



Spelling

Children learn to spell through reading, writing and talking about words.

- Spelling is best learned when children are encouraged to take an active interest in words and their meaning.
- Effective teaching of spelling is embedded across the curriculum, helping children make links between the meaning of words and their spelling.
- Investigation and discussion play a significant role in improving children's spelling.
- Learning to be a successful speller takes time and children need to be guided to develop a range of strategies.
- A supportive environment for spelling will have not only a range of resources to support language study but a teacher who is keen to explore language with the class.

The complex history of the English language means that it has an equally complex spelling system so that teaching spelling needs to be seen as part of wider language study. The 'traditional' view of teaching spelling is to give lists of words to be remembered and then tested, but there are difficulties with this approach: different learners know and recall different words so that there cannot be 'one list that suits all' and learning lists of words does not necessarily transfer to children's written work. Developing writers and spellers need to acquire a wide range of spelling knowledge:

- the relationship between sound and symbol
- letter names and the alphabet
- a growing lexicon of known words

- visual awareness of the likely patterns that occur in English spelling
- awareness of common strings and patterns
- a growing knowledge of word structures and meanings (prefixes, suffixes, compound words, word roots and families)
- an interest in words and their origins.

Improving the teaching of spelling can also help children develop their vocabulary and consequently reading comprehension.

Knowing word meanings supports learning how to spell words. Children need both formal and informal opportunities to develop spelling knowledge, through shared writing, editing, spelling logs, games, classroom collections of similarly spelled words, displays and print hunts focused on different aspects of spelling, through content or 'topic words', words with common meanings, similar letter strings and patterns, words with the same prefix, suffix etc.

Children learn to spell through writing and discussion. They should be encouraged to monitor their own spellings from early on, with support from teacher and peers and talk about words. A supportive environment for spelling might include: word banks, alphabet books/posters, class compiled books of spellings related to known stories, posters of 'what to do when you don't know how to spell a word', dictionaries, thesauruses, word games, word webs... and a teacher who shows a zest for words and spends time talking about words, their origins and their power.

Sources

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Classroom example

Working on words

A teacher wanted to help her 6 and 7 year old class to become more aware of their skills and strategies when spelling, in other words to develop their ‘spelling consciousness’. The teacher worked with her class to develop their metacognition in relation to spelling, giving them a number of strategies to use if they did not know how to spell a word. Strategies included ‘Chunky Monkey’ (dividing words into syllables) and ‘Trying Lion’ (writing the word in three different ways, and then selecting the word that looks correct). The teacher also worked on improving the children’s own knowledge of their spelling processes, by using talk about spelling to model thought processes and reasoning. Finally, the class worked on strategies for proofreading their work, including using ‘magic lines’ to identify words they thought they might have spelt wrong, and using classroom resources to correct them. The project resulted in children across the attainment range improving their spelling in independent writing, and also demonstrated that children as young as six can use metacognitive thinking in relation to spelling.

A teacher with a class of 7 and 8 year olds started talking about spelling ‘principles’ rather than ‘rules’ (Ramsden, 1993). She noticed the children showing much greater interest in exploring and experimenting with words and spelling patterns. By the end of the year the children’s spelling had improved much faster than would normally be expected.

A teacher began introducing his 8 and 9 year old class to examining morphology and etymology when talking about words and their spelling. Through structured word inquiry, looking at related words, they realised a common link between ‘music’ and ‘museum’ and later were excited to find that ‘happy’ and ‘mishap’ (together with related words such as ‘unhappy’) were based on the same root. This interest in words supported their spelling and vocabulary development, for example understanding and spelling ‘translation’ in Maths was grasped more readily after work on the prefix ‘trans’.

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See also

UKLA bookshop www.ukla.org/shop

Talk for Spelling by Tony Martin

Teaching Spelling 6-11: designing effective learning in English and across the curriculum by Kirstie Hewitt

Teaching Grammar Effectively in Primary Schools
by David Reedy and Eve Bearne

UKLA website www.ukla.org/resources

Website resource *Grammar in its place*: <https://ukla.org/resources>