

Supporting Children with Spelling

The bulk of the work on learning how to spell should be completed by the end of primary school.

Different children learn in different ways. There is no blueprint for teaching children to spell.

1) Fundamental issues

- In order to spell properly children need to be able to speak properly. Parents and teachers should sensitively correct poor articulation and mispronunciations. They should also assist pupils to recognise words that are slang (for example, *gobsmacked*).
- Joined handwriting helps spelling accuracy. As a general rule, children with neat, joined handwriting tend to be more competent at spelling than those who print, or those with poor handwriting

2) One technique for learning spellings – Rainbow writing

- The link between the brain and the writing hand is the key, therefore when learning spellings pupils should write them out
- They should say the word before writing it
- They should write in a joined script
- As they write each letter they should say its name
- At the end of the word they should repeat the word
- This process should be repeated twice more using a different colour each time and tracing over the letters
- In this way a striking visual image ('rainbow writing') is created. This enhances the visual impact of the word on the child's memory – a stronger imprint.

3) Key Issues when teaching spelling – Melvyn Ramsden

- Teach children to segment words rather than looking at individual letters
diff-er-ent rather than d-i-f-f-e-r-e-n-t; dis-gust-ing rather than d-i-s-g-u-s-t-i-n-g
- Teach them to '*get a feeling for the word in their mouth*'. Speak the word out loud
- Repeating words out loud is very important
- Single letters rarely indicate and represent a sound in isolation. Letters work in combination with other letters – does your child know this?

4) Using the segmentation technique

- 1) Segment your target word
- 2) Ask: do I recognise any of the segments?
- 3) Ask: do I know how to write any of these segments?
- 4) Write down the segments you know how to write in order
- 5) Leave a blank for those segments you don't know and ask a partner (parent) to help you with those segments

5) Visualisation and spelling

Some researchers stress the importance of visualising spellings as key to learning them. They suggest an alternative to the look-cover-write-check methodology.

Master strategy for teaching spelling Harry Alder 'Neuro-linguistic programming', 1994

- The secret to good spelling is being able to store words in a visual way
- The best way to remember a spelling is to visualise it, a little up and to your left in your mind's eye, and store that picture
- When you see that word again, it will 'look right' or 'feel right', or, if it was spelt incorrectly, it will 'look wrong' or 'feel wrong'
- All top spellers that have been researched use some form of visualisation, usually looking up or straight ahead as they recall a word, then down as they confirmed that it felt right

The strategy to follow:

- First, think of anything that feels familiar and comfortable
- Next, for a few seconds, look at the word you wish to remember
- See the word in your favourite colour, in a place you really like
- Look away from the word, up and to your left, and picture the word as best you can as you try to spell it in your mind
- Look back at the word, noticing any letters you have missed and repeat the process until you can picture the whole word
- To test yourself, after a short break, visualise the word and write it down
- Now look up at the word again and spell it backwards. This will confirm that you are learning through the best, visual strategy (you cannot learn to spell a word backwards if learned phonetically)
- For longer words chunk them down into smaller units of three or four letters. Visualise separate chunks

6) 50 common words that are frequently spelt incorrectly – a subjective list

Correct spelling	Common error
l	i (grammatical error)
so	sow
they	thay
went	whent
which	wich
until	untill
some	sum (homophone issue)
does	dose
before	befor
meant	ment
always	allways
could	cud
should	shud
would	wud

like	lik
might	mite
people	peple
believe	belive
really	realy
didn't	did'nt
listen	lisen
thought	thort
actually	acshully
enough	enuf
anyone	enyone
happened	happend
different	diffrent
friend	frend
something	somthing
everyone	evryone
decide	dicide
many	meny
very	verry
slowly	slowley
heard	herd (homophone issue)
someone	somone
quickly	quickley
special	speshall
tomorrow	tommorow
comfortable	conftable
rough	ruff
first	frist
calm	carm
eventually	aventually
usually	ushually
surprsie	suprise
separate	seperate
asked	aksed
once	wonce
tried	tryed

7) The 100 words most commonly mis-spelled by children

(in order of error frequency)

1) their	26) went	51) mother	76) interesting
2) too	27) where	52) another	77) once
3) there	28) stopped	53) threw	78) like
4) they	29) very	54) some	79) they're
5) then	30) morning	55) its	80) cousin
6) until	31) something	56) bought	81) all right
7) our	32) named	57) getting	82) happened
8) asked	33) came	58) going	83) didn't
9) off	34) name	59) course	84) always
10) through	35) tried	60) women	85) surprise
11) you're	36) here	61) animals	86) before
12) clothes	37) many	62) started	87) caught
13) looked	38) knew	63) that's	88) every
14) people	39) with	64) would	89) different
15) pretty	40) together	65) again	90) interesting
16) running	41) swimming	66) heard	91) sometimes
17) believe	42) first	67) received	92) friends
18) little	43) were	68) coming	93) children
19) things	44) than	69) to	94) an
20) him	45) two	70) said	95) school
21) because	46) know	71) wanted	96) jumped
22) thought	47) decided	72) hear	97) around
23) and	48) friends	73) from	98) dropped
24) beautiful	49) when	74) frightened	99) babies
25) it's	50) let's	75) for	100) money

8) Common words that are frequently confused

- where and were
- than and then
- two, too and to
- there, their and they're
- will and well
- quite and quiet
- accept and except

9) Two words that pupils hear as one word

- a lot
- all right
- in case
- in trouble

10) Hearing issues

- could've ----- could have Pupils write could of
- should've ----- should have Pupils write should of
- Hearing the s in the third person singular:
He needs, she wants, he thinks - He need, she want, he think

- The difference between of (ov) and off
- The difference between are and our (ower)

11) Some spelling rules

Rules should never be taught in isolation. They must be backed up by practical activities. Most spelling rules have exceptions. It helps if the children are taught the exceptions.

- Every English word must contain at least one vowel
- No words in English end in i – we use y instead
- The letter q is always followed by the letter u (queen; quite, quintessential)
- The letter j is never used at the end of a word – we use ge instead
- No complete words ends in v – we use ve instead
- The doubling rule: words ending in f, l, s or z double the final consonant (stiff, bell, Miss, fuzzy)

g) Suffix rules

i) The lazy 'e' rule

Drop the 'e' before adding a suffix beginning with a vowel:

like – liked

hate – hating

shake - shaking

ii) The 'e' that isn't being lazy

Keep the 'e' before adding a suffix beginning with a consonant

hope-hopeful, hopeless

iii) The lazy 'e' meets 'a'

Keep the 'e' in words ending in 'ce' or 'ge'

orange-orangeade

manage-manageable

j) shun endings - There are four different ways of spelling shun – but none are spelt as they sound:

- ssion profession, progression, discussion

- tion prevention, protection, station

- cian musician, electrician

- sion decision, confusion, revision

12) Fifteen common word families in English

all	ball	call	fall	hall	stall	tall	wall
ing	king	ring	sing	wing			
ack	back	lack	pack	rack	sack		

ay	bay	day	hay	lay	may	pay	ray	say	way
at	bat	cat	fat	hat	mat	pat	rat	sat	
op	hop	mop	pop	top					
ad	bad	dad	had	lad	mad	pad	sad		
ill	bill	fill	gill	hill	kill	mill	pill	will	
in	bin	din	fin	pin	tin	sin	win		
ump	bump	dump	hump	jump	lump	pump			
ent	bent	dent	lent	rent	sent	tent	went		
old	bold	cold	fold	hold	sold	told			
ook	book	cook	hook	look	took				
ell	bell	cell	fell	hell	sell	tell	well		
et	bet	get	jet	let	met	pet	set	wet	

13) Eleven more common endings

ain	contain, complain, brain, drain, main, pain, rain, stain, train
augh(t)	caught, daughter, naughty, slaughter, taught, laugh, laughing
ful	careful, thoughtful, painful, wonderful, resntful
ight	bright, fight, fright, light, night, right, sight, slight, tight,
ite	bite, kite, polite, satellite
ous	famous, cautious, ambitious, delicious
ough	although, cough, enough, rough, tough, thorough, though
ow	blow, follow, grow, low, slow, show, snow, yellow
sion	comprehension, confusion, decision, revision
tion	action, attraction, collection, direction, investigation, reaction, station
ture	capture, creature, fixture, furniture, future, mixture, nature, picture

14) Silent letters

Silent letter	Common examples
b	bomb, comb, crumb, doubt, thumb
c	descent, discipline, science
g	design, neighbour, sign
h	honest, honour, hour
i	business, marriage, parliament
k	knee, knife, knight, knock, know, know, knot
l	chalk, walk
n	autumn, column
t	castle, listen, whistle
w	wrong, wrap, wriggle, write, wrist, wreck, whole

15) Homophones

Homophones	Examples of use	Teaching tips
to, too, two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have two cars. He is too tired. Are you coming too? I go to school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use two when you mean the number 2 Too: means 'more than enough', or 'as well' In all other cases use 'to'
there, their,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Their dog is fierce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember if there can be a 'my' spell

they're	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They're coming over • There is a willow grows askance a brook. 	their with an i. You can say 'my house is big', you can say 'their house is big'.
here, hear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can't hear you. • I'm over here. 	You hear with your ear .
are, our	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are going on a trip. • Our class is going to Richmond. 	This is a 'false homophone'. Correct speech distinguishes between the pronunciation of the two words.
one, won	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have one sister • They won a prize. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you can win it then it has a w.
by, buy, bye	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I go by car • I must have a new pen • He waved goodbye 	
sea, see	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can swim in the sea. • Did you see the boy? 	
meet, meat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will meet you in London. • We had to eat the meat. 	Remember: we eat meat .
no, know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No you don't • Oooh I know . . ! 	No belongs with yes
wait, weight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will wait here. • Guess the weight of the cake? 	

16) Using mnemonics

Mnemonic – A device or system for improving memory
Irregular words cause most trouble to children

Word	Mnemonic
are	Are rhinos elegant
beautiful	Boys eat apples under tress in France until lunch
beacuse	Big elephants can always upset smaller elephants
believe	Never believe a lie
build	u and i will build a house
busy	This bus is busy
business	Do your business in the bus
could <small>Same rule for should/would</small>	Oh u lucky dear OR could old uncle lie down?
does	Does Oliver eat sausages?
friend	i to the end will be your friend
great	It is great to eat
intelligent	Tell the gent to come in
island	An island is land
mother	Mother ate a moth The other lady was his mother
piece	Eat a piece of pie
present	She sent a present
special	A special agent is someone in the CIA
sure	Save up red elephants
Wednesday	Nes was wed on Wednesday

17) Creating spellings, rather than remembering them

- An alternative to asking pupils to learn a set list of words is to ask them to generate as many words as they can – this creates more ownership of the learning experience.
- Think of all the words you can that contain a particular pattern. For example:

ight

bright, fight, fighting, height, light, lightening, might, mighty, night, nightly, right, rightly, sight, sighting, tight, tightly.

- Take a prefix: How many words can you create using the following prefix

pre

pretend, pretending, present, presently, presentation, preview, prepare, prepared, preparation, predict, prediction, preposterous, preachg, preacher, precise, precisely, preoccupation, prescribe, prescription.

- Take a suffix: How many words can you create ending in the suffix:

ly

carefully, thoughtfully, cowardly, terribly, seriously slowly, quickly, fortunately, unfortunately, casually, meaningfully, normally, dramatically, aggressively, amazingly,

- Take a common phoneme. For example:

ir

bird, third, thirteen, thirty, thirst, thirsty, thirsty, first, shirt, skirt, dirt, dirty, birth, birthday, girl, firm, firmly, stir, stirred

- Take a vowel digraph. For example:

ai

chain, train, rain, rainy, brain, Spain, again, main, remain, pain, painful, explain, paint, painted, painter, painting, rail, railway, sail, sailing, sailor, wait, waiting

For all the above activities pupils need to have an alphabet close at hand.

- Segment a word and create other words by using the letter strings

unknowingly

un	know	ing	ly
underneath	known	cooking	badly
understand	knowing	fighting	carefully
unhappy	knowingly	hating	quickly
unhelpful	knowledge	sitting	slowly
unkink		singing	terribly

unknown		watching	seriously
unusual		throwing	extremely

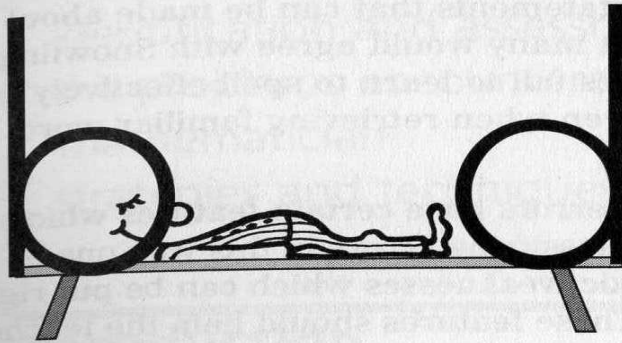
- Use a base word to generate as many words as you can. For example
sign

Sign					
design	signature	signal	resign	consign	significant
designer	signed	signalling	resignation	consignment	signify
designing	signatory		resigning		
redesign			resigned		

That b and d problem for younger writers

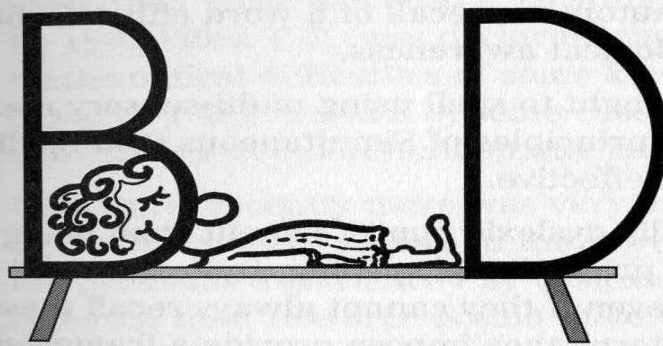
Two illustrations can help the pupil remember which is which:

Mr bed



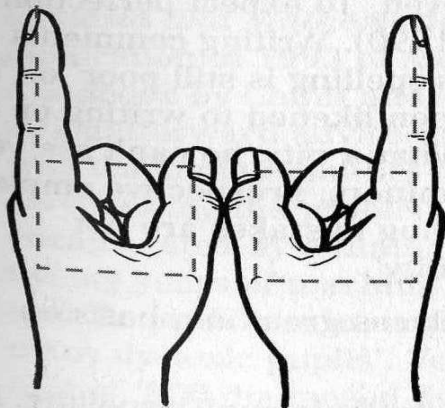
Mr bed can't lie down if the bed posts are on the wrong side.

Mrs BeD



Mrs BeD can't lie down if the bed posts are on the wrong side.

Other teachers teach the pupil to remember which way 'b - d' go by training him to hold up his fingers as illustrated below. Ensure that the pupil puts his forearms on the table in front of him and that he turns his hands so that the knuckles touch each other when he holds up the thumbs.



A useful way to remember how 'b-d' go, using fingers and thumbs.