

How to...

Teach spelling

Don't overstress the point that spelling in English can be tricky – it is actually much more regular than it seems. Encourage pupils to see common patterns.

In most cases – don't give answers, give/reinforce strategies. Each time you **give** the answer, you are making that pupil more dependent on you.

Also... use spellcheckers with great caution!



Spelling strategies

	Strategy	Why use it?	Possible words/ what to do/say
1	Share effective strategies you use yourself/ pupils in the group use.	To reinforce the point that we all use strategies to help us spell correctly.	'Does anyone have a <i>method/system/strategy</i> that helps them spell this word?'
2	Analogy.	To reinforce common patterns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The practice, to practise The advice, to advise The licence, to license 'Can you hear the difference with <i>advise/advice</i> ?'
3	Identify morpheme building blocks: prefix.	Learning the prefix provides both <i>spelling</i> and <i>meaning</i> .	dis = not: disagree , dissatisfy pre = before: preheat , prearrange
4	Identify morpheme building blocks: suffix.	Learning the suffix provides <i>spelling</i> , <i>meaning</i> and <i>word class</i> .	ly creates an adverb: slowly ly , strangely ly ness creates a noun: happiness, kindness, greatness
5	Identify morpheme building blocks: root.	Making links and bridges between different contexts helps to reinforce both the spelling and the meaning.	port = carry: portable , import , transport sanct = holy: sanctuary , sanctify sect = cut: bisect , intersect , section spect = to look: inspect , spectator , prospect , spectacle

6	Identify morpheme building blocks: know the Greek/Latin etc. origin of the word. (Overlaps with 3, 4, 5.)	This often helps with spelling <i>and</i> meaning.	astro (Greek) = star: astronaut , astronomy athlon (Greek) = contest: decathlon , pentathlon cyclo (Greek) = circle: cycle , cyclone equi (Latin) = equal: equilibrium , equivalent
7	Identify common patterns. (Overlaps with 3 - 6.)	This often helps with spelling <i>and</i> meaning. Seeing common patterns is more helpful for most pupils than linking confusable words such as there, their, they're.	know , knowing , knew , knowledge here , where , nowhere , everywhere , elsewhere , there
8	Identify and use common spelling changes.	Knowing the pattern means you can make a good prediction in a new context.	fly → flies, carry → carries, -y → -ies
9	Sound the word out carefully.	Some spelling mistakes arise from mispronunciation.	quiet would have/ (would've) (not would of etc.)
10	Get them to write the word/ letter string several times in a sentence.	Many pupils develop a kinaesthetic memory of typical letter patterns/ strings: e.g. <i>aire, ight, ing, ough</i>	'Write out and read the sentence several times.' Provide a range of fun activities to reinforce the spelling.

Note that the following should only be used if 1-10 cannot be used – strategies using logical patterns are preferable to memory aids etc.			
11	Say the word strangely. (To be used with care with ESOL pupils.)	As a memory aid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feb RU ary • dis CIP line • gover N ment • SC issors • Wed NES day
12	Look for words within words.	As a memory aid. <i>Encourage pupils to find their own.</i>	bus iness / bu sin ess sep a rat e
13	Use mnemonics.	As a memory aid. <i>Encourage pupils to develop their own if 1-10 cannot be used.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is necessary to have one colour for two socks. • gran ruined a pink hat = graph • rhythm helps your two hips move • her + his = their • M I double S I double S I double P I = Mississippi
14	Write the word down in the two or three most likely ways.	Some variations look more right than others if visual memory comes into play.	
15	Use a dictionary.	To reinforce the point that even experienced adults use dictionaries for spelling as well as meaning. To familiarise pupils with using dictionaries on a regular basis.	

When exploring the spelling of a word:

- ask for/suggest a strategy;
- explore how the strategy works in this context;
- help them to identify words with the same pattern/where the same strategy works;
- show how learning to spell one word can lead to being able to spell many more, because words are linked and patterns are repeated.

Other advice about spelling

- Group words according to how they **look** rather than how they **sound**.
- Word walls should link words by meaning rather than be in alphabetical order. But common patterns/word strings etc. should be highlighted.
- Word walls and other activities should use lower case throughout, except for proper nouns etc. For those using visual memory to any extent, the shape of the word is critical. (Words in capitals all have the same shape.) Also, pupils may otherwise not be clear about which words need a capital letter at the start.
- If you write the word down for them and they copy it, the spelling will probably not even enter the short term memory, let alone the long term memory. Instead, try to suggest a strategy for remembering this word.

Personalising the advice

Look at the pupil's writing and see what kinds of spelling mistakes are being made. Help them to fully understand and make use of one new strategy on each occasion: decide which strategy will make the biggest difference to this pupil at this time.

If pupils can be involved in deciding the strategy/naming the strategy, this will help to make it more personal and effective for them.

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