

# Spelling the /k/ sound before a vowel: is it **c** or **k**?

## Why is it **c** in cat ... but **k** in kitten?

The most common spelling choice for the /k/ sound is the letter **c** but sometimes we need to use **k**.

There are some spelling rules to help with the correct choice for the /k/ sound:

1. If the next vowel is **a**, **o** or **u**, we usually use **c**.

For example:

**call**, **carrot**

~~ka~~ **ca** ✓

**copy**, **colour** (US - **color**)

~~ko~~ **co** ✓

**cup**, **cucumber**

~~ku~~ **cu** ✓

2. If the next vowel is **e** or **i**, we usually use **k**.

For example:

**keep**, **kettle**

~~ke~~ **ke** ✓

**kill**, **kitchen**

~~ki~~ **ki** ✓

There is a good reason for this rule: When **c** is followed by **e** or **i**, it will make the soft sound /s/ as in **cent** and **circle**.

So, if you want the hard sound /ke/ or /ki/, you must use **k**.

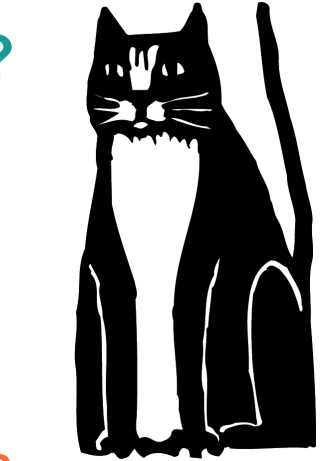
3. If the next letter is a consonant e.g. **r** or **l**, we nearly always use **c**. For example:

**crab**, **cricket**

~~cr~~ **cr** ✓

**close**, **clap**

~~cl~~ **cl** ✓



For more on this spelling rule, please see **Spellzone** Unit 2 where you will find complete spelling lesson plans, extensive word lists, practice exercises, spelling tests and spelling games for **ca/co/cu**, **ke/ki**, **cr/cl**.

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