



Helping at Home with Spelling



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Guidelines for helping children improve their spelling.

Poor spelling can have a wider effect than just making work look untidy. In the same way a poor reader may shy away from print a poor speller may be reluctant to write. Some children try to cover up poor spelling with untidy writing. Many will have been told not to worry about their spelling as long as they write what they want to say. Although there is some justification for saying this, some confusion between not worrying about spelling and not bothering about it is possible. It is important that the poor speller doesn't worry but it is equally important that he or she tries to improve.



Mistakes

There are many different types of spelling mistakes. Letter reversal (perhaps getting the letters 'd' and 'b' confused); hearing the word incorrectly (writing 'could of' instead of 'could have' or 'could've'); mixing up words that sound the same (there/their); using the incorrect phonic structure ('pach' for 'patch'). If the child is making one of these common mistakes regularly then efforts can be directed to remedy them, when selecting the group of words to be learnt.

Building Words

As with reading, teaching spelling through phonics can be a complex business because English is not always a phonetically regular language, (through' and though' sound different although only one letter is added). Consequently it is best not to teach spelling through sounds alone, although it is vital that the child recognises the sounds made by the letters of the alphabet and certain blends of consonants such as ch, sh, wh and th.

Satpin(dhe) Strategy

Initially it is recommended that you restrict building up words to six letters only: "satpin". Children should be able to master these without the added demand of recalling and using the whole alphabet. The next three letters: "dhe" can be added once mastery improves. Once blending with these nine letters becomes automatic the skills are likely to be transferred and extended to the other letters of the alphabet.

Choosing Words To Learn

Positive help with spelling at home must begin with choosing which words to concentrate on. Here are a few suggestions:

- If the child is receiving help with spelling at school, any reinforcement of the words learnt at school will be of great value.
- Spelling mistakes from teachers' corrections in school work.
- At the end of this guideline is a list of the most common words used in reading material. These words make up approximately half of all reading material. The ability to spell these words correctly is therefore very important.

Spelling Lists

Just giving the child a list of words to learn may not be enough. Parents may say, "How do you spell field?" The child may answer, "f-i-e-l-d". The child's brain is learning to spell, but his hand hasn't learned. The next day in a spelling test s/he may be able to write 'field' correctly but later writing a sentence his brain is thinking about the whole sentence and not the isolated word, so s/he may spell it wrongly. As a child learns to say a spelling they should also learn to write them.

Techniques For Learning Spelling

It is really important that children feel positive and able to learn spellings, - especially if negative feelings have already started to be associated through previous failure. This can lead to the negative cycle of fearing failure and therefore failing (learned helplessness).

The information below is taken from a technique for children and adults alike. The method's central focus is upon the learner creating a good feeling within themselves and using this positivity to enable maximum learning. It is a highly visual technique which often particularly suits learners who have dyslexia.



Magical Spelling

- Print the target word neatly on a large piece of paper in lower case letters
- rather than capitals.
- Get the child to hold a good feeling from a good experience - can be made up
- but this is a really important step so ensure that the good feeling is present throughout by asking "have you got your good feeling?"
- Hold the word up and move it to their left* (your right), eyes/head must move up.
- The child must look at the word closely - with the good feeling present -and notice all letters and the correct order. Spend time building an accurate picture in "the mind's eye", paying particular attention to areas that may cause problems.
- Turn the word to hide it and ask them to continue picturing the word.
- Show the word so they can check their pictures matches.
- Turn the word to hide it while child writes it - encourage them to keep looking up to the left, where the word is 'stored' to check their picture.
- Check the spelling is correct with the word showing. (If it's incorrect it's important the written and mental versions are erased and that the process is repeated so that the correct picture of the word is stored in memory).
- Turn the word to hide it while the child gives the spelling orally.
- See if the child can spell the word backwards orally - if they've stored a good strong picture with their good feeling they should be able to do this step and will feel empowered by this new skill!

* (There may be rare occasions when the opposite will apply and a child will need to store the picture looking up to their right.)



Look, say, cover, write, check technique

- Look closely at the word — notice the first and last letters, the shape of the word, any patterns of letters or smaller words within the word etc.
- Trace the word on the table with your finger to look at it
- Say the word and listen to how it sounds (out loud or silently)
- Cover the word
- Write the word on a piece of paper/in a spelling book*
- Check the word
- Write the word in a sentence

* To make the writing element even more fun - and therefore more memorable - you could paint it or use chalk or water in squirty bottles on the floor outside.

With this technique you are using as many pathways to the memory as possible - visual, hearing, muscle movement (kinaesthetic).

This is particularly important for dyslexic children and tracing the word on a textured surface can be beneficial for some e.g. sandpaper or velvet.

With both techniques writing the word in a sentence as well as on its own is important. The new word has to become part of a pattern of words the hand will write correctly without having to stop and think. The more you write a word the more chance you have of remembering it correctly.

Grouping Words

Lists of 5-10 words on average can be used. However this will depend upon the child - it is far better to concentrate on learning to spell and remembering 3-5 words at a time really well than a list of 5-10 that are less firmly remembered. When making up the list it is better to group words together with the same patterns of letters, not words with the same sounds. So we would group together:

raid	sore	height	BUT NOT:	hare
paid	more	weight		wear
laid	core	ceiling		pair

Spelling Rules

In general spelling rules can confuse the poor speller. Some rules are important to teach such as the 'silent e' (changing 'can' to 'cane' etc. and the way it softens the 'g' in 'rag' to 'rage', for example). More complicated rules such as changing to plurals (e.g. 'y' to 'ies' should be left until you feel the child is coping well with the basics of spelling and is confident in his or her ability. For more information on rules, the internet is a vast resource.

Memory aids

Mnemonics (see picture for an example) can be very useful to help children recall spellings. For further information search on the internet. The website www.welshdyslexia.info also has useful information.

Games

Games that reinforce spelling in a fun way (Scrabble/Word Bingo etc.) are of great value because children are less likely to think of them as work and are likely to have a more positive attitude as a result. The internet has many games for learning.

Pencil and paper games:-

- Changing words: can you change 'hat' to 'pen' in only three steps, one letter at a time? e.g. hat-pat-pet-pen.
- Finding words: how many words can you find in 'Manchester'?
- - man, chest, men, mast, her, can, came, mate etc.
- Making sentences: use a pack of cards, stick labels with the words that the child has been learning to spell on them. Each player draws four cards and has to write down a sentence which includes all four words. The best sentence wins.

For an enjoyable and relatively inexpensive way of learning and improving spellings, there is a computer games programme which is aimed at home use available (Nessy Games Player from www.nessygamesplayer.co.uk) that deals with many of the basic spelling rules.



Summary

- Make sure the child knows the sounds made by the letters of the alphabet and by certain blends of consonants such as br, bl, fl, fr, cr, cl, ch, sh, st, sl, wh, th.
- Limit blending to satpin(dhe) letters only initially.
- When grouping words for lists put words together with the same patterns of letters, where possible.
- Games are very useful in learning spellings.
- Don't worry too much about spelling rules.



Common Words In Written English

The following 100 words comprise one half of all reading and spelling because they appear so often in written material:

a	about	all	an	and
are	as	at	back	be
been	before	big	but	by
call	came	can	come	could
did	do	down	first	for
from	get	go	he	had
has	have	her	here	him
his	I	if	in	into
is	it	just	like	little
look	made	make	more	me
much	must	my	no	new
not	now	of	off	old
on	one	only	or	our
other	out	over	right	said
see	she	so	some	that
the	there	them	then	there
they	this	to	two	up
want	was	we	well	went
were	what	when	which	who
Will	with	you	your	

