

Word division

From the Collins Gem Dictionary of Spelling and Word Division

The purpose of the written word is to communicate, and written matter should be easy to read. However, the splitting of words at the end of a line can impede the flow.

The main rule in English word division is, *that the pronunciation of the first part of the word be recognisable before the eye reaches the second part in the succeeding line*. Thus, the word *coincidence* must be split *co-incidence* to ensure that it is not confused with *coin-age*. All other considerations are secondary to this rule.

- ◆ In general, words are split into **syllables**, e.g. *com-bine*, *walk-ing*, *vis-u-al-is-ation*, etc. In compound words it is suitable to split the words, e.g. *life-time*, etc.
- ◆ **Etymology** should also be taken into consideration, e.g. *geri-atrics*.
- ◆ It is suitable to divide a word after a **prefix**, e.g. *anti-bacterial*, not *antibacterial*, or before a **suffix**, e.g. *count-able*.
- ◆ **Pronunciation** should also be considered, hence, *photo-graph*, but *photogra-pher*, and not *photo-grapher*.
- ◆ **Never** split an English word between two letters that form one sound, i.e. – ea-, -th-, -sh-, etc. Hence *read-able* not *re-adable*, *worth-less* not *worthless*, *wash-ing*, not *was-hing*.
- ◆ **Never** split a word so that the second part is **unpronounceable**, e.g. not *probab-le* but *prob-able*.
- ◆ A split which gives **only two letters** at the **beginning of the second line** is **never permissible**, and one which gives **only two letters** at the **end of the first line** is **undesirable**. (Exceptions are prefixes, such as re-, di-, etc.)
- ◆ **Never** split a word such that the last line of a **paragraph** consists only of the second part of the word.
- ◆ **Some words cannot be split**, for example, *sources*. *Sour-ces* misleads the reader into thinking the word has to do with *sour*. Other words simply cannot be pronounced if split: *brou-ght*, *thoug-ht* etc.

Many programs have built-in word division functions. It is most important that you use **English word division rules for English text**. If you divide English words according to Swedish rules the result will be at best comical, and at worst unreadable.

A number of dictionaries are available, either as purely spelling and word division dictionaries, or normal English dictionaries, in which word division is indicated in each entry. Consult these if in doubt.