

Spelling Skills



Spelling instruction refers to a system of teaching that addresses English phonemes, as well as common non-phonetic words. It teaches strategies that help students spell difficult words. The purpose of teaching children the rules of phonics and spelling is to make them literate: literate people communicate to other people in a written format that is easily read and understood by others.

Students should be directly taught common spelling patterns, common rules, application of generalization, and be provided word study opportunities. Grade level mini-lessons and word building activities are based on the TEKS and paced to the needs of students.

Effective spelling and writing instruction contain certain activities that

- ★ Coordinate spelling instruction with instruction in sound-letter relationships and decoding strategies
- ★ Guide students to move from invented spelling to correct spellings - and introduce spelling lessons later in the program
- ★ Help students attend to spelling patterns in written words
- ★ Allow students to respond in writing to what is read to them and to what they read

As children learn to read words, they become aware of how words are spelled. **Increasing children's awareness of spelling patterns hastens their progress in both reading and writing.** Spelling instruction is coordinated with the program of reading instruction. Learning to spell is a developmental process. Research shows that as children move through the process, they go through five developmental stages. These stages are not pure, and as such,

students are often seen producing spellings characteristic of more than one stage. We determine their developmental level by what the child uses most of the time. The first stage is precommunicative. In this stage the children are seen writing random letters. The child does not have an understanding of the letter-sound correspondence. In stage two, the child is aware that letters represent sounds, but they rely primarily on dominant consonants and letter names to provide symbols that guide their spelling attempts. In the third stage the child is able to break a word into phonemes and attempts to represent the phonemes with the correct letters. By stage four, a child begins to write words in a more conventional way as he or she moves away from dependence on sounds to more reliance on visual memory of how the words look(ed) in print. Finally, the fifth stage is marked by conventional spellings developed after a number of years of spelling study. A few examples follow in the chart below.

Words	Stage One	Stage Two	Stage Three	Stage Four
monster	mtr	mostr	monstur	monster
dress	jrs	jas	ddres	dress
closed	kd	klosed	closed	closed

Our writing activities for effective spelling instruction include the following:

- ★ Activities that are related to the words that children are reading
 - ★ Proofreading activities
 - ★ An emphasis on pride in correct spelling
- ★ Lessons that relate spelling conventions in a systematic way
 - ★ Activities that present and surround children with words

Daily opportunities for reading and writing should be provided.

- ★ Frequent opportunities to read enhance the students' spelling consciousness through vocabulary development, exposure to spelling patterns, and increase in the use of visualization strategies.
- ★ Frequent opportunities to write allow students to apply their spelling knowledge in an authentic context, provide a basis for appropriate spelling instruction, and guide their development as conventional spellers.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) document "How Do You Spell...?, *Spell It - Write* teacher editions from Zaner-Bloser, and *Teaching Kids to Spell* by Richard Gentry and Jean Wallace Gillet are good sources for additional information on the developmental process of spelling.

Assessing Spelling

at Spicewood Elementary, R.R.I.S.D.

In Round Rock Independent School District, one standard in first through fifth grade is to "correctly employ spelling patterns." At Spicewood, our students' spelling words are selected based on a spelling pattern (or phonics rule). Spelling words are also considered vocabulary words because once taught, students are expected to correctly read them and use them in their writing.

Research has shown that spelling words correctly on a weekly test has no carry-over to daily use. In fact, students who correctly memorize words for weekly tests do not necessarily correctly employ them in their own use. Only when students are expected to employ spelling patterns in reading, writing, and editing can they truly apply what they've been taught. In the last few decades, research has shown that spelling-curriculum should allow children to realize their full potential, not only as spellers, but also as writers.* Because we are committed to teaching Spicewood students to be good spellers, we emphasize applying spelling and phonics rules. Students are assessed in spelling on application, not just rote memory. In preparing our students for the 21st Century, we know an adult's level of literacy is not assessed by a spelling test, but by their written correspondence.

According to Richard Gentry, simply writing words *in question* a certain number of times is not a good procedure for learning misspelled words. Here are two examples of effective word study techniques:

Fitzgerald Method

1. Look at the word carefully.
2. Say the word.
3. With eyes closed, visualize the word.
4. Cover the word and then write it.
5. Check the spelling.
6. If the word is misspelled, repeat steps 1 - 5.

Horn Method

1. Pronounce each word carefully.
2. Look carefully at each part of the word as you say it.
3. Say the letters in sequence.
4. Attempt to recall how the word looks, then spell it.
5. Check this attempt to recall.

6. Write the word.
7. Check this spelling attempt.
8. Repeat the above steps if necessary.

The following poem is from an Ann Landers' column that emphasizes the importance of learning phonics and spelling rules. Although spell checkers on our computers and hand-held spellers are terrific tools, we must teach our children the "rules" because simply relying on a spell checker may imply illiteracy!

I have a spelling checker,
It came with my PC
It plainly marks four my revue
Mistakes I cannot sea.
I've run this poem threw it,
Im sure your please too no,
Its letter perfect in it's weigh,
My checker tolled me sew.

In early writing activities, students in Texas are encouraged to use phonetic approximations of words, or "invented spelling." Using invented spelling allows students to communicate their ideas in written language by applying what they know about sounds and letters. Encouraging children to create their own spellings helps them think about the sounds of words in relation to their written symbols. In summary, research supports the notion that invented spelling can contribute to students' development in reading and in writing.

In the first grade, spelling instruction is coordinated with the program of phonics and reading instruction. As children write, those who are good spellers tend to use their knowledge of spelling patterns. We know that getting children to pay attention to spelling patterns contributes to their spelling success. This can often be achieved by simply having children look at the spelling of words.

The more children write, the more they become aware of common spelling patterns in words and of how words are spelled.

An effective spelling and writing program should contain activities that:

- Coordinate spelling with instruction in sound-letter relationships and decoding strategies;
- Guide children to move from their own invented spellings to correct spellings;
- Include instruction that helps children to attend to spelling patterns in written words;

Contain purposeful activities that permit children to respond in writing to what is read to them and to what they read, to express themselves creatively, and to communicate their ideas in writing.

Research supports the following:

- Learning to spell is an organic, developmental process.
- Learning to spell is a conceptual process. It involves thinking, not rote memorization.
- Spelling should be taught socially in interaction with reading, writing, and the other language arts – and with people.
- Formal spelling programs should not focus on tedious drills with irksome materials and hideous tests, but should take place in a context that honors the recent understandings of children's developing orthographic knowledge, principles that can be applied in a child-centered curriculum.

Examples of skills that might be done during spelling activities...

- Long vowels
- short vowels
- syllable count
- homonyms
- past tense
- verbs- irregular
- double consonants
- phonic review
- verbs with ed/ing
- suffix
- prefix
- consonant digraphs
- compound words
- plural forms
- antonyms
- contractions
- apostrophe s
- schwa sound
- r-controlled vowels
- silent letters
- sounds of /ow/
- words with /f/, ph,/gh/
- edit words
- rhyming words
- edit sentences
- word families
- etc!

Examples taken from Third Grade TEKS indicate the need to go beyond expecting students to write a correctly spelled list of spelling words that are assigned on a Monday and tested on a Friday. In third grade the Writing/Spelling Student Expectation is, “The student spells proficiently.”

The skills listed below this expectation state:

- Write with more proficient spelling of regularly spelled patterns such as consonant-vowel-consonant (CVD – hop), consonant-vowel-consonant-silent e (CVCe - hope), and one-syllable words with blends (drop)
- Write with more proficient spelling of inflectional endings, including plurals and past tense and words that drop the final e when such endings as –ing, –ed, or –able are added.

More information about spelling expectations can be found in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

References:

- Gentry, J.R. (1982). An Analysis of Developmental Spellings. *The Reading Teacher*, 36, 192-200.
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