

Spell Well

Supporting Children in Learning to Spell

A guide for Parents

This booklet is designed to support parents in helping their children learn how to spell. It contains information on the English spelling system, strategies that children use to remember the spellings of new words and some games and activities for you to use at home. These should be useful in helping your child to remember the spellings in their spellings book each week.

The English Spelling System

Spelling in English is notoriously difficult. There are 205 different spellings for the 44 English sounds. To make it even harder over a third of these spellings are used to represent more than one sound. For many of these sounds there is no dominant spelling pattern – eg **bought**, **caught**, **port**, **Autumn**, **all**.

When teaching children how to spell we begin with the most common way to write each sound. We then look at the alternative ways a sound can be written. These are called sound families. These ‘graphemes’ are listed in your child’s reading diary in the order in which they are taught.

Following this the children learn which spelling pattern to choose when spelling a word. We call this ‘Best Bet.’ To help with this we teach the children rules to follow. For example we say ‘**Shy i, toughy y**’ as in words with an ai or oi sound at the end the i is too shy so it changes to a y. For example **day** or **toy**. The rule extends to the ee sound which usually becomes either y or ey.

Often no rules apply or there are lots of exceptions so children will need to learn the spelling of the words. However, this is not as simple as reciting the letters of a word. Children need to retain their spellings in their long term memory. Part of this is in the physical act of writing the word down in order to ‘get the feel of it.’ But they also need to explore the word, to know the shape of it and be able to visualise it. It is for this reason that weekly spelling tests are not an effective method for learning how to spell. Children are able to learn their spellings in a week but will only have them in their short term memories and will probably not be able to apply them in their writing. It is through continually revisiting and reviewing spellings that children are able to retain them.

Spelling Strategies

Below are a number of strategies that we teach children to help them remember the spelling of new words. Every child is different so what works for some children, doesn't work for others. You will soon discover which ones your child likes.

Does it look right?

Write the word with a variety of graphemes for the tricky part and ask your child to identify which is the correct spelling. For example:

nite night niet nyt

Break the word into it's syllables.

eg re – mem – ber

Break the syllables into phonemes.

eg r-e-m-e-m-b-e-r

Word Patterns

Link the word with other words with similar patterns.

eg bright - fright, light, night

Exaggerate the sounding out of tricky words.

eg Wed – nes – day

T – ues – day

Mispronounce tricky words

eg pe-ople

Word Collections

Make collections based on the same word.

E.g. build – build, building, builder, built

Words in Words

Look to see if there are little words inside the word. For example vegetable has the word get and table. Emphasise those which help you to remember the tricky part of the word.

important - Children tend to write a n instead of a m at the beginning and ent instead of ant at the end. So these are the parts to emphasise.

separate – There is ‘a rat’ in separate

Remember rules when adding ‘ing,’ ‘ed,’ ‘s’ or ‘es’

	ing	ed	plural
short vowel words such as step	Double the consonant stepping	Double the consonant stepped	Just add s
Words that end in e such as dance	Remove the e dancing	Remove the e danced	Just add s
Words that end in y such as cry NB. Not words ending in ay, ey or oy	Just add ing crying	Change the y to an i crying	Change the y to a i cries

Mnemonics

Little rhymes that help you remember tricky spellings

E.g. **because** – **B**ig **E**lephants **C**an **A**lways **U**nderstand **S**mall **E**lephants
said – **S**ave **A**nimals **I**n **D**anger

You could even make your own for words your child finds difficult.

Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check

Look at the word and say it. Then cover it up. Write it. Check the spelling is correct. Then repeat it.

It is important that children write the word down, not just say the spelling.

Some Games and Activities to Use at Home

Practise any activities that give children chance to practise reading and writing their spellings. For example:

- Write your words in alphabetical order.
- Write them in bubble letters.
- Use play-doh to sculpt your words.
- Use an etch-a-sketch to write the word.
- Draw a flower and write the word in each petal.
- Find the word in a sentence/page of a book – it's better if you can underline/circle it.

Jumbled Letters Games

Choose a word from their spelling lists and jumble it up. Can your children work out which word it is. For younger children it helps if the letters are movable such as cards or scrabble tiles as they may need to put them in the correct order to find the word. A great activity is to do this with magnetic letters on the fridge. Put the whole spelling list up and then jumble up a word or two every time you pass. This encourages your child to keep reading to check the words are still correct, which is great for helping your child to remember them.

Getting to Know the Shape and Feel of a Word

Choose a word from your child's list and trace it on their hand with your finger. Can they guess the word? This helps them 'feel' the word. It also works well on their back but this is harder. Alternatively, write a word in the air with your finger and ask your child if they know what it is. Then swap over and do it the other way around.

Quick Write

Choose a word from the spelling list and write it at the top of a piece of paper. Now give your child one minute to write the word as many times as possible. Do it again and see if they can beat their score. This is great for feeling the flow of the words as they write. They must have the correct spelling of the word to start with or it doesn't work.

Playing with Vowels and Consonants

Choose a word from your child's spelling list. Write out your word with a line replacing the vowels. Ask your child to fill the blanks. Then swap over. This helps children see the shape of the word. Alternatively you could miss out the consonants (this is really hard). Or to make it easier write the word and circle the vowels.

Word Pyramid

Make a word pyramid by adding one letter at a time

w

wh

wha

what

A simpler version is to play peek a boo with your word or give your child the word one letter at a time.

Asking Questions and Giving Clues

Choose a word from the spelling list but don't tell your child what it is. Now use Yes/No questions to eliminate incorrect words and to find the correct word.

E.g. Does it have a split digraph? Does it have a w at the beginning?

Alternatively you can give clues rather than ask questions.

Memory Games

Write all the letters from a word on post it notes. Put them on the table in front of you. Ask your child to close their eyes and then remove one. Can they guess which letter is missing? This good because children need to visualise the word in order to know what is missing. It's best to begin with the word in the correct order but when they get really good at it you could jumble them up first.