

Curricular Materials — Spelling and Beyond

Spelling and Beyond enables teachers to move into more complex instruction than used in Essential Word Knowledge. In particular, learning the meaning of words supports spelling and general knowledge. Examining the phonological structure of these content-area words strengthens the use of the alphabetic principle and can resolve difficulties experienced by students in their early learning. Finally, it is important to teach content-area words because the less frequently a word occurs, the more meaning it conveys.

In English, words expected to be learned first, referred to as "Primer Level," hold the key to learning all words for students who have phonological skills. Of the approximately 100 Primer-level words, half are phonetically regular and half are irregular. Having mastered these words and an additional 200+ words from Level 1 of Spelling and Beyond, talented readers and spellers have been exposed to almost all the phonetic patterns of English. They go on to master more words and more patterns without needing to know the explicit "rules of English".

These students have perceived the relationship between the phonetic elements of English and its written form because their neural predispositions enable them to be sensitive to phonetic patterns and/or because they have had effective developmental instruction. Our goal is for students to move into Level 2 of the Spelling and Beyond portion of the program prepared to learn inflected endings and affixes as extensions of what they already know (as opposed to separate entries in their mental lexicons). This learning contributes to mental energy being unimpeded when students learn vocabulary and accurate spelling representations when they reach Level 3.

For students, usually beyond third grade, whose spelling skill lags behind their basic word-reading skill, the MCUW 300 (phonetically-irregular or phonetically-equivocal of the 600 Most Commonly Used Words) and Spelling Review along with knowledge and practice of the vowel system—will teach them the necessary components of applying the alphabetic principle and discovering the peculiarities of English spelling generalizations. Consequently, they will have the foundation necessary to learn to spell polysyllabic words as outlined in the program.

The Development of Spelling and Beyond

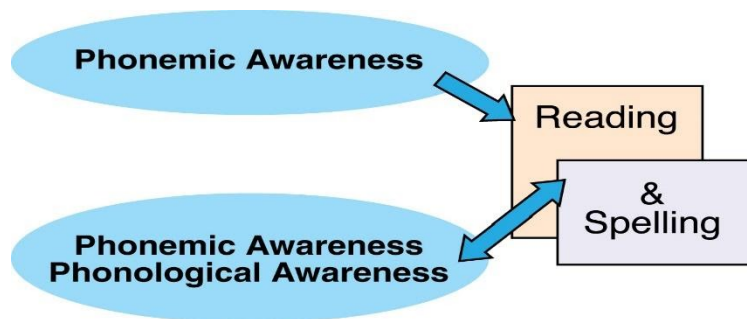
Historically, teaching spelling has not had the research attention that teaching reading has had. The two domains became even more detached as a result of the 1980's initiative, "learning to read by reading" and the omission of spelling in the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's research released in 1999.

Historically, teaching spelling has not had the research attention that teaching reading has had. The two domains became even more detached as a result of the 1980's initiative, "learning to read by reading" and the omission of spelling in the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's research released in 1999.

From the work of Frith (1980), Ehri (1987), Temple (1993), Perfetti, Rieben and Fayol, eds (1997) and our own experiences, we conclude that:

1. spelling acquisition is structurally different and more rapid than is generally supposed when students *of any age learn the vowel system* of English;
2. ability to spell words supports retention of the identity, pronunciation, and meanings of words that a student has learned to read;
3. spelling skill acquisition supports 'catching up' with students who have learned to read and spell effortlessly or easily; and
4. analysis of words to be spelled—applying the alphabetic principle in an explicit manner—is engaging whereas both students and skilled adult readers alike find phonological analysis of words they already know how to read to be arduous.

We hypothesize that learning to spell, as with learning to read, using the alphabetic principle, improves phonemic and phonological awareness and thereby strengthens the reciprocal relationship between awareness and more advanced reading and spelling skills.



The disparity in the effort required between learning to spell and learning to read is resolved by providing phonetic analysis for learning to spell words. In addition to securing the spelling of words, students develop their ability to use the alphabetic principle and, thereby, strengthen their ability to use it when reading.

Using the alphabetic principle is particularly important when reading and spelling polysyllabic words. While the most commonly occurring 600 words comprise 95% of text, the less frequently a word occurs, the more responsibility that word has in conveying meaning. Furthermore, the economy of the English language rests on the fact that its sophisticated words convey meaning that would otherwise require a phrase in less sophisticated language.

Several sets of words are provided for instruction: Primer Level, Levels 1, Level 2, Level 3, Spelling Review, and the 300 Most Commonly Used Words (MCUW 300); and Level 4, Level 5, and Level 6.

The words provided in the Primer Level through Level 6 were derived by analyzing commercially available spelling curricula and a research project list of more than 3000 words. These words were graded according to when teachers thought students should know particular words and when a vocabulary-learning intervention would be recommended.

Analysis and categorization of the phonetic elements through Level 3 revealed a phonological/phonemic awareness task less complex than we had thought. We divided the levels into instructional units which made sense based on many years of observing students at all levels acquire their sight-word vocabularies for spelling.

For those students, usually beyond third grade, whose spelling skill lags behind their basic word-reading skill, the MCUW 300 (phonetically-irregular or

phonetically-equivocal of the 600 Most Commonly Used Words) and Spelling Review along with knowledge and practice of the vowel system—will teach them the necessary components of applying the alphabetic principle and discovering the peculiarities of English spelling generalizations. Consequently, they will have the foundation necessary to learn to spell polysyllabic words as outlined in the program.

The Patterns of English

The principles by which English spellings may be efficiently categorized and the generalizations pertaining to endings (morphemes) are listed below. At the Primer Level, students are exposed to almost all elements they will ‘meet’, and by the end of Level 1, students have been exposed to all features. Consequently, teaching the system of inflected endings is an extension of what students already know at Level 2. At Level 3, with only two remaining sets of patterns to become skilled at, instruction and learning can be devoted to accurate spelling and vocabulary learning. The patterns are:

1. Short-vowel sounds spelled primarily by a single letter but also by the digraphs *au/aw* and *oo* as in *foot*
2. Long-vowel sounds, including vowel-consonant-*e* syllables and digraphs
3. Diphthongs
4. *R*-controlled vowels
5. Open-syllable, one-syllable words
6. One-syllable words with doubled spelling of ending sound
7. *-ng* and *-nk* words
8. Phonetically irregular words
9. Phonetically equivocal spellings
10. Compound words
11. Two-syllable words containing open and closed syllable patterns
12. Vowel-consonant-consonant-vowel patterns and doubling of consonant-sound spellings in two-syllable words
13. Behavior of inflectional morphemes (endings which change the function of a word):

- a. *-ed; -ing; --s, -es, -'s, -s', -en, -er, -est;*
 - b. doubling of final consonants after short vowels;
 - c. treatment of silent *e* before adding an ending; and
 - d. changing *y* to *i* before adding endings.
14. Behavior of derivational morphemes (endings which change the meaning of a word):
- a. consonant-*le* syllables and
 - b. *-al, ent/ant, ence/ance, etc.*

The MCUW 300

Roughly half of the spellings of the MCUW 600 are equivocal or phonetically irregular. Found to work are the following steps:

1. Explain to the student(s) that:
 - a. being able to spell the most commonly occurring words automatically rather than trying to remember the string of letters or spelling phonetically is the goal of spelling instruction; therefore, any word in the MCUW 300 whose spelling is not secure will be targeted with instruction;
 - b. learning the spelling of these words demystifies the spellings of other words with similar patterns;
 - c. although English has many phonetically-irregular and phonetically-equivocal spellings most of the phonetic elements within words are regular;
 - d. he or she will work on approximately ten words at a time; when a word is spelled correctly five times over five consecutive sessions, he or she will highlight the word on the list, signifying that it has been learned, and will also highlight the section in the Bank where the word(s) were found.
2. Have the student spell each word—section by section (bottom to top and left to right), orally or on paper; circle any words requiring instruction.

3. Write the circled, targeted words on the Mastery Spelling Sheet along with their phonetic analyses; have the student ‘touch and say each sound’ and then blend the sounds to form the target word.
4. In each subsequent lesson the word is spelled; a check or minus is placed after each word.

Specific Techniques for Timings to Build fluency

Reading & Spelling Fluency exercises are conducted on the approximately ten words in a list using the Mastery Spelling Worksheet. The student objective is to spell all words in the list correctly and efficiently. The list may be divided in half for two ‘sprint’ timings and then as a whole-list timing.

Most Detailed Approach to Fluency Training

Count the number of letters in each word and write the number—plus one for reading the word—in the Timings Column, adding the numbers of subsequent words.

Using a timer which calculates rate per minute, write the scores for each half and then for the whole list. Initially it may be necessary to aid the student with the identity of the word and the sequence of letters in some productions as he or she works toward a higher rate of accurate productions per minute;. (A Celeration chart may be used but is not essential.) Generally, when a student reaches 150+ productions per minute (all accurate), the spelling of the word will be secure.

Less Detailed, Alternative Approach

The student may complete the exercise with an adult—or a fellow student who is checking the list—so that feedback is immediate. The student records his or her **elapsed time** rather than the rate per minute.

Subsequent sessions begin with spelling each of the words, orally or in writing, with immediate feedback for correct spellings and spellings in error. Spelling is followed by timing; the student attempts to lower the elapsed time which is again recorded.

Unconventional Approach

Use this with students for whom it is too difficult to write the spellings: build fluency in the Reading/Spelling exercise, and ‘pass’ the student when he or she is

able to accurately spell the words orally in five consecutive sessions either in the rate-per-minute or elapsed time method. When the student is fluent, gradually introduce writing some of the words following spelling each word orally.

References

Ehri, Linnea C. "Learning to Read and Spell Words." *Journal of Reading Behavior* 19: 1 (1987) 5-28.

Frith, Uta, ed. *Cognitive Processes in Spelling*. 1980.

Perfetti, C. A., Laurence Rieben and Michel Fayol, eds. *Learning to Spell: Research, Theory, and Practice Across Languages*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1997.

Temple, Charles, R., et al. *The Beginnings of Writing*. Needham Heights, MA Allyn and Bacon, 1993