

When is a 't' silent in English?

If you went to Paris with someone you liked, you might have great **rapport** over a **gourmet** meal and then go to see the **ballet**..

rapport

gourmet

ballet

... but one thing you would not do is to pronounce the letter < t > at the ends of those three words. French is famous for its silent letters – including silent < t > in places – but English tries to trip students up as well! Fortunately, this only happens in a few cases. Here are some pointers to help you learn the patterns:

1. Some spellings (almost) always produce a silent

Common word spellings that (almost) always produce a silent < t >:

-ften

-sten

-stle

Some examples include:

-ften: often (can also be said with < t >), soften

-sten: listen, glisten, hasten, fasten, moisten, christen, chasten

-stle: castle, nestle, pestle, apostle, thistle, whistle, wrestle, gristle

2. Some spellings produce a silent < t > in connected speech

There are other spellings where the < t > is not necessarily silent but can be silent in fast, connected speech.

This can occur both within a word and between words. The pattern of spelling where this occurs is:

fricative + < t > + consonant

Some examples include:

Within a word: lastly, postman, coastguard, wristband

Between words: blurriest photos, aircraft problems, robust theory, weirdest coincidence

3. French loanwords keep their original silent < t >

Of course, being such close neighbors, English and French have exchanged many words and ideas over the years. In some French loanwords, we try to keep something of the original pronunciation, and this includes keeping the original silent < t >:

ballet, gourmet, rapport, ricochet, penchant

In summary:

Silent < t > almost always occurs in -ften, -sten and -stle

Silent < t > is possible in fricative + < t > + consonant

Silent < t > is often kept in French loanwords