

Help for Spelling

Have you ever spelled a word, looked at it and thought, “Hmm... that does not look right”? You have just compared what you wrote with a picture in your head. This is called visualization, a skill that must be developed to help you spell correctly. A child needs to be a very good visualizer to be a good speller. Good visualizers can see things in their head, hold them there and manipulate them. Young children need to be exposed to puzzles and building Legos, tangrams and other visual discrimination activities like putting things together and such. Playing visualization games for 10 or more minutes a day, where players develop the ability to “see” their next move, like Checkers, Chess, Pente or Four in a Row will build visualization skills and more! These skills are also necessary to get the best scores in higher level math. So work on visualization abilities if you want a good speller.

A child needs to be a good reader and to have been exposed over and over to printed words--- (frequency). This means a minimum of a junior high reading level before we care much about spelling. In our observation over the years, when reading comprehension reaches 10th grade level, spelling just “happens”; that child all of a sudden can spell. This has been such a consistent pattern that we encourage parents, if they can, wait until that happens. The same thing applies when teaching grammar.

There is also a subset of very excellent readers who have poor spelling skills. It has to do with the reading being so automated that the child does not have to look closely at the words. Also, children with poor central detail vision see the words but they do not notice the individual details of the letters. Working on central detail vision can improve spelling very quickly in a good reader.

Practicing spelling words by writing them is a common activity in schools. However, many teachers require the children to write their spelling words in cursive. No one visualizes their words in cursive; therefore it does not assist in remembering how to spell them. Rather, printing them for practice can be useful because this is the way in which they are best remembered visually.

All those 'spelling' activities in spelling books, writing them over and over, etc. are usually just busy work and don't teach spelling. How many spelling words did you learn to spell doing these activities? Probably none.

AVKO Sequential Spelling is a great tool for children to start noticing patterns in spelling words and can help jump start spelling.

Phonics programs can give you little pieces of spelling but for a child with low auditory processing, these usually just cause confusion. English is so irregular that learning all these 'rules', which the child can usually do quite well, doesn't help them spell correctly. On the other hand, getting their reading levels up, is greatly beneficial.

The main thing to remember is NOT to let them spell it wrong, if you can help it. A child will need 21 MORE correct exposures to get it right after seeing it wrong. So as usual, it's important to INPUT, INPUT, INPUT, the correct spelling of words.

ND Tip: Visual spelling with 3x5 cards. Put 10 - 20 words, one word each, on a card printed neatly with a black felt pen. The activity is this. The child holds the card, looks at it, points at it with a finger and says the word (horse). Then the child touches each letter of the word and says it, “H-O-R-S-E”. Next, say the word again (horse). Put the card down and look up into the air and visualize the word as on a blackboard and touch the letters again (in the air seeing them) and say them (H-O-R-S-E) and the word again “horse”. This helps teach visualizing while working on the spelling words needed each week. If a child is homeschooled, it is best to choose the words that are functional, meaning the ones misspelled every day in real life.

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