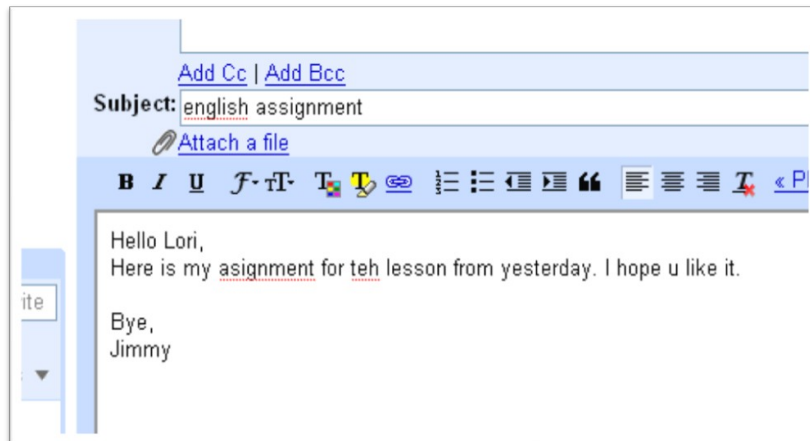


## Tips and tools for EFL and ESL learners: spelling checkers

Hi, Lori here, welcoming you to tips and tools for ESL and EFL learners, from [betteratenglish.com](http://betteratenglish.com). This episode marks our first videocast, so those of you who have video iPods can listen *and* watch. If you have feedback or questions for us, you can email them to **info [AT] BetterAtEnglish [DOT] com** or stop by our forum, which you can find at [www.betteratenglish.com/forum](http://www.betteratenglish.com/forum).

**Today's topic: spelling and spell checkers.**



Judging from the email I get from many of my students, it seems as if some of them have a "who cares?" attitude toward spelling in email. Sometimes their spelling is so bad that I can tell right away that they didn't even bother run a spell checker.

Maybe spelling doesn't seem important anymore

because modern English language teaching often focuses on "successful communication" and "just getting your message across" rather than "boring" details like grammar and spelling. While this may help give learners confidence in their ability to use English to communicate effectively, there is a downside. The covert message is that spelling isn't important anymore.

Good spelling is still important. Very important.

Yes, even in email. In fact, I'd say that it's particularly important in email and online. Why? In the world of email and online communication, your spelling and language reflect who you are. If you use sloppy spelling in your online communications, people may not see through it to discover the brilliant, charming person that you are. This is particularly important for first impressions – say, when you're writing an email to someone for the first time. When people read your email, not only will they be interested in your message; they'll be trying to form an idea of who you are. And if your email is full of bad spelling, their first impression of you could well be that you are a loser.

Is spelling really such a big deal? It can be. Remember the movie *Forrest Gump*? Well, writing to someone for the first time is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get. And if you get someone like this, she'll take one look at your bad spelling and careless mistakes and come to the conclusion that you are stupid (or careless or lazy).



Fortunately, there is some good news. Free tools are available, tools that make bad spelling piece of cake to fix. And they are really easy to use. In fact, it's so easy to run a spell check these days that there really are no excuses.

Let's look at some of the free spelling tools available for two of the most popular browsers, IE and Firefox. They will help you check your spelling in everything you write online: email, forums, comments on blogs, even filling in online forms. Of course, no spelling checker can fix ALL of your mistakes, but that's still no reason NOT to use one. I estimate that using a spelling checker will catch a huge percentage of your errors.

First we'll look at Internet Explorer, the most widely used browser today. There is a useful spelling and dictionary tool for version 5.0 or higher. It's a plug-in called *IE Spell*, and you can download it at [www.IEspell.com](http://www.IEspell.com). Once you've installed it, it works in a similar way to the spelling checker in MS Word.

In addition to a spelling checker, IE spell also has a cool dictionary look-up function. When you are reading text online and come across a word you don't know, you can simply right click on it to look it up in a variety of online dictionaries.

Moving on now to add-ons available for Mozilla Firefox. Now, I have to take a moment to rave about Firefox. Firefox freaking rocks. If you are not using it already, you should be. It is so much better than IE that I don't even know where to start. You owe it to yourself to at least try it.

Why am I so keen on Firefox? It's got tons of free language tools and useful add-ons, it's safer than IE, and it's not Microsoft.

Some of Firefox's useful language tools for EFL and ESL learners include a spelling checker for multiple languages – you can switch between languages with the click of a mouse; it's also got lots of different dictionary look-up plug-ins and translation tools in many languages. The Firefox browser and add-ons are all available for free download at [www.mozilla.com](http://www.mozilla.com).

For those of you who are web savvy, this is probably all you need to know to get started with spell checking in IE or Firefox. If you need more guidance or help downloading or installing these spelling tools, feel free to stop by our forum and ask for help.

Remember, checking your spelling can make a huge difference in how people perceive you in your emails. It only takes a minute to check your spelling, and I promise you, people will think that you rock for doing it.

That's all for this time. We encourage you to check out our podcast and forum at [www.BetterAtEnglish.com](http://www.BetterAtEnglish.com) where we offer free help for EFL and ESL learners. Bye for now!

#### Links:

[www.IEspell.com](http://www.IEspell.com) (IE Spell download page)

[www.mozilla.com](http://www.mozilla.com) (Firefox download page)

<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/68> (Dictionary Search add-on for Firefox)

<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/browse/type:3> (Multi-language spelling dictionaries)

[www.BetterAtEnglish.com/forum](http://www.BetterAtEnglish.com/forum)

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Thank!