

# The Art and Science of Word Building

## Myths about Word Building

- \* Spelling is learning a list of words so that the order of letters can be accurately repeated.
- \* Spelling is something you're either good at or you're not.
- \* Spelling is a good thing to give the students for personal 'homework'.

## Truths about Word Building

- \* Spelling is a developmental process where we move from precommunicative scribbles to mastery.
- \* Spelling can be learnt and **MUST** be taught - unfortunately, we can't catch it by contagion.
- \* Spelling is a good thing to practise at home but too important to give the students for unsupervised work.

## What do I need to have in my classroom?

- \* A good quality general use dictionary.
- \* A range of dictionaries suited to developmental needs and for working 'up a level' with assistance and 'down a level'.
- \* At least one 'non-spellers' dictionary'.
- \* A guide to basic derivation.
- \* Atlas, map of the world or globe.
- \* Things to write on and with - **AND** purposes for writing.
- \* Lots of things to read.
- \* Rough paper.

## Learning Space Resources

- \* Provide reference lists and files of words which are easily accessible around the room.
- \* Have 'empty charts' around the room to record word families, affixes and Greek and Latin roots. The students may add words.
- \* Make charts of word families, affixes and roots with the students. Keep them up for access and reference.

## What do I need to know?

- \* Spelling is a developmental process.
- \* We don't all learn how to spell at the same time.
- \* As with all learning, students need **optimal conditions for learning**.
- \* Students pass through stages in learning how to spell.
- \* Students use approximations.
- \* English spelling is NOT based on simple sound/symbol equivalence.

## Conditions for Learning

\* **Immersion**

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**Engagement**

. feels the activity will further the purposes of their life;

\* **Demonstration** ↗

. see themselves as potential 'doers'; and  
. feel safe to 'have a go'.

↙

\* **Expectation**

↓↑

\* **Responsibility**

↓↑

\* **Use**

↓↑

\* **Approximation**

↓↑

\* **Response/Feedback**

### Precommunicative Stage

- \* The writing is the result of the child's interaction with print symbols - environmental print, symbols in their world, mirror writing.
- \* Left to right directionality may not yet be established
- \* Sound and symbol matching is rare.
- \* Alphabetic knowledge is very limited and most letters will be capitals - as reflected in the world of printed signs.

Handwritten examples of precommunicative stage writing, including mirror writing and non-directional symbols.

### Semiphonetic Stage

- \* The letters form a partial map of the heard sounds.
- \* Letters may reflect improper pronunciation patterns.
- \* There is a growing understanding of sound and symbol relationships.
- \* There is a firm demonstrated knowledge of letter formation.
- \* Nasal sounds, silent letters and unstressed vowels are frequently omitted.
- \* Letter name and letter sound are frequently confused.

Handwritten examples of semiphonetic stage writing, showing partial letter maps and letter formation.

### Phonetic Stage

- \* Total phonetic mapping takes place and all the 'heard' sounds are represented. This can result in odd attempts such as 'jrag'n' for 'dragon' where the word has been incorrectly pronounced.
- \* Students show greater understanding of information that has been explicitly taught to them - strings of letters, inflectional endings, rules and letter functions such as the "magic 'e'".

Handwritten examples of phonetic stage writing, showing total phonetic mapping and explicit teaching.

- \* Approximated spellings where the writer uses all the information known to them to attempt the spelling of a word still occur, but are more standard in nature.

## Transference Stage

- \* Writers show great application and understanding of their learnt knowledge of visual patterns, meaning bases and word families.
- \* Writers rely less on simple sound / symbol equivalence as their wider knowledge of word origins and word bases comes into play.
- \* Writers use conventions of word building explicitly and implicitly taught by their teacher/s.
- \* Approximated spellings show clear knowledge and application patterns.
- \* 'Known' words are becoming more numerous.
- \* Writers begin to develop a 'spelling conscience' and the circling of 'dodgy' words becomes more commonplace.

The Transformers  
On planet Earth transformers  
lie all around. There are lots of  
them. The evil force is  
the dicepicons, the good team is  
the ortobots. The leader of the  
good team is Octomes Prime and  
the evil leader is mecatron.

## Mastery Stage

- \* Writers have mastered the strategies that enable them to arrive at the correct / standard spelling of any word they wish to use.
- \* They will continue to use the occasional approximation but these attempts will be quite refined.
- \* They will attempt the word, decide if it looks right, consult a peer, dictionary or other resource and perhaps learn by 'Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check'.
- \* There is a clear demonstration of the understanding of the spelling conventions and word structures.
- \* Writers demonstrate an awareness of the morphemic structures of words. Occasional approximated spellings show a refinement in approach.
- \* 'Known' words - automatic words - are more numerous.
- \* A 'spelling conscience' is evident in the writer, both in regard to his/her own writing and more widely.

## Key Teaching and Learning Strategies

- \* Visual – Graphic Patterning
- \* Auditory - Phonological
- \* Morphemic - Meaning
- \* Mnemonic - Memory
- \* Kinesthetic or Haptic

## Visual / Graphic Patterning

- \* the letter shapes
- \* the appearance of words
- \* groupings of letters which represent sounds
- \* probability of letter order in common letter strings
- \* where letter clusters are likely to occur – introductory, medial, final.

## Auditory / Phonological

- \* The sounds of Standard Australian English (SAE) are called phonemes.
- \* The phonemes are represented by individual letters or letter strings called graphemes.
- \* The concepts of 'onset' and 'rime' are important - e separate sounds in a syllable or in a one-syllable word (for example, in 'cat' the onset is /c/ and the rime is /at/.
- \* Segmentation for syllabification must be guided.
- \* English is not a sound and symbol based language.

## Morphemic / Meaning

- \* Words that are related in meaning should be discussed together – muscle – muscular ... changed /c/.
- \* Meaning of compound words can be explored through discussion of smaller base words.
- \* Generalisations about can be made about adding affixes to words.
- \* Affixes, Greek and Latin roots must be examined in guided discussion using a metacognitive approach.

## Mnemonic

- \* Mnemonics are an essential tool in spelling.
- \* 'Never separate a paratrooper from his parachute.'
- \* RAVEN – Remember Affect Verb Effect Noun
- \* There's a 'lie' in 'believe'.
- \* Naughty forty doesn't want to play with 'u'.

## Kinesthetic or Haptic

- \* Many words are 'automatic' – we do not need to think about how to spell them, they simply flow from our pen because our hand knows the movement.
- \* Must write clearly, neatly and in syllables or morphemes.

## Word Building through Reading

- \* Read to and with your students regularly – keep a words and phrases book.
- \* Use a variety of resources - books, catalogues, magazines, newspapers, non-fiction materials, timetables and more – commercial and class made.
- \* Consult dictionaries and thesauri together.
- \* Look for print in the environment - find and photograph errors!
- \* Make charts together and use them together.
- \* Use written communication.

## Word Building through Writing

- \* Let them see you writing for a range of purposes.
- \* Let them write for a purpose and audience - someone who will write / email back!
- \* Encourage memos on the class notice board.
- \* Let them see you attempting an unknown word.
- \* Let them see you consulting a dictionary.
- \* Show them the 'Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check' method to learn a word.
- \* Keep personal word lists.
- \* Use approximated spellings as a point for discussing attempts and finding origins.

## Play Games!

- \* Play Spelling Games with your students.
- \* Commercial Games like Scrabble ®TM and Upwords ®TM
- \* Hangman, Word Chains, Spelling Bee and more.

## Seven Steps to Spelling Independence

- \* Read
- \* Listen
- \* Be 'word wise'
- \* Write often
- \* Self-check
- \* Learn new words
- \* Use memory triggers / mnemonics.

## Assessment

- \* Just as vocabulary building should be taught, so should it be assessed.
- \* Assessment is a tool by which both entry and exit level skills and knowledge may be determined to plan for individual and group needs.
- \* Tests for Spelling Age
- \* Error Analysis
- \* Lists
- \* Writing
- \* Dictation
- \* Maintenance and use of exemplars.

