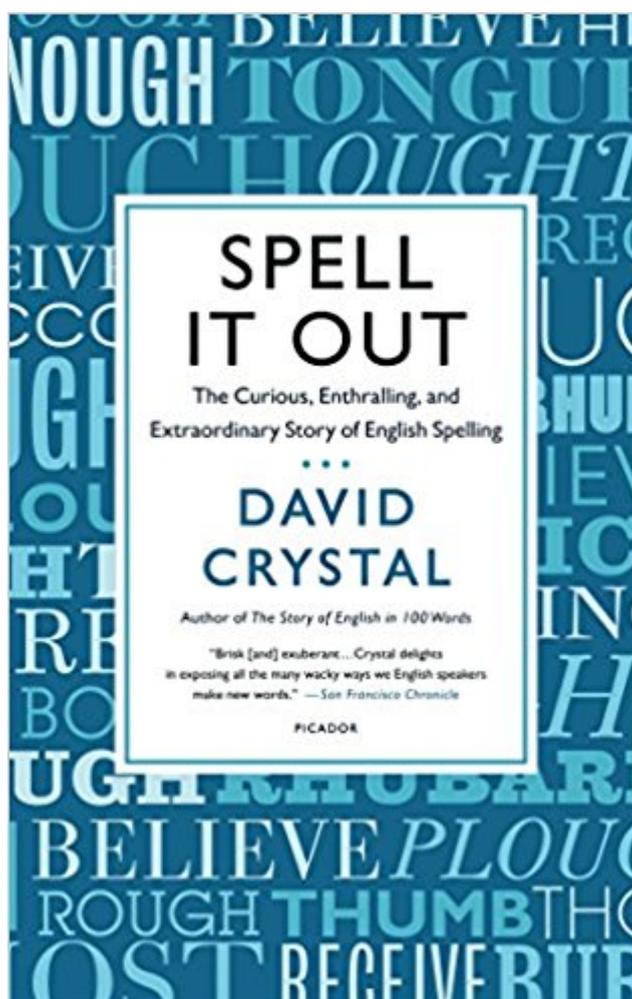


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# Spell It Out: The Curious, Enthralling, And Extraordinary Story Of English Spelling



## Synopsis

THE FASCINATING AND SURPRISING HISTORY OF ENGLISH SPELLING FROM DAVID CRYSTAL, EVERYONE'S FAVORITE EXPERT LOGOPHILE With *The Story of English in 100 Words*, David Crystal took us on a tour through the history of our language. Now, with *Spell It Out*, he takes on the task of answering all the questions about how we spell: "Why is English spelling so difficult?" Or "Why are good spellers so proud of their achievement that when they see a misspelling they condemn the writer as sloppy, lazy, or uneducated?" In thirty-seven short, engaging and informative chapters, Crystal takes readers on a history of English spelling, starting with the Roman missionaries' sixth century introduction of the Roman alphabet and ending with where the language might be going. He looks individually at each letter in the alphabet and its origins. He considers the question of vowels and how people developed a way to tell whether or not it was long or short. He looks at influences from other cultures, and explains how English speakers understood that the "o" in "hopping" was a short vowel, rather than the long vowel of "hoping". If you've ever asked yourself questions like "Why do the words "their", "there" and "they're" sound alike, but mean very different things?" or "How can we tell the difference between "charge" the verb and "charge" the noun?" David Crystal's *Spell It Out* will spell it all out for you.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Professor Crystal shows us that there are EXPLANATIONS for the bewildering variety of English spelling, but at the end I felt like adapting a French proverb: "tout comprendre n'est pas tout

rappeler", even if in the last chapter is a Teaching Appendix he gives us a few guides of how to teach and how not to teach children how to spell. He maintains that "the underlying system [of spelling] is robust and regular, BUT STRUGGLES TO BE VISIBLE THROUGH THE LAYERS OF ORTHOGRAPHIC PRACTICE ..." The second part of that sentence is only too true! Spelling has a history, and it begins with the problems presented to Early English scribes, who were monks schooled in Latin, in using the Roman alphabet of 23 letters (no u, no w and no j) to express a range of about 37 sounds (phonemes) in Anglo-Saxon speech. They added just four letters (which the French scribes who came with the Normans would do away with: two different ones for th, the runic one for w, - which they replaced with our w in the 13th century - and *ǣ* for the vowel a as in "man"). Runes were letters of pre-Latin alphabets used before the monks arrived. Wikipedia tells me that the Anglo-Saxon runic alphabet had 34 characters; but the monks rejected them (with two exceptions) because, Crystal says, they were considered to be too associated with paganism. [I would have thought it was more because monks had been brought up with Roman characters which, moreover, had international currency in the Western Christian world.] There were some "rules" (with lots of exceptions) for these transcriptions, but they were not standard, not least because there were regional variations of pronunciation.

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