

# Strategies for spelling<sup>1</sup>

## Implement a plan of attack

Through the years, many teachers have noted that some kind of systematic plan of attack increases student awareness of the ways words are spelled. A four-step plan used by many teachers works this way:

Step 1: Have students look carefully at a word that causes them trouble.

Step 2: Have them copy the word exactly, noting visual features and the way letters relate (or do not relate) to the letters.

Step 3: Have them cover the word, see it in their mind's eye, and rewrite it from memory.

Step 4: Have them uncover the original and check their reproduction. They do this over and over until they know the word's spelling.

Dr. Joyce McPeake of the Scituate (Massachusetts) Public Schools has tested out the following "attack system", (McPeake 1979).<sup>\*</sup> She has had her sixth-grade students complete a duplicated sheet, such as the following, for each word they misspell:

1. I am going to spell the word \_\_\_\_\_ which I misspelled.

2. Below I will write the word and circle the part or parts I misspelled:

\_\_\_\_\_.

3. A device to remember a misspelled part is helpful. The device I thought up is:

\_\_\_\_\_.

4. The word \_\_\_\_\_ means: \_\_\_\_\_.

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to the City of Dublin VEC Psychological Service for material

5. A good sentence using \_\_\_\_\_ is:

\_\_\_\_\_.

6. The word \_\_\_\_\_ has \_\_\_\_\_ syllables.

7. As I write the word below, I will softly say each syllable:

\_\_\_\_\_.

8. Now I will close my eyes and see the syllables of the word

\_\_\_\_\_ in my mind.

9. Below I will write each syllable separately:

\_\_\_\_\_.

10. I will write the word from memory five times:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Learning support techniques for teaching spelling

The general principles of learning support teaching e.g. short frequent periods, small increments, regular review, repetition, feedback etc apply to the teaching of spelling. The following additional points are particularly useful:

- **Homophones**, words of similar sound but different spelling should be taught separately.
- **Avoid** di/vi/sion, underlining, **accent** marking etc, as these tend to distort the pattern of the word and prevent the pupil from forming a stable image.
- **Promote** good, preferably cursive, handwriting. Good handwriting helps the pupil to derive the greatest possible benefit from consistent, carefully executed motor movement.

### The principal categories of spelling difficulty are:

1. **Weak visual perception**, yet the speller places considerable **emphasis** on the recall of **visual patterns** in words.
  2. **Weak visual perception**, and spelling is achieved by reliance on the **phonetic** constituents of words.
  3. **Weak auditory discrimination**: Poor discrimination of similar sound combinations, particularly vowels and vowel digraphs.
  4. **Low standard of orthographic accuracy** due to carelessness and a neglect of the details of words.
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1. **Weak visual perception**, but the speller places considerable emphasis on the recall of visual patterns in words.

### Type of error:

Transposition of letters, e.g. creul (cruel).  
Confusion of visually similar letters, e.g. jod (job).  
Substitution of letters, e.g. wanman (woman).  
Reversal of short words, e.g. ti (it).

### Learning support measures:

- Orientation and sequencing activities.
- Say the word while writing it.
- Check by saying aloud after it has been written
- Use cursive writing to fuse the letters into a unitary, kinaesthetic schema.
- Concentrate on auditory and kinaesthetic methods of recall but not to the exclusion of visual techniques.

2. **Weak visual perception.** Spelling achieved by reliance on phonic regularity.

**Type of error:** Phonic analogies resulting in:

Omissions: clock – klok

Substitutions: done – dune

Additions: last – larst

**Learning support measures:**

- Concentrate on **visual recall** characteristics.
- Exercises to include the pupil to **look at letters** irrespective of sound, e.g. Put a line under pairs of words that contain the same two or more letters next to each other and in the same order. Read down the **columns**.

<u>bo</u> gh	blood	beads	fresh
<u>gh</u> ost	shoot	wrap	sheep
flies	dried	there	receive
files	field	where	receipt

3. **Weak auditory discrimination:** Poor discrimination of similar sound combinations, particularly vowels and vowel digraphs.

<b>Type of error</b>	<b>Phonetic speller</b>	<b>Weak auditory speller</b>
kitten	kitin	caton
towel	towl	teal

**Learning support measures:**

- Isolate common sound units.
- Drill with word families.
- Introduce long words derived from simple combinations of simpler elements.
- Word building activities.
- Auditory discrimination exercises.
- Speech training.

4. **Low standard of orthographic accuracy** due to carelessness and a neglect of the details of words.

**Type of error:**

Omission of letters from word endings: -s, -ed, -t, -e.

Omission of letters in intermediate position:

**Learning support measures:**

- Improve hasty and slovenly writing and speech.
- Encourage personal checking (proofreading) of all that is written.

## Spelling acronyms

The following **mnemonics** are sentences of phrases in which the initial letters of the words spell out a word which many people find rather tricky to spell.

### **BECAUSE**

**Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants**

### **ARITHMETIC**

**A Rat In The House May Eat The Ice Cream**

### **GEOGRAPHY**

**General Eisenhower's Oldest Girl Rode A Pony Home Yesterday**

### **RHYTHM**

**Rhythm Helps Your Two Hips Move**

### **NECESSARY**

**Not Every Cat Eats Sardines (Some Are Really Yummy)**

### **ARGUMENT**

**A Rude Girl Undresses; My eyes Need Taping!**

### **OCEAN**

**Only Cats' Eyes Are Narrow**

## More mnemonics

Another mnemonic method involves associating spelling patterns with familiar words. Putting the associated words into a meaningful phrase can help the association and later recall. For example:

The beach is by the sea

Beech tree

One man too many

Birds chirp

A piece of pie

You hear with you ear

U-TURN

Paper is stationery

A bus is always busy

Mnemonics can be useful for the spelling of difficult words that are resistant to learning any other way. The pupil should make up a sentence containing all or parts of the word that the pupil finds difficult to spell. The pupil may remember them better if she makes up her own sentences. These personal mnemonics should be written down and revised constantly.

<b>are</b>	are rhinos elegant?
<b>beautiful</b>	boys eat apples under trees in France until lunch
<b>because</b>	baby eats cake and uncle sells eggs big elephants can always upset smaller elephants
<b>believe</b>	never believe a lie
<b>build</b>	u and I will build a house
<b>business</b>	do your business on the bus
<b>cemetery</b>	we met in the cemetery
<b>come</b>	come on my elephants
<b>could</b>	could old uncle lie down
<b>does</b>	does Oliver eat sausages?

## Some spelling rules

1. 'q' is always written with u, as qu. It never stands by itself – quick, queen, quarrel  
Exception: Some foreign words / names e.g. Iraq.
2. Double l, f, s, after a **single** vowel at the end of a word – will, tell, toss, miss, stiff, stuff  
Exceptions: us, bus, gas, if, of, this, yes, plus nil, pal.
3. Regular plurals are made by adding 's' – animals, horses, monkeys, cliffs
4. The sound 'ee' on the end of a word is nearly always 'y' – baby, lazy  
Exceptions: committee, coffee, macaroni, spaghetti, vermicelli, taxi
5. A silent 'e' on the end of a word makes the vowel in front say its own alphabetic name – hate, bake, mere, ride, tire, lobe, cube  
Exceptions: done, come, some, give, have
6. 'ck' may only be used after a single vowel that does not say its name and at the end of a syllable or root word  
e.g. track, pick, rocket, wreckage
7. To form plurals of words with a hissing ending, add 'es',  
i.e. after s, x, z, sh, ch,  
e.g. buses, foxes, busses, wishes, churches
8. Word ending in an 'o' preceded by a consonant usually add 'es' to form the plural  
e.g. potato-es, volcano-es  
Exceptions: pianos, solos, Eskimos
9. Nouns ending in a single 'f' change the 'f' to a 'v' before adding 'es' to form the plural  
e.g. leaf, leaves; wolf, wolves  
Exceptions: dwarfs, roofs, chiefs
10. If a word ends in a consonant plus 'y' change 'y' to 'i' before adding any ending other than 'ing').  
e.g. party, parties, heavy, heaviness, marry, married, funny, funnily, carry, carriage, pretty, prettier,  
For 'ing' endings leave the 'y'  
e.g. cry, crying; hurry, hurrying
11. When 'w' come before 'or' it often says 'wer' as in 'worm'  
e.g. worship, worst, worth, work
12. Words ending in both a single vowel and a single consonant always double the last consonant before adding an ending  
e.g. stop, stopped, stopping; flat, flatter, flattest; swim, swimmer, swimming

Exception: fix, box, fox, mix, -x is same as ch, that is it counts as a double consonant ending

13. When 'c' is followed by c, i, or y, it says 's'. Otherwise it says 'k'. e.g. centre, ceiling, circle, cycle, cottage, cave, cream, curious, clever
14. When 'g' is followed by 'i', 'e', or y, it says 'j'  
Otherwise it says 'g', as in gold  
e.g. gentle, giant, gymnastic, gallon, gold, guide, glass, grow  
Exceptions: get, begin, girl, give, gear, geese, gift, girth, geyser, giddy
15. Drop the final 'e' from a root word before adding an ending beginning with a vowel, but keep it before one beginning with a consonant  
e.g. love, loving, lovely; drive, driving, driver; settle, settled, settling;  
grace, graceful
16. 'ti', 'ci', and 'si' are three of the most frequently used ways to say 'sh' at the beginning of syllables other than the first  
e.g. national, patient, palatial, infectious, gracious, ancient, musician, financial, session, admission, mansion, division  
Exceptions: 'ship', as a suffix e.g. worship
17. 'i' comes before 'e' when it is pronounced ee, except when it follows 'c' - or when sounded like ā as in neighbour, weigh  
e.g. brief, field, priest, receive, deceive, ceiling.  
Exceptions: neither, foreign, sovereign, seized, counterfeit, forfeited, leisure
18. 'All' and 'well' followed by another syllable only have one 'l'  
e.g. also, already, although, welcome, welfare
19. 'Full' and 'till' joined to another root syllable drop an 'l'  
e.g. useful, cheerful, until
20. No English words end in 'v' or 'j'
21. Words ending in a single 'l' after a single vowel, double the 'l' before adding a suffix regardless of accent  
e.g. cancelled, traveller, signalling, metallic
22. If a word of more than one syllable ends in a 't' preceded by a single vowel, and has the accent on the last syllable, double the final consonant  
e.g. permit, permitted; admit, admitted; regret, regretted  
Exceptions: visit, visited; benefit, benefited

## Morphemic features

1. 'ous' at the end of a word often means 'full of' e.g. famous: full of fame, glorious: full of glory, gracious: full of grace (furious, ridiculous, dangerous, etc.)
2. 'al' at the end of a word often means 'to do with' e.g. musical: to do with music, criminal: to do with crime, historical: to do with history
3. 'er' or 'or' endings. The most common everyday words end in 'er'  
e.g. baker, painter, teacher  
Otherwise use 'or', especially when the meaning is 'one who' or 'that which'  
e.g. author, director, instructor, indicator, conveyor, escalator
4. 'ery', or 'ary' endings. Words ending in '-ery' are often obvious  
e.g. very, brewery, flattery, bakery, nursery  
Otherwise use '-ary'  
e.g. dictionary, secretary, commentary, stationary (meaning *come to a halt*)  
Some words ending in 'ery' might cause trouble  
e.g. distillery, confectionery, millinery, cemetery, dysentery, monastery, stationery (meaning *paper*)
5. 'ise', - 'ize' or 'yse' endings. The most common spelling is '-ise'  
e.g. sunrise, surprise, supervise, exercise, disguise, unwise, surmise, advertise
6. ceed, sede, cede words.  
There are three 'ceed' words i.e. succeed, exceed, proceed  
There is one 'sede' word i.e. supersede  
For all others use 'cede' e.g. intercede, antecede, precede
7. able or ible endings. Use '-able'
  - a) after root words e.g. available, dependable
  - b) after root words ending in 'e' e.g. desirable, believable, usable – but drop the 'e'
  - c) After 'i' e.g. reliable, sociable
  - d) When other forms of the root word have a dominant short 'ă' vowel e.g. irritable, durable, abominable
  - e) After a hard 'c' or 'g' e.g. educable, practicable, navigable.  
Exceptions: formidable, inevitable, memorable, probable, portable, indomitable, insuperable.Use '-ible'
  - a) After non-word roots, e.g. audible, horrible, possible
  - b) When the root has an immediate 'ion' form e.g. digestible, suggestible, convertible
  - c) After a root ending in 'ns' or 'miss'  
e.g. responsible, comprehension, permissible
  - d) After a soft 'e', or 'g',  
e.g. legible, negligible, forcible, invincible.  
Exceptions: contemptible, resistible, collapsible, flexible