Exercise 5: Permissible Spelling Patterns

1. List all the rules you can think of that govern permissible spelling patterns in English (for example, U always follows Q).

2. The following table displays four sets of words. In each set, only one of the words is an actual English word. The other three are nonwords; they contain spelling patterns that are not permissible in English. Select the real word in each group by examining the spelling patterns. (See page 175 for answers.)

Set 1	Set 2
alcazav	absqquatulate
zeugma	lexxicomane
cabotaj	tristesse
mistigriv	majjolica
Set 3	**Set 4**
ulotrichous	penneeck
anglliform	sixsain
mpignorate	exeqies
inspssate	mumpsimus

Most skilled readers can correctly identify the real word in two or three of the sets. But very rarely can a person articulate the rule that helped them identify the real word. To say it differently, the knowledge that allows a reader to select the actual English word is implicit and unconscious; it operates below the level of conscious attention and recall.

Answers:

The rule for set 1 is "words do not end in V or J," and the real word is *zeugma* (which means to apply two different senses of a word to a single object, as in "She opened the door and her heart to the little boy").

The rule for set 2 is "J, Q, and X are never doubled," and the real word is *tristesse* (which means melancholy or sorrow).

The rule for set 3 is "every syllable must have a written vowel," and the real word is *ulotrichous* (which means to have crisp or woolly hair).

The rule for set 4 is "S never follows X, U always follows Q, and CK is always used after a single short vowel," and the real word is *mumpsimus* (which describes a person who insists that he or she is right when he or she is, in fact, wrong).