, and in numerous newspapers in the United Kingdom. On a more academic level, CS is now recorded in general reference works on the English language as an innovative proposal for the modernization of English spelling, and has been analyzed in more specialized studies. Basic information on CS is accessible (and is being accessed) on the Internet. Publishers have proved willing to accept material in CS, with (so far) one research report in a scholarly journal and a chapter in a collection of conference papers printed in it, and other items forthcoming. Articles have appeared explaining and demonstrating CS in professional journals addressed to teachers of basic literacy skills and of English as a foreign language, as well as targeted at more general readerships. Conferences have been addressed both on the subject of CS itself, and using CS for illustrative material. CS has been regularly used in personal and professional correspondence around the world (for instance to Australia, Canada, China, India, Japan, Saudi Arabia and the USA), both in hard copy and in electronic form. And of course readers of the Simplified Spelling Society's publications have now been familiar with CS, in its evolving forms, for a decade and more.

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It may not be altogether implausible to claim that, since the first edition of the Handbook appeared in 1992, CS has become more widely known than any previous proposal for reforming English spelling.

Lessons for the second edition

Since 1992 a rich body of experience has accumulated in the use, reception, and operation of CS. Well over half a million words of continuous text on a range of subjects have been written in CS, almost certainly far more than in any previous reformed English orthography. This practical use has clarified some uncertainties, highlighted some problems, and reinforced the advantages of the system from the writer's viewpoint. Readers' reactions have been expressed through numerous comments received, ranging from the abusive to the enthusiastic. These have described readers' initial responses to CS, their process of acclimatization, and the difficulties they may have encountered in decoding individual words. Readers have included young and old, native and non-native speakers of English, and professionals such as academic linguists and remedial literacy teachers, alongside lay persons with a general interest in alternative ways of writing English.

The second edition has benefited not only from all this practical but also from improved understanding in related areas. Research on literacy teaching methods, especially in the 1980s, has become better known, confirming the phonics approach, (ensuring beginners appreciate how sounds are represented by letters) as fundamental to proficiency in reading and writing. Recognition of the importance of phonics, despite its limitations in English, highlights the centrality of the alphabetic principle to a good writing system, namely that the letters should predictably represent sounds, and sounds be predictably represented by letters. Cut Spelling's claim to satisfy the demands of phonics and of the alphabetic principle far better than does through traditional orthography of English (TO) — though still not perfectly — can therefore now be advanced more forcefully than before.

Fresh support for CS also comes from three other directions, historical, geographical and technological. Historical research has revealed that a broader range of CS forms was in use in the Middle English period (eg, in the 14th century, the age of Chaucer) than had been suspected when the first edition was prepared. Geographically, it has recently become apparent that one effect of CS is to remove many arbitrary disparities between English spellings and their equivalents in other, mainly western European, languages, so making foreign language learning easier both for native and, especially,

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non-native speakers of English. In yet another area, that of information technology, the strides made in the past few years in developing electronic written communication (known by such terms as the Information Superhighway, the Internet, the World Wide Web, etc) open up new possibilities for implementing English spelling reform. The effect of the new technologies on the literacy practices of younger generations is emerging as a further argument for simplifying the alphabetically grotesque spellings currently promulgated as correct in TO.

Changes between the first and second edition

This second edition of the CS Handbook has thus been strengthened by the new knowledge and clearer perspectives that have emerged in all these areas. At the same time a number of specific changes have been introduced in the presentation of the CS system. The readability of the Handbook has been enhanced by more generous spacing of text and by using small capitals to indicate letters of the alphabet and spelling patterns, instead of the traditional cumbersome and unattractive angle brackets; thus what appeared as <a>, , <c> in the first edition now appears as A, B, C.

Scarcely any changes have proved necessary in the proposed spelling of individual words in CS. Two minor, isolated instances may nevertheless be mentioned:

1) it is now thought better to reinforce the recommended rules for keeping SS (see Part 1, Chapter 3, Rule 3, §2.4) and write CS *messaj*, rather than to harmonize this one word with the rare single S of its rhyme *presaj*.

2) it became apparent that the second E, of TO *elsewhere* was redundant by Rule 1, E. 1. 1. 13, and CS now recommends *elswher*.

In Part I, Chapters 1 & 2, it has been possible to introduce or expand discussion of various points which in the first edition had given rise to objections and/or misunderstandings. These include the concern that redundant letters are actually important in ensuring comprehension, the question of how far CS can suit speakers of all the world's accents of English, and the misconception that CS aims to regularize all the irregularities of TO.

The main changes to Part 1, Chapter 3, which contains the detailed arguments for cutting particular letters from TO spellings, take the form of clarification. Thus the dilemma of the TO alternatives *carcase/carcass*, with first syllable stress, has now been resolved by analogy with *atlas*, so distinguishing CS *carcas*, and several parallel spellings, from the second-

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syllable stress pattern of uncut forms like *erase/morass* (Rule 1, E.1.1.13). Similarly, a new comprehensive analysis of the L, M, N, R + T sequences (Rule to, §1..5) has shown that the advantages of the controversial long consonant strings in CS forms like *exlnt*, *govrnmnt*, *contnnt*, *cormnmt* are far greater than originally appreciated.

But while those changes represent a strengthening of the case for CS, Chapter 6 (Part 2: *Stopng short of CS*, §2.3.8) now sets out in detail the various anomalies (loose ends, rough edges, warts) in CS that were not previously collected together at any one point in the Handbook, or have, in a few cases, only become apparent since the first edition was published. These anomalies range from lists of the unproblematic mergers of the *peace/piece* > *pece* type and the slightly more problematic *plaiice* > *place* type, to a few gross heterophonic ambiguities of the type *err/heir* > *er*. Although none of these anomalies calls into question the integrity of the CS system as a whole, they are now more clearly recognized as blemishes, and ways of preventing them are discussed.

It goes without saying that the opportunity of a second edition has been taken to correct whatever misprints and other small errors had come to light in the first edition.

HOW TO USE THE HANDBOOK

The Handbook to Cut Spelling consists of three main parts and several purposes. Part I offers an analysis of the traditional orthography of English (particularly, but by no means only, its redundant letters), and makes a plea for TO to be modernized by omission of those letters, and it provides a step-by-step demonstration of how written English is simplified as the result of their omission. Parts II and III serve as practical guides to how writers proficient in TO may learn to use such a simplified orthography.

The analysis of TO contained in Part I should be of interest to all students and teachers of English spelling, whether or not they believe the system should be simplified. Unlike some other surveys, this Handbook does not aim to give a systematic account of all the vagaries of sound-symbol correspondence found in TO. Instead, it presents a functional analysis, based on observation of the feature of TO that causes learners in users the greatest difficulty. This feature is redundancy, which means the numerous letters that are surplus to the proper functioning of an alphabetic writing system. The process of elucidating them brings other aspects of TO to light: how arbitrarily many of the redundant letters were acquired in the history of the language; how perversely TO often differs from the spelling of related European languages; and how naturally readers and writers, from absolute beginners to skilled and experienced practitioners, stumble into the traps represented, with exquisite psychological spite, by the redundant letters.

This analysis leads to the conclusion that there can be no justification for leading English spelling as it now is, as "one of the world's most awesome messes", and that removing redundant letters would be the single most effective step that could be taken to improve it. Readers are not obliged to agree with that conclusion - the evidence presented provides illumination enough of the reason why the acquisition of literacy is such a struggle, and so often unsuccessful, in English.

Part I (*the system explained*) describes the aim of CS, discusses its social and psychological implications, and analyses its simplified forms. It attempts to answer the *why?* *how?* and *what?* of CS, and addresses readers wishing to evaluate CS as an innovative writing system, as well as those generally curious about its origins, underlying assumptions and mode of operation. It is also a source of reference, explaining the simplified spelling patterns listed in part II. The text of part I progressively introduces CS, which is then used almost throughout the rest of the Handbook.

Readers whose main aim is to master CS for their own use, without bothering with its detailed rationale, are advised to begin with **Part II** (*the system demonstrated*), which lists examples of CS spelling in three ways. The first section groups examples according to cutting pattern, and is intended to give a straightforward overview of how CS operates, as well as to encourage readers to think critically about both traditional and simplified spelling shown; each pattern refers to paragraph in part I with the reason for each cut is explained. The second section of Part II is more directly designed for the learner: where the first section consisted of repetitive lists of words following a single pattern, the second section mixes the patterns in the form of structured exercises. The third section contains parallel texts in TO and CS, to give learners practice in identifying redundant letters in authentic writing. Learners can practise CS in all three sections by covering the right-hand column, which is printed in CS, and trying to work out the CS forms from the TO equivalents given in the left-hand column.

Part III contains a dictionary of the CS forms of over 21,000 of the most common words in modern English containing redundant letters. It can be used both by readers wanting to evaluate the system and by writers wanting to check the CS forms of specific words for their own writing.

It is hoped that, whether or not readers are persuaded CS offers a desirable step forward for written English, it will raise their awareness of the deficiencies of TO and the need for it to be modernized.

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS, SYMBOLS & TERMS

CS = Cut Spelling.

TO = Traditional Orthography, ie, the customary British and/or American spelling of English words in the twentieth century, as opposed to simplified spelling.

/t/ A letter between slashes represents a sound (phoneme); thus we can say, the final consonant sound in the word *passed* is /t/.

D A letter in SMALL CAPITALS represents the alphabetic symbol concerned; thus we can say, the /t/ in *passed* is spelt D.

*xxx An asterisk before a word indicates an incorrect or non-existent (eg, purely theoretical) written form; thus we can say, "Poor spellers often write **recieve*"; or, "Although the form **English* would show the pronunciation, Cut Spelling keeps the letters of the traditional spelling *English*".

xxx* An asterisk following a CS form indicates that a letter has, exceptionally, been retained, although the normal application of CS rules would require its omission; thus we can say "Off* is a CS form, although Rule 3 would normally require the FF to be simplified."

§ Refers to a particular numbered or coded paragraph or section in Part I of the Handbook.

Short vowels

These are the sounds of the vowel letters A, E, I, O, U, Y as heard in *pat, pet, pit, pot, putlputt, myth*.

Long vowels

These are the sounds of the vowel letters A, E, I, O, U, Y as heard in the names of the letters themselves, ie, as in *mate, mete, mite, mote, brute/mute, type*, also in *maid, mead, might, moat, fuit*, and in many other spellings.

Hard C, G

These are the sounds of the letters C, G as heard in *catgut*.

Soft C, G

These are the sounds of the letter C as heard in *Cecil*, and of the letter G as heard in *ginger*.