



## 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<sup>1,2</sup>, 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<sup>3,4,5</sup>) are taught in first and second grades. Morphological structures (i.e., roots and affixes<sup>3,4,5,6</sup>) 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.

See Bourassa & Treiman, 2001; Graham, 1999, 2000; Templeton & Morris, 1999; Troia & Graham, 2003.

<sup>1</sup>Graham, S., Harris, K.R., & Loynachan, C. (1993). The basic spelling vocabulary list. *Journal of Educational Research*, 86, 363–368.

<sup>2</sup>Graham, S., Harris, K.R., & Loynachan, C. (1994). The spelling for writing list. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 27, 210–214.

<sup>3</sup>Bear, D.R., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnston, F. (2000). *Words their way: Word study for phonics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

<sup>4</sup>Carnine, D.W., Silbert, J., & Kame'enui, E. J. (1997). *Direct instruction reading*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

<sup>5</sup>Cunningham, P.M. (2000). *Phonics they use: Words for reading and writing* (3rd ed.). New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

<sup>6</sup>Harris, A.J., & Sipay, E.R. (1985). *How to increase reading ability: A guide to developmental and remedial methods*. New York: Longman.

**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.