**University of Bejaia Module: English**

**Department of technology Lecture: 01**

**Silent Letters**

**Definition:**

A [letter](http://grammar.about.com/od/il/g/letterterm.htm) that is usually left unpronounced, such as the *b* in *subtle*, the *c* in *scissors*, the *g* in *design*, and the *t* in *listen*.

According to Ursula Dubosarsky, roughly "60 percent of words in [English](http://grammar.about.com/od/e/g/englishlanguageterm.htm) have a silent letter in them" (*The Word Snoop*, 2009).

**Examples and Observations:**

* The letter combination *gh* is silent in the following words: *bought, caught, dough, eight, flight right, sleigh, sigh, taught, thought*.
* **Different Kinds of Silent Letters**  
  "Edward Carney, author of *A Survey of English Spelling* distinguishes two kinds of **silent letters**: *auxiliary* and *dummy*.  
    
  "*Auxiliary letters* are part of a group of letters that spell a sound that does not have a usual single letter to represent it. For example,

**/th/** thing **/th/** there **/sh/** share **/zh/** treasure **/ng/** song

*Dummy letters* have two subgroups: *inert letters* and *empty letters*. *Inert letters* are letters that in a given word segment are sometimes heard and sometimes not heard. For example,

**resign** (g is not heard)  
**resign**ation (g is heard)  
**malign** (g is not heard)  
**malig**nant (g is heard)

*Empty letters* are letters that do not have a function like auxiliary letters or inert letters. The letter *u* in the word *gauge* is empty. Here are some examples of silent [consonants](http://grammar.about.com/od/c/g/consonaterm.htm):

Silent b: thumb Silent c: indict Silent ch: yacht Silent d: bridge  
Silent g: foreign Silent h: rhinoceros Silent k: knee Silent l: calf

Silent m: mnemonic Silent n: autumn Silent p: receipt Silent t: castle

Silent w: answer

There are no rules that we can apply to words with empty letters[;] you just have to use them and remember their spelling."

* **Silent Consonants**  
  "**Silent consonant letters** constitute one of the problem areas in respect to pronunciation of English words. To solve some of the problems of the learners, a few spelling sequences containing silent letters are discussed below:

(\*) *b* is always silent in the spelling sequences *mb* and *bt* occurring in the word-final position: *comb, numb, bomb, limb, debt* . . ..  
  
(\*) *d* is always silent in the spelling sequence *dj*: *adjective, adjunct, adjacent* . . ..  
  
(\*) *g* is silent in the spelling sequence *gm* or *gn*:  *sign,* phlegm   
  
(\*) *h* is silent in the spelling sequence *gh* and in the word-final position: *ghost, oh.*  
  
(\*) *k* is always silent in the word-initial spelling sequence *kn*: *knee knowledge,*

**Exercise:** Read each word and choose which letter is silent.

Haut du formulaire

Gnome: silent letter is G

Wrap: silent letter is W

Spaghetti: silent letter is H

Talk: silent letter is L

Raspberry: silent letter is P

Ballet: silent letter is T