Silent Letters

Definition:

A letter 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 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**

  "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)
  resignation (g is heard)
  malignant (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:

  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.

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