



## Learning to Spell

### Stages of Spelling

Children often go through stages as they learn to spell:

1. They use alphabet symbols, but have no knowledge of their sounds or how they go together.
2. They recognize that sounds are made by letters.
3. They may use a letter to represent words, sounds or syllables (*U* for *you*).
4. They use a letter or group of letters to represent every speech sound they hear in a word. This is systematic, but may not conform to conventional spelling (e.g., *kom* for *come*).
5. They move from depending on phonics to relying more on visual memory and knowledge of word structure.
6. They know the rules of spelling and can deal with prefixes, suffixes, silent consonants, alternative spellings and irregular spellings.

The learning of spelling is gradual, and you may see examples of more than one stage in a child's writing at any given time. **Invented** spelling changes as formal spelling instruction happens, but you may see aspects of it for many years as your child learns to use their best judgment.

**“Only a generation of readers  
will spawn a generation of  
writers.”**

**– Steven Spielberg**

### What kinds of spelling words should your child learn?

#### YOUNGER CHILDREN:

- Common sight words, such as *was*, *and*, *here*, *come*, *said*, *jump*, *play* and *is*.
- Rhyming patterns (word families), like *fish*, *dish* and *wish*.
- Spelling words sent home from school, like words taken from science, math, etc.
- Expansions of words learned—for example, *fishing* and *fished*, if your child knows *fish*.
- Words of interest to the child.
- Environmental words, like *stop* and *street*.

#### Practice with these strategies and activities:

- Read and reread favourite nursery rhymes to learn language patterns.
- Read poems and songs and discuss rhyme and alliteration in them.
- Make letters with clay or playdough.
- Build words using magnetic letters on a cookie sheet.
- Trace letters and words in a salt or sand tray.
- Stamp out letters and words in the fresh snow.
- Write letters and words on your sidewalk using sidewalk chalk.
- Practice spelling words by using the **cloze** method. Write out words and messages leaving out letters in some of the words, and have your child try to discover what the missing letters are.
- Learn word families, also called rhyming words. If the child can spell *cat*, then learn *hat*, *bat*, *rat*, *mat*, etc.
- Label items in your home with their names, so your child sees the words on a daily basis. This develops **word recognition**.

- Supply your child with a personal spelling dictionary. Try creating a small scribbler with a different letter of the alphabet at the top of every second page. When your child asks how to spell a word, they can write the word in this dictionary for future use. Encourage your child to write notes to practice with these words.

## OLDER CHILDREN

Reading is one of the best ways to develop spelling skills. The more children are exposed to the written word and are using it, as in reading, the more this skill will grow.

- Spelling lists from school (these should include words taken from science, math, etc.)
- Common misspellings from their own writing
- Words of interest to them
- Basic words with prefixes or suffixes added
- Words from books that they are reading
- Words with irregular spellings
- Words with many syllables

### Practice with these strategies and activities:

- Play word-building games
- Using letter tiles, have your child make a word, mix up the tiles and reconstruct the word.
- Make words with stamp pad letters. Your children can stamp out their spelling words.
- Provide word searches or crossword puzzles for children.
- Have your child use a personal spelling dictionary.
- Practice the **have a go strategy** with your child. Ask the child to try the word first, then provide the word and compare the spellings. Talk about differences in the spelling.
- Practice spelling by **chunking** (using syllables).
- Read! Read! Read!

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