Splendour and misery of English hyphenation

Part One: The Curse

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knowledge
“Traditional”: knowledge
“Modern”: knowledge
hyphenation is called word division

7.33 Follow Webster; otherwise
7.34 Don’t break one-syllable words, \hyphenmin > 1, no confusing breaks
7.35 Break according to pronunciation
7.36 Break after a vowel
7.37 Break after prefixes, before suffixes, and between components of compounds
7.38 Always break gerunds before -ing
7.39 \righthyphenmin > 2
7.34 (no break) Don’t break: aimed, helped; again, enough, unite; water, women, prayer

7.35 (pronunciation) Break: knowledge (not knowl-edge), democracy (not democ-racy)

7.36 (after a vowel) Break: criticism (rather than crit-icism), ligature (rather than lig-ature), aneurysm (or an-eurysm)
English has a magic rule that explains why breaks “according to pronunciation” are

- knowledge
- de-moc-ra-cy
- crit-i-cism
- lig-a-ture
- an-eu-rysm

That magic rule, almost never spelt out, very often applies when a consonant is between two vowels (VCV). In many languages the consonant comes after the break ... but not in English.
7.37 (compounds) Break:
poverty-/stricken (rather than pov-/erty-stricken)
thanks-giving (rather than thanksgiv-ing)
dis-pleasure (rather than displea-sure)
re-inforce (rather than rein-force)

7.38 (gerunds) Break:
certify-ing
giv-ing
dab-bing
run-ning
fiz-zling
bris-tling
Rules 7.37 (compounds) and 7.38 (-ing) contradict 7.35 (break after pronunciation, not derivation).

rat-<i>ing</i>
rat-<i>ting</i>

They also contradict the part of rule 7.34 about confusing breaks

proc-<i>ess</i>
plac-<i>ing</i>
What is a syllable?
The most useful thing that can be said of syllables is that we can count them.
How do we learn about hyphenation, then?
Most hyphenation dictionaries give exactly one break at each syllable boundary. That principle is absolutely never spelt out as a rule.

Counting syllables is essential for printing text in a music score, but many words in hyphenation dictionaries have missing or wrong (according to pronunciation) breakpoints.

sha-king
u-nite
“British” and “American” hyphenation: the difference are actually between publishers and disappearing anyway. Oxford University Press was the last hold-out and has essentially aligned with Webster-like hyphenation since the 1995 of its spelling dictionary.

shak-ing
as-tron-o-my
bi-o-g-ra-phy
phe-nom-e-nol-o-gy
hel-i-cop-ter
Oxford / Webster

innovation / innovation
problematic / problematic

P-S: Differences between American and British hyphenation are completely disconnected from differences in spelling, which themselves are completely disconnected from differences in pronunciation.
And that’s the curse of English hyphenation: many contradictory “rules”, that together build a confusing and in fact inconsistent picture. In addition, the most important rules (one break per syllable boundary, “magic rule”) are never actually explained. And hyphenation is not even called hyphenation by typographers.
Homework: find out what the “magic rule” is. I’ve seen it spelt out by five different people over time:

1. An American typographer in the 1900s
2. A Belgian writer in the 1930s
3. A Zairian teacher in the 1980s
4. A Czechoslovak professor in the 1980s
5. A German student in the 2020s

... and some other writers whose topic was are not related to typography.
Monterone’s Curse
From *Rigoletto*
Text: Francesco Maria Piave
Music: Giuseppe Verdi