

How can I assist my child with spelling?

Spelling Techniques:

1. Look, Analyse, Cover, Write and Say, Check

- The student looks at an enlarged correctly printed version of the word. Write this for them on the whiteboard.
- The student analyses the “tricky” parts of the word and may choose to put these in another colour or enlarge those letters in order to “help the brain remember”. (They may wish later on to develop an acronym or other mnemonic for the word.)
- The student rubs out the word.
- The student “write, rubs” i.e. they write the word, then rub it out. This is done twelve times quickly. The students say the sounds or letter names as they are written and says the whole word each time.
- All this is best done on a whiteboard or electronic smartboard. Paper just does not have the same motivational factor.

2. Visualisation

- The student imagines a whiteboard/ wall in their mind.
- The student chooses a bright colour and stirs an imaginary pot of paint/ can of spray-paint.
- The student paints the word in the air while looking up to the left. She is to “see” what she is painting on the whiteboard/wall of her mind.
- She says the letters aloud as she paints them. She states the word she is spelling.
- The student spells the word backwards i.e. reads the letters out backwards without any hesitation because she is merely reading what she can “see” in her mind. Any hesitation or attempt to work out the correct letters or their order is an indication the student does not yet have a clearly formed visualisation.
- Repeat the process.
- Some students are able to do this easily. Others need more practice.

3. Chanting

- Just as students learn the times tables by chanting, some students learn their spelling by saying the word and then the letters aloud while looking at a written image of the word and marching on the spot. Chanting the letters 20 times seems the best number for long term retention and overlearning.

The student initially uses all three of these techniques on each of the words to be learnt. This seems a slow lengthy process, but it ensures success. The student will speed up and learn more efficiently with time. Let the student choose which the order in which to use the techniques. Students seem instinctively to use their area of personal strength first. Each student is a different combination of learning styles and strengths i.e. some have stronger visual than auditory memories or stronger phonics skills, etc.

NB. A very rare few people cannot visualise at all. These students then have to write their words more often to compensate. One student had to write her spelling test with her eyes closed as looking confused her. She could spell perfectly with closed eyes; made a mess of words when her eyes were open. Remember students’ brains work differently.

4. Consolidate learning by doing word building

e.g. if the word learnt was ‘retire’, say ‘retires’, ‘retiring’, ‘retired’- the student repeats each word one at a time, writes it and reads it again.

5. DICTATION is KEY! We need students to learn to spell words in context not in isolation like shopping lists! Put the words and extensions into sentences immediately. The student must repeat the sentence, write it saying each word as it is written, then read what they have written- not what they heard: this teaches self-editing. Be strict about capital letters, punctuation etc. from the beginning.

There are many ways to assist the student with spelling when they are writing so their mental effort goes into their writing not their spelling.

For more information on how to assist children with spelling, see our book review on page 12 *Rules Rule* by Dr Lillian Fawcett

