

Pronunciation: The Silent 'e' (the Magic 'e')

Accents were removed from the English language in the 15th century, due to a discontentment with the French upper classes, and this change, for many people, introduced some difficulties in the pronunciation of some words.

So, in 1582, Richard Mulcaster, an English teacher, proposed the first orthographic change in the English language – to add a silent 'e' to the end of words which contain a long vowel, in the same way as an accent would do. Today, instead of accents, English uses many silent letters to assist in the pronunciation of words.

Here are some examples of the silent 'e' (the magic 'e'):

<u>Vowel:</u>	<u>Short sound:</u>	<u>Long sound:</u>
a	mad	made
e	pet	Pete
i	sit	site
o	not	note
u	cut	cute

Now practise saying these words:

at	ate	mad	made	can	cane	man	mane	fad	fade
plan	plane	tap	tape	mat	mate				
pet	Pete	met	mete	gen	gene				
bit	bite	win	wine	sit	site	rid	ride	hid	hide
dim	dime	Tim	time	quit	quite	whip	wipe	Bic	bike
hop	hope	not	note	rob	robe	dot	dote		
us	use	hug	huge	cub	cube	cut	cute		

Sometimes a consonant can change too. Compare the sounds of the final consonants in these words, when we add a silent 'e':

mac mace rag rage hug huge

There are (as always) some exceptions, and they are words which existed before the orthographic change. For example:

one done gone love glove above come some have

Here are some similar examples in other languages:

German: **Müller** - sometimes written as: **Mueller** (the extra 'e' acts like an accent)

Portuguese: **Ele é legal** - sometimes written as: **Ele eh legal** (the extra 'h' acts like an accent)

Recommended video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gkZWcp_a08 (10 mins)

The Magic 'e' song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZhl6YcrxZQ> (2 mins)