

# chicago style spelling exceptions

**chicago style spelling exceptions** are a common point of confusion for writers, editors, and scholars adhering to the widely respected Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS). While CMOS generally advocates for American English spelling, it offers flexibility and specific guidance on numerous exceptions, often to accommodate established usage, British English variations, or simply to clarify common pitfalls. This article delves deeply into the nuanced world of Chicago style spelling, exploring its core principles and highlighting the most frequently encountered exceptions. We will navigate through variations in "-or" vs. "-our," "-ize" vs. "-ise," and the peculiar cases of words like "judgment" versus "judgement." Understanding these distinctions is crucial for maintaining consistency, clarity, and professional polish in academic papers, books, and professional documents.

## Table of Contents

- Introduction to Chicago Style Spelling
- Core Principles of Chicago Style Spelling
- Common "-or" vs. "-our" Spelling Exceptions
- Navigating "-ize" vs. "-ise" in Chicago Style
- Specific Word Spelling Anomalies and Exceptions
- When to Consult the Chicago Manual of Style Directly
- The Importance of Consistency in Spelling
- Frequently Asked Questions on Chicago Style Spelling Exceptions

## Introduction to Chicago Style Spelling

The Chicago Manual of Style, a cornerstone of academic and professional publishing, provides comprehensive guidelines for writing and editing. While its adherence to American English spelling is a foundational principle, the manual thoughtfully addresses numerous exceptions and nuances. These variations ensure that the style guide remains practical and reflects the dynamic nature of language. Writers often encounter situations where the standard American English rule doesn't quite fit, leading to questions about the "correct" spelling. This section sets the stage for understanding how Chicago style handles these deviations and why such flexibility is necessary for effective communication.

Understanding these exceptions is not merely a matter of following rules; it's about achieving clarity and credibility in your written work. In fields ranging from humanities to sciences, precise language is paramount. Chicago style's approach to spelling exceptions demonstrates a commitment to both standardization and recognition of established linguistic practices, including those found in British English and specialized terminology. This article aims to demystify these often-overlooked aspects of CMOS, providing a clear and authoritative resource.

# Core Principles of Chicago Style Spelling

At its heart, The Chicago Manual of Style recommends the use of American English spelling as the default. This means that words commonly spelled with "-er" at the end, such as "center" and "theater," are preferred over their British counterparts, "centre" and "theatre." Similarly, suffixes like "-ize" are generally favored over "-ise," though this is an area with significant exceptions, as we will explore later.

However, this preference for American English is not absolute. CMOS acknowledges that certain words have established alternative spellings, often rooted in British English usage, which have become widely accepted even within an American context. The manual prioritizes consistency and clarity above rigid adherence to a single dialect when such adherence would create awkwardness or contradict common professional practice. Therefore, the guiding principle is often to choose the spelling that is most common in the field of the work or that best serves the author's audience, while maintaining internal consistency throughout the document.

## Common "-or" vs. "-our" Spelling Exceptions

One of the most frequent areas of divergence between American and British English, and consequently a source of Chicago style spelling exceptions, involves words ending in "-or" versus "-our." American English typically favors the "-or" ending, as seen in "color," "labor," and "flavor." Conversely, British English uses "-our," resulting in "colour," "labour," and "flavour."

Chicago style generally aligns with the American "-or" preference for most common words. For instance, "behavior," "editor," and "director" are standard. However, the manual recognizes that certain words have become so firmly entrenched with the "-our" spelling that forcing an "-or" ending would appear incorrect or overly pedantic. These exceptions often include words that have a distinct etymological history or have maintained their British spelling in specific professional contexts or for stylistic reasons.

Here are some key examples of words where Chicago style often permits or even prefers the "-our" spelling, despite the general inclination towards American English:

- **Candour:** While "candidness" might be an American alternative, "candour" is often retained.
- **Harbour:** This is frequently seen with the "-our" ending.
- **Humour:** This is another prominent example where the British spelling is commonly accepted.
- **Odour:** Similar to "harbour," this word often retains its "-our" form.
- **Rigor:** While "rigour" exists, CMOS often favors "rigor" in American

contexts. However, consulting specific field conventions is wise.

- **Savior:** Generally preferred in American English, though "Saviour" is also understood.
- **Spectre:** This word, particularly when referring to a ghost or a haunting presence, can be seen with the "-re" ending, which is more common in British English, but Chicago style usually prefers "specter." However, its variant "specter" is the more common American spelling.

It is crucial to remember that consistency is paramount. Once a spelling is chosen for a word, it should be used uniformly throughout the entire document. The Chicago Manual of Style encourages authors to consult its latest edition for the most up-to-date recommendations and to consider the established conventions within their specific academic or professional field.

## Navigating "-ize" vs. "-ise" in Chicago Style

The "-ize" versus "-ise" debate is another significant area where Chicago style offers guidance, often leading to questions about exceptions. The general rule in CMOS is to prefer the "-ize" ending, aligning with the preference of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and many American scholarly journals. This means spellings like "organize," "recognize," and "analyze" are typically the Chicago standard.

However, there is a notable category of words that are almost always spelled with "-ise" in both American and British English, and Chicago style respects this established usage. These are words where the "-ise" ending is not a mere variant of "-ize" but is integral to the word's etymology and common spelling. This category often includes verbs derived from French or Latin that have historically maintained this ending.

Key examples of words that Chicago style invariably spells with "-ise" include:

- **Advise**
- **Apprise**
- **Compromise**
- **Exercise**
- **Franchise**
- **Merchandise**
- **Paradise**
- **Surprise**

Beyond these exceptions, the distinction can sometimes be influenced by regional preferences or stylistic choices. For instance, some British publications might use "-ise" more broadly, even for words that American English spells with "-ize." Chicago style aims for a balance, advocating for the "-ize" form for clarity and consistency with its primary recommendation while acknowledging the indispensable "-ise" spellings. When in doubt, a quick check against a reputable dictionary or the latest CMOS edition is always the best course of action.

## **Specific Word Spelling Anomalies and Exceptions**

Beyond the broad categories of "-or/-our" and "-ize/-ise," the Chicago Manual of Style addresses numerous individual word spelling exceptions that can catch writers off guard. These anomalies often stem from historical linguistic shifts, variations in usage across different disciplines, or simply words that have developed unique spellings over time.

One such common exception is the spelling of "judgment." While the British English spelling is "judgement," Chicago style, in line with most American English usage, prefers "judgment" without the final "e." This is a widely accepted standard in legal and academic contexts in the United States. However, it's worth noting that some older texts or specific regional dialects might still favor "judgement," but for most contemporary American writing adhering to Chicago style, "judgment" is the standard.

Another area of frequent inquiry involves words that have silent letters or unusual consonant doubling. For example, consider words like "fulfill" versus "fulfil." American English typically uses "fulfill," while British English often uses "fulfil." Chicago style aligns with the American "fulfill." Similarly, words like "program" are preferred over "programme," which is more common in British English, especially for theatrical performances.

The spelling of names, both personal and place-based, can also present exceptions. While not strictly a spelling rule in the same vein as word endings, ensuring the accurate and consistent spelling of proper nouns is critical. If a work discusses a specific organization or individual with a unique or historically established spelling, it is imperative to adhere to that specific spelling.

Consider also the spelling of scientific and technical terms. These often have their own established conventions within specific fields, which may or may not align perfectly with general American or British English rules. Chicago style generally defers to established professional usage in such cases, prioritizing accuracy and recognition within the relevant discipline. The key is to be aware that standard rules may have sector-specific deviations.

## **When to Consult the Chicago Manual of Style**

# Directly

While this article provides a comprehensive overview of common Chicago style spelling exceptions, the ultimate authority rests with The Chicago Manual of Style itself. Given the dynamic nature of language and the continuous updates to style guides, there will inevitably be instances where specific guidance is needed beyond general principles. Consulting the latest edition of CMOS is not just recommended; it is essential for maintaining the highest standards of accuracy and consistency.

The manual is an invaluable resource for addressing ambiguous cases, obscure words, or situations where competing conventions exist. It offers detailed explanations and provides authoritative rulings on a vast array of linguistic issues, including spelling. For writers and editors working on significant projects, or those who encounter recurring uncertainties, keeping a current copy of CMOS readily accessible is a professional necessity. Its index and clear organization make it relatively easy to find specific answers to your spelling queries.

Furthermore, CMOS often provides advice on handling foreign-language terms, hyphenation that affects pronunciation and meaning, and the correct spelling of proper nouns, all of which can be considered extensions of spelling considerations. When in doubt, err on the side of consulting the source. This practice not only resolves immediate questions but also deepens your understanding of the underlying principles of Chicago style, leading to more confident and accurate writing in the long run.

## The Importance of Consistency in Spelling

Regardless of whether you are following American English, British English, or navigating the specific nuances of Chicago style, the single most important principle is consistency. Inconsistent spelling can undermine the credibility of a text, distracting the reader and suggesting a lack of careful editing. Readers may question the author's attention to detail if a word is spelled one way on one page and differently on another.

For example, if you decide to use the "-ize" spelling for verbs like "organize" and "recognize," you must continue to use this spelling throughout the entire document. Any deviation, such as using "organise" on one occasion, would break the established pattern and create an inconsistency. The same applies to the "-or" versus "-our" distinctions. If you choose "color," stick with "color" for all instances; if you opt for "colour," maintain that choice.

The role of a style guide like Chicago is to provide a framework for making these decisions and to ensure a uniform approach. By understanding and applying its guidelines on spelling exceptions, writers can establish a clear, authoritative voice. This attention to detail contributes significantly to the overall professionalism and readability of any written work, ensuring that the content, rather than the spelling quirks, remains the primary focus for the audience.

# **Frequently Asked Questions on Chicago Style Spelling Exceptions**

## **Q: Does Chicago style always prefer American English spelling?**

A: While Chicago style generally advocates for American English spelling as the default, it acknowledges and incorporates numerous exceptions. These exceptions often accommodate established British English spellings that are widely accepted, or specific words that have unique etymological histories and commonly used alternative spellings.

## **Q: What is the general rule for words ending in "-or" versus "-our" in Chicago style?**

A: Generally, Chicago style prefers the American English "-or" ending (e.g., "color," "labor," "flavor"). However, it allows for exceptions where the "-our" spelling is firmly established and commonly used, such as in "candour" or "humour." Consistency within a document is key.

## **Q: How does Chicago style handle words ending in "-ize" versus "-ise"?**

A: Chicago style typically favors the "-ize" ending (e.g., "organize," "recognize"). However, it strictly adheres to the "-ise" spelling for a specific set of words where this ending is integral to the word's common and historical usage, such as "compromise," "exercise," and "surprise."

## **Q: Is "judgment" or "judgement" the correct spelling in Chicago style?**

A: Chicago style prefers the spelling "judgment" without the final "e," aligning with common American English usage, particularly in legal and academic contexts.

## **Q: Are there exceptions for proper nouns or technical terms in Chicago style spelling?**

A: Yes, when it comes to proper nouns (names of people, places, organizations) and specialized technical or scientific terms, Chicago style generally defers to established and recognized spellings within those specific contexts. Accuracy and consistency are paramount for these.

## **Q: Should I use British or American spelling if my audience is international?**

A: For an international audience, it is best to adhere strictly to the chosen style guide, which in this case is Chicago style's preference for American English spelling, while being mindful of its established exceptions. Consistency is more important than trying to appease multiple dialectal preferences.

## **Q: How can I ensure I am using the correct spelling for less common words?**

A: For less common words or when in doubt about a specific spelling, the most reliable method is to consult the latest edition of The Chicago Manual of Style. Reputable dictionaries, such as Merriam-Webster (for American English) or the Oxford English Dictionary, are also valuable resources.

## **[Chicago Style Spelling Exceptions](#)**

Chicago Style Spelling Exceptions

## **Related Articles**

- [child abuse investigation for caregivers](#)
- [chicago style research paper formatting student](#)
- [chicago writing assistant](#)

[Back to Home](#)