Tips for Teaching Spelling

The following are research-based suggestions for teaching spelling.

Curriculum Considerations

- Spelling vocabulary includes words drawn from children’s reading materials, children’s writing, self-selected words, high-frequency word lists, and pattern words.
- Students are typically taught phonemic awareness and phoneme-grapheme associations (reserving the least consistent mappings, such as consonants /k/ and /z/ and long vowels, for last) in kindergarten and first grade. Common spelling patterns (e.g., phonograms or rime families) are taught in first and second grades. Morphological structures (i.e., roots and affixes) and helpful spelling rules (e.g., add es to make words ending in s, z, x, ch, or sh plural) are taught in second grade and beyond.
- Students are taught systematic and effective strategies for studying new spelling words (e.g., mnemonic spelling links, multi-sensory strategies).
- Previously taught spelling words are periodically reviewed to promote retention.
- Correct use of spelling vocabulary in students’ written work is monitored and reinforced.
- Students are taught and encouraged to use dictionaries, spell checkers, and other resources to determine the spelling of unknown words.
- Spelling “demons” and other difficult words are posted on wall charts.

Weekly Routines

- A minimum of 60–75 minutes per week is allocated for spelling instruction.
- Students take a Monday pretest to determine which words they need to study during subsequent activities and to set spelling performance goals.
- After studying new spelling words, students take a Friday posttest to determine which words were mastered.
- Immediately after taking a spelling test, students correct their misspellings.
- The teacher conducts word sorts and guided spelling activities to explicitly teach spelling patterns and rules at the beginning of the week.
- Daily opportunities are provided for cumulative study and testing of new spelling words (e.g., through computer-assisted instruction).
- Students work together each day to learn new spelling words.
While studying, students monitor their on-task behavior or the number of times they correctly spell a target word, to promote active learning.


**Note:** Although the research base for these recommendations is limited (as compared to, for instance, the research base for instructional recommendations in reading), study findings are generally consistent.