

**Splendour and misery
of English hyphenation**
Part One And A Half: Exercise

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Last year, I presented a few facts to illustrate my conviction that hyphenation in English is cursed, in particular because the rules for breaking words according to pronunciation contradict each other. I also showed that there was a *magic rule* that specifies where to break when a consonant is between two vowels (VCV). In most languages, the only possible breakpoint is before the consonant, but not in English.

That magic rule is described only very rarely,
and is never explained.

I left, as a homework, the task of finding out what that magic rule is.

I do not think anyone did the homework, so you get another chance this year.

I give on the next page a number of words, hyphenated according to pronunciation, that I consider representative. Your job is to deduce the magic VCV rule from these examples.

crit-i-cism

an-eu-rysm

lig-a-ture

sha-king

as-tron-o-my

as-tro-nom-i-cal

dem-o-cratic

de-moc-ra-cy

dem-o-cratic

phe-nom-e-nol-o-gy

e-nu-mer-ate

pi-rate

riv-ers

ri-vals

bi-son

pris-on

as nouns:

as verbs:

proc-ess

pro-cess

proj-ect

pro-ject

pres-ent

pre-sent

Not all breakpoints occur when the word has a VCV pattern; partly because I could not find perfect examples, but also because I wanted to show that the magic rule can be extended naturally beyond VCV situations, as in *democracy*, *astronomy*, and their derivatives.

There is also a very special case, which is the word *knowledge*, hyphenated traditionally knowl-edge. You will get bonus points if you can explain this!

The magic rule is not completely ignored in the typographic literature. I have seen it described, but only on very few occasions, by:

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

There are also other sources, unrelated to typography.

Questions, comments, solutions ...

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