

## Grammar Crimes and Misdemeanors

by TONY NEWMAN

English is a strange language. The kind of strange that thinks “cough,” “dough,” and “rough” are rhyme buddies, or insists that saying “I could care less” makes perfect sense. As English teachers and learners, we all try to follow the rules. But sometimes English itself forgets what the rules are.

Take, for example, **silent letters**. What are they even doing there? The “k” in “knight” has been silent for centuries. At this point, it’s just loitering. And don’t get me started on “yacht”—a word that sounds classy but is spelled like someone typed it mid-sneeze and hit send anyway.

Or how about those phrases that mean the opposite of what they say?

- “Break a leg!” (Good luck?)
- “Out of sight, out of mind.” (Unless it’s your cell phone!)
- “Let’s table the discussion.” (Wait, are we stopping, starting, or rearranging furniture?)

Let’s not forget **prepositions**, those tiny words that cause big headaches. You sit *on* a chair, but *in* a car. You’re *at* the airport, *on* the plane, and sitting *by* the window, but hopefully not *behind* a snoring stranger’s fully reclined seat—at which point you’re *under* duress! Prepositions are like cats—they do what they want and can’t be trained.

But here’s the thing: even with all its quirks, English is a wonderfully flexible, expressive, occasionally ridiculous language. And that’s part of the fun. Mistakes make great teachers. And they also make great stories.

So if you’ve ever said, “I am boring,” when you meant “I am bored,” welcome to the club. We meet every Tuesday. Or is it *on* Tuesday? *At* Tuesday? Never mind. Just come.

Now, like that sneaky little “w” in wrist and the “b” in subtle, find the letters below that make their presence known ... by not saying a word.

### Word Play: The Silent Letter Sleuth

Can you spot the silent troublemakers? Below are ten words with sneaky, silent letters. Your mission: **Find and circle the silent letter** in each word.

Example: Wrist → **W**rist

Knife	Write
Honest	Listen
Castle	Salmon
Debt	Hour
Ghost	Ballet

### Bonus Challenge!

What do all these silent letters have in common?