

FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADE SPELLING: WORD STUDY

Introduction

Research shows that children move through five predictable developmental stages of spelling though not always in a linear fashion. Here are the stages that have been identified by :

1. **Emergent:** (Ages 1-7 years old) use scribbles to random letters and numbers (invented spelling), becoming aware of phonemes and at end of stage typically can write initial and final consonants of words
2. **Letter Name:** (Ages 4-9 years, Grade 1-early 3) generally spell words with initial and final consonants and some vowels
3. **Within Word:** (Ages 7-12 years, Grade 1-mid 4) spell words with initial and final consonants and words with some blends and digraphs, use some long and short vowel patterns, complex single syllable words
4. **Syllables and Affixes:** (Ages 8-14 years, Grade 3-8) spell some words that include consonant doubling, using rules of syllabication, common affixes, verb tenses, low frequency vowel patterns
5. **Derivational Constancy:** (Ages 10+ years, Grade 5-12) make connections between meaning and spelling. Begin to learn internal morphology in bases and roots and prefixes

These stages are based on the fact that English has three levels of orthography like 3 layers of a cake, building one on top of the other. These layers make learning to spell and read English more complicated than most other languages. Here is a quick description of each layer:

1. **Alphabetic layer:** This is the first layer of English known as Old English. It came from Anglo-Saxon roots. Of the 100 most commonly used words, most can be traced to this first layer of English. Most of our regular sound-symbol correspondences come from Old English as well. Children must first examine the relationship between letters and sounds, match single letters and pairs of letters (e.g., ch) to specific sounds to spell words correctly. It's best if they learn the rules of this layer first.
2. **Pattern layer:** Then came a period during which Latin-based vocabulary was introduced, with the addition of Norman French into the English language beginning in 1066. More sound-symbol correspondences were added such as the soft c sound. Children need to learn the longer patterns from this period that guide the grouping of letters (e.g., CVCe).
3. **Meaning layer:** During the Renaissance, words from other languages were adopted into our language. This layer is best to wait on as children learn how the English spelling system can directly reflect semantic relationships across related words from

Greek, Latin, and other languages. For example, the second vowel in the word *composition* is spelled with an o because it is related to compose.

What's the best developmental approach to spelling instruction?

How can we help our students move through these layers? By guiding them to see how words work in our writing system or, in other words, by teaching them to become “**spelling detectives**” looking for and remembering the regularities, patterns, and derivations in English words. They discover how to decipher the English “code,” becoming spellers (encoders) of their mother tongue and better readers (decoders) of it at the same time!

How can our students become “spelling detectives?” We teachers need to use a *Word Study* approach! This approach has less to do with memorization and everything to do with learning the “code” of our 3-layer English “cake.” We recommend *Word Study* because it:

- Focuses on students investigating word patterns
- Stresses the comparing and contrasting of word features
- Uses a variety of hands-on activities or “word work”, to help students actively sort words and thus explore each layer of our language.

Words Their Way uses **word sorts** to teach the patterns of each developmental spelling stage. Word sorts are lists of words that fit into categories that your students actively explore and analyze. You give your students a number of activities which help them:

- Recognize the similarities and differences between and among the words
- Compare and contrast the word characteristics
- Form generalizations of the sort so that they can apply their knowledge when spelling at the developmental level they are at.

You can find the *Words Their Way*'s word sorts online at

<https://wordstudywithintheclassroom.wikispaces.com/file/view/Sample+Word+Sorts+by+Spelling+Stage.pdf>. For example, one past tense irregular verb word sort includes the words: *send-sent, lend-lent, drink-drank, kneel-knelt, deal-dealt, sweep-swept, teach-taught, bring-brought, think-thought*. You guide your students to discover the specific patterns and challenges found in this word sort. This sort shows us that we need to make sure that we understand the spelling generalizations and/or patterns in each sort before presenting them to our students.

We highly suggest that you purchase *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* (4th Edition instead of 5th) by Donald Bear, et al. which explains the Word Study approach at length. There are two other books we highly recommend: *Recipe for Reading* and *The Writing Road to Reading*. They also have excellent phonics instruction ideas and word lists.

Now let's look at how to embark on a **Waldorf Word Study** approach....

Step 1: Assess Your Students' Spelling Knowledge Using Multiple Assessment Tools

Before you can create your *Word Study* program you have to determine what your students know about the alphabetic, pattern, and meaning layers of our language. Assess your students in two ways:

- **Study your students' independent writing**

Your students' invented spellings show you what they know about English orthography and their sight word memorization. Each week review the students' correct and incorrect spellings in their main lesson independent writing passages or dictations. Write them down as you are looking at each student's work and assess which students could be grouped together at the same stage. Bear et al. (2008) suggest that the words students "use but confuse" in their writing should be the target of their word study.

- **Assess each student**

Use either the *Primary Spelling Inventory* or the *Elementary Spelling Inventory*, created by Donald Bear, et al. (free pdfs found on the internet), depending on your students' spelling abilities. Give the appropriate inventory to assess students' word knowledge. This helps you know how to group (and re-group) children homogeneously for small-group instruction.

Step 2: Add Sight Word Study to Your Spelling Program

As mentioned above your instruction focuses the students' attention on finding the consistencies (or patterns) within our spelling system so that they can apply it generally to all their reading and writing. **But** you also must teach your students how to identify and spell the words that are most highly useful – *sight words*! (See Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, for why.)

We call sight words “friendly” words. They show up so frequently in their reading as well as in their own writing (e.g., *because, are, again, said, friend, were*). Because many sight words don't follow the spelling patterns and generalizations that your students will be exploring in their weekly word sort, help them learn these words by focusing on how each word looks and how it sounds.

Display “friendly” words on a “word wall” or on a special section of the chalkboard. Play lots of games with them to help the children learn how to spell and read them. Simple memorization isn't enough (Clay, 2001).

Decide on how many sight words you will have on your weekly word lists depending on how many sight words they already spell correctly.

Step 3: Organize Your Groups

Some students have figured out the basics of our “code” by 4th or 5th grade and others need more time. Why does this happen?

- Students move through the spelling stages at their own pace, not in a linear fashion.
- Some students have reading and spelling levels that not closely linked.
- Spelling achievement can sometimes lag behind reading achievement.

That's why we suggest that you create at least two word study groups to meet the students' different developmental spelling levels at this point.

It's essential to think through the activities/games you will share with the children, preparing all the materials you will need, especially the word lists. And most importantly, plan on how to make the lesson an interesting "spelling detective" experience! Before we share ideas about planning, we need to share one more crucial aspect of your Word Study.

Step 4: Create a Weekly Rhythm

Following a set but enlivening practice pattern for school and home helps students create a habit of getting enough practice to properly internalize the patterns and generalizations.

You will have two rhythms depending on which main lesson block you are in. Engage in your word study (spelling) work either during the practice time of your **Language Arts, Geography, History or Science Main Lesson Blocks**. Here is a possible schedule for the practice time during the main lesson:

| RHYTHM DURING LANGUAGE ARTS, GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, SCIENCE MAIN LESSON BLOCKS | | |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| DAY | MAIN LESSON PRACTICE TIME (10-15 min) | HOMEWORK (5-10 min.) |
| 1 | Teacher introduces word study sort on BB. Students read, discuss what spelling patterns may be, teacher points out strategies, syllabicate words together | Do a sort that teacher chooses |
| 2 | Teacher shares spelling strategies and/or activities | Have parent dictate words to check |
| 3 | Teacher shares spelling strategies and/or activities | |
| 4 | Teacher shares spelling strategies and/or activities | Have parent dictate words to check |
| 5 | Teacher dictates word sort, all students spell. Students correct each other's work. This takes 15-20 min. | |

During your **Math main lesson blocks** your word study and grammar, vocabulary and dictionary skills practice will be in your Language Skills practice periods. Here is a possible schedule for your practice periods during a Math main lesson block:

| RHYTHM DURING MATH MAIN LESSON BLOCKS | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| DAY | LANGUAGE ARTS PRACTICE PERIOD (40-50 min) | HOMEWORK (5-10 min.) |
| 1 | Teacher introduces word study sort on BB. Students read, discuss what spelling patterns may be, and syllabicate together | Do a sort that teacher chooses |
| 2 | Teacher shares spelling strategies and/or activities (10-15 min.) Reading comprehension (35-40 min.) | Have parent dictate words to check |
| 3 | Teacher shares spelling strategies and/or activities (10-15 min.) Grammar, dictionary and vocab practice (35-40 min.) | |
| 4 | Teacher shares spelling strategies and/or activities (10-15 min.) Grammar, dictionary and vocab practice (35-40 min.) | Have parent dictate words to check |
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| | Reading (20-35 min.) | |
|--|----------------------|--|

Teach Spelling Strategies

Research shows that explicitly teaching specific spelling strategies helps struggling students more than anything else you do as part of this developmental spelling approach! Target these specific strategies to each of your student's zone of proximal development and you will help her to find ways to learn on her own and feel success which then motivates her to learn more (Vygotsky, 1978).

Here are some examples of excellent strategies to teach all your students:

1. Use this 3-step process:
 - a. Say the word slowly and listen for the sounds you hear (initial sound, middle sound, final sound)
 - b. Say the word slowly and listen for any parts you know (*br* in *bring*)
 - c. Clap the syllables and write letters for each part your hear
2. Think of a word that rhymes with the word you're trying to spell (*rain* to *train*)
3. Use words you know to spell one you don't know (*fun* and *silly* to *funny*)
4. Use names you know to spell one you don't know (*William* to *will*)
5. Use word families to spell related words
6. Think about different spelling patterns that can spell the sound you hear (*out* vs. *down*)
7. Try it on a practice page and see if it looks right
8. Look at the word wall to get help or look up the word in a dictionary

And remember – model and continually prompt the use of these strategies during writing activities. For example, if a child is trying to write the word *nothing* in a story the class is composing, prompt him to say the word slowly and listen for the sounds he hears. Guide him through to success. Later the same child may be trying to write *street*. You observe him saying the word slowly, demonstrating that he is now using this important strategy on his own. Then he writes *stret* in story. Acknowledge his use of the spelling strategy you taught him, and then prompt, "The /e/ in *street* is spelled like *see*. How do you spell *see*?" You are encouraging him to use strategies but still supporting him!

Share Spelling Detective Activities

Once you've introduced a specific spelling pattern or principle and pointed out any strategy give your students lots of opportunities to explore it through word sorts and activities.

Each small group needs Monday-Thursday activities so they can move new spelling patterns to long-term memory. Have fun! Be curious, love words!

Word Study Sorts

Here are some *word sorts* from *Words Their Way*:

Regular Sort

Students explore and categorize words in their sort by creating columns or groups of words. When students receive new words, begin with this sort.

As the week progresses, assign different kinds of sorts to make the work engaging:

Blind Sort

Students work with a partner or two who have the same words. Partner(s) take turns being the *Caller* and the *Writer*. *Caller* says each word aloud without letting the other person see the word. *Writer* writes the word on her slate or on a piece of paper. *Writer* keeps the card of any word she spells correctly. If the spelling is not correct *Caller* keeps the card. Goal is to get the most cards. If 3 people are playing there are two *Writers* and one *Caller* for each round. *Writer* who is first to correctly write the word neatly gets the card. Students take turns reading words to another student who then tries to write and categorize the words.

Open Sort

Students find ways to sort words differently. They write down the new headings and sorts.

Example:

First sort (alphabetical)

cab
cabinet
catch
comics
cup

Second sort (number of syllables)

cab comics cabinet
catch
cup

Concept Sorts

Sort words by meaning or concept. For example students can choose to create a sort by looking at nouns vs. verbs.

Speed Sort

Using a stopwatch, students see how fast they can correctly sort their words.

Word Study Activities

Word Scramble or Misspell: Teacher (or volunteer student) scrambles or misspells some of the words on the BB before ML. Students correct on slates or in books, volunteer comes to BB to correct with others' help.

Oops: Teacher (or student) erases some letters of some of the words before ML. Students write correct words on slates, volunteer comes to BB to add the letters with others' help.

Team race: Create two or more teams and have them stand in lines at the back of the room. Clear the desks that may be in the way to the BB. Teacher says one of the spelling words, one player from each team runs to spell the word on BB correctly.

Hangman: Teacher covers list and chooses a spelling word for the game. I don't hang a man (too gruesome for me). I choose a seasonal theme (grow a flower, create a jack o'lantern, etc.)

Team Spelling: Create a few teams. Give one team a spelling word. Each team member gives 1 letter of the word. If correct, they receive a point. If incorrect, the next team gets a try. Great game to help them learn to be cooperative and supportive.

Partner Work: Partners test each other. They could use slates or sidewalk or sand to spell.

Recess/Home Ticket: When dismissing for recess or going home, each student has to spell one of the words to be dismissed.

Transition Minute: Spell words as a group. Whisper, shout, clap and spell, write in the air or on partner's back, etc.

Don't Forget Dictation

Schedule spelling dictation once every 4-6 weeks to see how well the students have internalized the patterns of the word sorts. For Dictation Week, review all the word sorts of the last 4-6 weeks in your spelling practice time. Write sentences which have words which represent the word sorts introduced in those 4-6 weeks to dictate to the students on Friday. See our *How to Lead Spelling Dictation* for specific instructions about how to make this activity developmentally appropriate for each grade.

Resource Books

Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction (4th Edition is recommended) by Donald Bear

Recipe for Reading: New Century Edition (2000) by Nina Traub and Frances Traub (uses Orton Gillingham methodology)

Writing Road to Reading 6th Rev. Ed.: The Spalding Method for Teaching Speech, Spelling, Writing and Reading by Romalda Spalding

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