

# The Science of Spelling

The Explicit Specifics That Make  
Great Readers and Writers  
(and Spellers!)

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Figure 5-6: Adapted from "Spelling Strategies" by J. Richard Gentry. First published in *Instructor* (p. 77), September 1997. New York: Scholastic.

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For Bill,

And for Bonnie and Miriam

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*Can you combine the use of word lists, word sorting, and teaching spelling in writing to help each child learn to spell correctly and automatically?*

# 5

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## **Discovery #5: There Is One Best Way to Teach Spelling—Assess and Teach Each Individual—Hooray for Spelling Books!**

What if Picasso had only stirred the paint? You can stir up a little spelling instruction here and there, but the true value of spelling assessment and instruction is the picture it paints of each child's word-specific knowledge and the opportunity it provides to increase word-specific knowledge that enhances writing fluency, reading fluency, and speaking ability. This chapter provides research-based techniques into which, like buckets of paint, you can dip your spelling-instruction paintbrush. But if you only do the technique—stir the paint, so to speak—you will not end up with a masterpiece of each child's word knowledge and literacy. You have to apply the technique appropriately to each child just as the artist applies the paint from the pallet to the canvas. Each of the research-based techniques described in this chapter, like buckets of paint, gives you options for achieving your goal. In spelling, the goal is assessing the child's knowledge and habits as a speller, increasing the knowledge and nurturing better spelling habits. The techniques will help you reach the goal of knowing each child as a speller—instructional level, ease of spelling acquisition, spelling habits in writing—and moving the child to a higher level. But you will not be successful if you only stir the paint and fail to make the application relevant to each child that you teach.

The first section of this chapter provides the paint—research-based techniques that good spelling teachers use to do their work. The second section shows you an instructional framework to help you apply the successful teaching of spelling in your classroom.

A lot of research has been conducted on the art of teaching spelling. Many of the techniques listed below relate to the teaching of spelling anchored in word lists. Others are techniques that grew out of developmental spelling theory and out of teaching spelling in the context of writing. The techniques I highlight are a combination of these very important areas of spelling inquiry. Although some consider them theoretically incompatible, I will demonstrate how techniques for explicit teaching of spelling words, word sorting, and techniques focusing on spelling in writing may be used in concert to strengthen any spelling instructional program.

## **Six Research-Based Techniques to Use with Weekly Word Lists**

Six of the research-based techniques that I find most helpful for teaching spelling in the classroom are related to teaching spelling anchored in a word list:

1. Careful word selection
2. Using a pretest–study–posttest format
3. Using a self-correction technique
4. Teaching children how to study unknown words
5. Spelling games and board games
6. Word sorting

### **Select the Right Words**

You can't paint a picture without the paint, and you can't teach spelling without words. English has more words than any other language. How do you decide which ones to teach at your grade level? This is perhaps one of the most important considerations for successfully teaching spelling. Some language arts experts have suggested that it is as easy as leaving it up to the teacher to choose the words and plan a weekly class lesson based on a useful strategy, principle, or pattern. I disagree with this recommendation. What teacher has time to go through the complex process of observing the class in reading and writing, consulting lists of grade-level benchmarks, and then looking through stacks of frequency lists, pattern lists, family clusters lists, double consonants lists, vowel lists, phonogram lists, silent letter lists, contractions lists, compound words lists, suffixes lists, prefixes lists, synonyms lists, antonyms lists, homographs lists, homophones lists, plurals lists, spelling demons lists, clipped words lists, Latin roots lists, Greek roots lists, roots from other languages lists, and lists of portmanteau words and, finally, compile the weekly lesson based on a spelling principle? I find this recommendation entirely uncongenial to teachers!



The selecting process for teaching the right words is entirely too complex and too time consuming to have teachers choose words and implement a weekly spelling unit without the resources typically found in a good spelling book. Of course, teachers should use observation, the student as informant, and reflective decision making to fine-tune the spelling program by differentiating a weekly word list to fit individual and group needs, but selecting all the words and spelling patterns to be studied by twenty-five students for an entire year of their educational career, based on observation with minimal resources, is entirely overwhelming. While teacher-chosen core words might work in some first and beginning second grade classrooms, in which the number of words children are expected to know as readers and writers is relatively small, those who support the well-intended "let the teacher choose the words" option fail to recognize that by the end of second grade, children are expected to read and write *hundreds* of words correctly (Pinnell and Fountas 1998, 266), and word-specific knowledge gets much more specialized. Teachers need resources that help them select the right words and patterns, and that help match each child with words that best suit him or her. They need help determining which words and patterns are most important for a particular grade level. Arbitrary word lists with no coordination of the curriculum between grade levels do not work.

The lists should reflect words and patterns likely to be used by writers at developmentally appropriate grade levels. In a fourth grade lesson on the vowel sounds /ôr/ and /ô/, for example, a good resource might provide a fourth grade core list such as *forgot, bought, nor, haul, ought, forest, sport, thought, daughter, port, sort, record, taught, brought, forth, because, fought, report, forty, and caught*. In the same weekly unit, lower level spellers might concentrate on an alternate list of fewer of the easier words listed above, or a lower level list might be provided that contains words such as *form, before, morning, north, and story*. Higher performing students might be challenged with *audio, naughty, oriole, toward, dinosaur, audience, author, enormous, important, and launch*. All of these words would be provided for the teacher the week fourth grade students studied spelling the vowel sounds heard in *sport* (/ôr /), spelled *or*; and heard in *haul* (/ô/), spelled in different ways: *au* in *haul*, *aught* in *caught*, and in *ough* in *ought*. Fourth grade writers would be tested to see if they already know these patterns, and, if not, they would be taught (Gentry 2004). This practice connects to writing because all writers, especially fourth graders, use these patterns when they write. It is important that the teacher monitor the students' writing to make sure these decontextualized spelling patterns that are taught are transferring. For example, proofreading activity in Writing Workshop might include a word hunt to see how many words can be found to fit the targeted pattern of the week.

Because research shows that many fifth grade writers confuse *ei* and *ie*, spelling study one week in fifth grade might focus on the spelling rule, "Write *i* before *e* except after *c* or when sounded like *a* as in neighbor and weigh. Weird, their, and neither aren't the same either." Good resources might give teachers words such as *receive*, *pierce*, *cashier*, *neighbor*, *believe*, *patient*, *weight*, *piece*, *eighty*, and *frontier* for the grade level speller. Lower level spellers might work with *brief*, *chief*, *eighth*, *field*, *friend*, *quiet*, *reindeer*, *tried*, *view*, and *weigh*. Superior spellers might be challenged with *achieve*, *ceiling*, *conceit*, *fierce*, *mischief*, *niece*, *reign*, *relief*, *shield*, and *yield* (Gentry, Harris, Graham, and Zutell 1998). Most teachers wouldn't have time to search for these words and group them on their own.

A few Method 5 advocates who are against spelling books have criticized the idea of having the teacher "abdicate her professional judgment to the distant authors of some spelling textbook" (Laminack and Wood 1996, 29). Instead, they advocate shifting the emphasis from words to writing: "Children identify words from their own writing to address in their spelling study; lists are now made with a purpose of discussion and further study rather than for testing. There is an emphasis on teaching and learning strategies for spelling; children are correcting words in their writing by using sources in the room" (37). The "strategies" Laminack and Wood recommend for generating spelling include the following: "First, think about how a word looks. . . . Think about whether the word is a long word or a short word. . . . Is the word like any other words you know? . . . Is the word written nearby? . . . Think about what sound you hear in the word" (65–66). A major teaching technique employed by "wise teachers," according to this Method 5 philosophy (see Figure 4–1), is to "embed talk about spellings as words are used throughout the day in meaningful contexts" (64). These resources go on to say, "Bill, a fifth-grade teacher, shares his own spelling strategies (such as *i* before *e*) by demonstrating his thinking when he writes on the board in front of his students" (65). As pointed out in Chapter 4, techniques such as these are not supported by research (Allal 1997). I don't know about you, but if I were Bill, I would welcome a resource to give me *ie* and *ei* words for working with my fifth grade students, and I would not feel validated as a teacher if I were to be expected to teach spelling to fifth graders off the top of my head!

A great deal of research and many considerations go into the selection of words for good spelling resources. Studies of thousands of samples of children's writing are consulted that show what words and patterns children use in their own writing at each grade level (Rinsland 1945; Smith and Ingersoll 1984). Modern lists are compared with classic lists to determine the enduring importance, permanency, and frequency of the words being chosen. Studies are consulted to consider how often particular words appear in print (Carroll, Davies, and Richman 1971;

Kucera and Francis 1967; Thorndike and Lorge 1944). Other studies consider a word's degree of difficulty, universality, permanence, and application to other areas of the curriculum. Studies such as Gates' "A List of Spelling Difficulties in 3,876 Words" help identify common misspellings at particular grade levels, and studies are used to identify "spelling demons" (Gates 1937). As a spelling author of a commercial program, I consulted twenty-two published word lists to help in the selection of words for the series. Selection of the best words is not an easy task.

Just as a teacher matches "just right books" with children for independent reading, he or she must match the right spelling words with each child. Given resources with choices of words from which to choose, the teacher is like a skillful piano tuner tuning a grand piano, making sure the tone is just right. The teacher also acts as the conductor, motivating, increasing the bravado, bringing out nuances, and selecting heavy or lighter works as needed to enhance the program. The teacher/tuner/conductor is very important in the final orchestration, but no music is made without the right notes, and spelling competency doesn't happen without teaching the right words.

### **Use a Pretest–Study–Posttest Format**

In a comprehensive review of spelling research, Graham (1983) validated the use of the "test–study–test" cycle (Fitzgerald 1953; Yee 1969), anchoring the spelling program in word lists (Graham 1983). In my view, administering a pretest is an efficient way to individualize spelling. In the pretest, each writer in the classroom quickly and easily demonstrates whether or not he or she knows the words or patterns in the week's unit of study. If the core words are known, other words are studied. Because spelling is for writing, it sounds appealing to keep spelling in its context. But as it turns out, that's not very efficient. Think of any roomful of 100 people—they could be second graders, fifth graders, eighth graders, or adults. If it were important to quickly and efficiently assess the spelling of each individual in the group, it would be much better to use a word list and a test than to assess spelling in samples of writing. Word lists and test–study–test should be used simply because they are efficient and leave more time for other parts of the literacy curriculum, such as reading and writing.

### **Use a Self-Correction Technique**

Graham's comprehensive review of spelling research validated the practice of having students correct their own spelling tests. Particularly on the pretest and trial tests, more learning occurs when the student corrects as opposed to having buddies check or the teacher make the corrections. Figure 5–1 presents a self-correction technique that many teachers like.

First follow these steps to take a test.

1. Find a partner and take the test (or the teacher may administer the test).
2. Trade spelling lists. Ask your partner to read your list and tell you if there are any words he doesn't know how to say. Say those words for your partner.
3. Ask your partner to read the first word on your list. Write the word on a piece of paper.
4. When you have completed your list, switch roles.

Now you are ready for Circle Dot.

1. Ask your partner to spell your first word out loud—one letter at a time.
2. As your partner says each letter, draw a dot under every correct letter. If you wrote a letter that is not correct, or if you left out a letter, draw a little circle.
3. Use the circles to see the parts of the word that gave you trouble.
4. Write the word again. Check your spelling with your partner.
5. Keep going until you and your partner have tried every word on your lists.

FIGURE 5-1 Circle Dot

### **Teach Children How to Study Unknown Words**

A systematic technique for learning the correct spelling of words by using a combination of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile procedures was validated by research by Horn (1954) and reported in Allal (1997).

1. Pronounce each word carefully.
2. Look carefully at each part of the word as you pronounce it.
3. Say the letters in sequence.
4. Attempt to recall how the word looks, then spell the word.
5. Check this attempt to recall.
6. Write the word.
7. Check this spelling attempt.
8. Repeat the above steps if necessary.

A variation of this method that many teachers like, called the Flip Folder, is demonstrated in Figure 5-2.

### **Use Spelling Games**

Using spelling games to supplement but not supplant explicit instruction is compatible with cooperative learning theory and is one of the techniques recommended by Graham (1983), though he does not provide empirical research to validate the use of spelling games. Spelling games

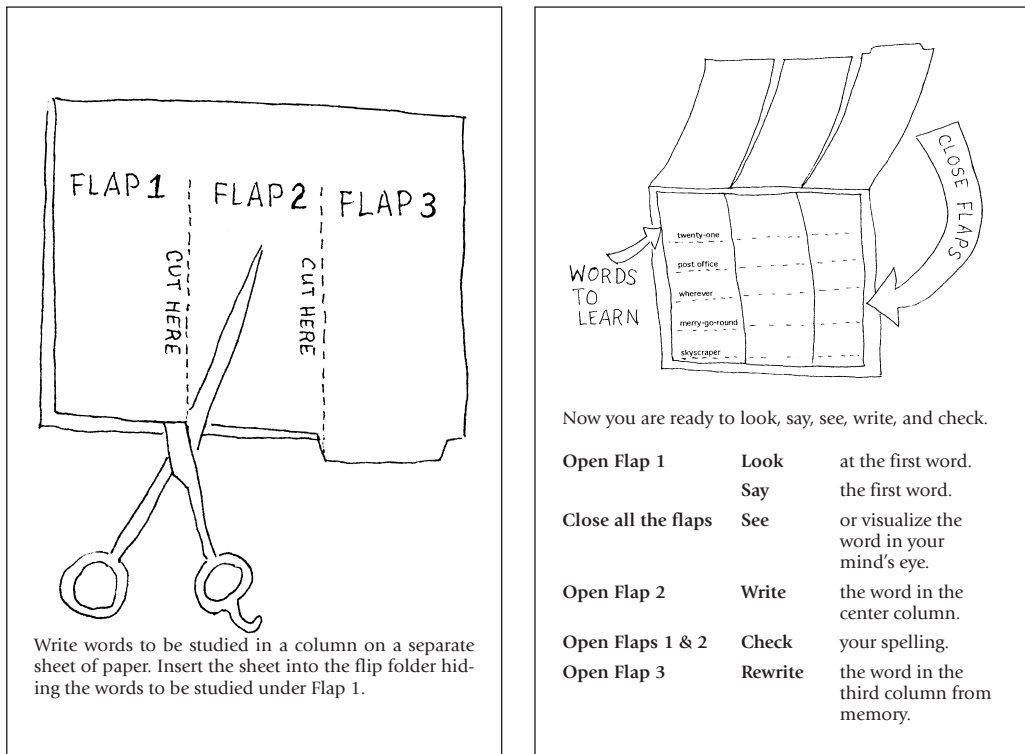


FIGURE 5-2 Flip Folder

such as hangman, Scrabble®, and spelling tic-tac-toe are popular with children and teachers and, in my view, should play a role in the elementary spelling program. Children might have the option of using spelling games, working with spelling buddies, to master the words on their individual spelling lists, or to practice word sort patterns. From my experience, I would recommend spelling games as one option for children for studying their words in a period restricted to about fifteen minutes one or two days per week. A particularly popular implementation of spelling games is the use of board games for activities such as Spelling Baseball and Spelling Tic-Tac-Toe. Figure 5-3 presents some popular board game activities.

### Word Sorting

Word sorting is an instructional technique based on the systematic study of spelling patterns that grew out of developmental spelling research led by Ed Henderson and his colleagues and students at the University of Virginia (Bear et al. 2000; Henderson 1990; Templeton 1991; Zutell 1992b). Recently, some empirical research has been added to the research base. It focuses on the use of particular word sorts with struggling spellers in



FIGURE 5-3 Examples of Board Games

second grade (Brown and Morris, in press). I believe word sorting is compatible with the brain research implications reported in Chapters 1 and 2 as a way of practicing words and word patterns so that they may be automatically retrieved from memory. In the following activities, speed sorting and writing each column word sort in an individual's word study notebook add to the effectiveness of the activity. A more thorough discussion of word sorting along with "super sorts" for particular grade levels appears in Chapter 7. Figure 5-4 presents three of my favorite word sort activities.

**Activity I: Teacher-Led Sort**

1. Demonstrate column word sorts to show patterns.
2. Use pocket chart and enlarged word cards or overhead.
3. Teacher and students sort words into patterns.

<b>bush</b>	<b>wood</b>	<b>could</b>	<b>?</b>
bull	crooked	couldn't	sure
helpful	good-bye	shouldn't	
sugar	poor	wouldn't	
put	wooden	should	
	woodpecker	would	
	cookies		
	wool		
	stood		
	hook		
	cook		
	good		
	look		
	took		
	foot		

**Activity II: 1-2-3/Make-Sort-Write**

1. Make individual word cards.
  - Use 8 × 10 paper with grid space for 10 to 16 words.
  - Print a word in each space.
  - Check the correctness of student copying.
  - Cut the words apart.
2. Sort by pattern.
  - Child reads down column while teacher or partner checks pattern.
3. Write the spelling words in a word study notebook in columns.

**Activity III: Speed Sorts (Shuffle-Sort-Read)**

- Use a stopwatch or second hand.
- Player times partner.
- Switch roles.
- Second speed sort/Child tries to beat first time.

**Activity IV: Practice Spell Check-Column Formation**

- Student calls the words.
- Partner writes the word in the correct column.
- Spellings are checked before partners switch roles.

FIGURE 5-4 Word Sort Activities

## Techniques to Connect Spelling to Writing

### Personal Spelling Journal

One purpose of the Personal Spelling Journal is to collect spelling words for study from the errors children make in their own writing. Words misspelled on unit tests are also added to the Personal Spelling Journal to be mastered on future weekly word lists. Children are given guidelines to help them self-assess and guide their word choices. They are invited to self-select some of their own spelling words each week as Personal Words to be added to their Core Word list, giving them a sense of ownership and control over their own learning. By paying attention to how they spell words in their writing, they begin to develop better spelling habits in writing.

To set up a Personal Spelling Journal, follow this procedure: Provide or have each student purchase a small spiral notebook specifically for the word journal. Divide the first section of the Spelling Journal alphabetically, allowing two pages for each letter, A through Z. The page may be divided into two columns to accommodate many words per page. This is where students record words they have misspelled in their writing or on a unit spelling test. Additionally, students may also be invited to record new words they want to learn to spell in their Personal Spelling Journal. Following the A through Z section, the remaining pages of the Personal Spelling Journal are where students write the column word sorts they have studied in columns.

The Personal Spelling Journal is the “holding vessel” for words that will eventually be studied in weekly spelling lists. This journal is used every Day 2 when the child constructs his or her list for the week. The child may choose any Personal Words from the Personal Spelling Journal to add to the Core Words misspelled on the Day 1 pretest. These words do not have to fit a particular pattern that is being studied in the weekly unit. A student’s weekly list of ten words will generally include about five Core Words and about five Personal Words taken from the Personal Spelling Journal.

When students add a word to their weekly spelling list, they draw a circle around it on the page in the Personal Spelling Journal. Once they learn the word and spell it correctly on the Friday final test, they cross it out. If they misspell the word on the Friday test they do not cross it out but recycle it by adding it to a future weekly list. Figure 5–5 shows this function in a child’s Personal Spelling Journal.

Two procedures may be used to find the words a child needs to know how to spell and get them entered into the Personal Spelling Journal. “Green-penning” is a technique the teacher uses to find words, and Student-Found Spelling Words is a technique used by the student. The techniques, as reported in *The Literacy Map* (Gentry 2002), are shown in Figure 5–6.



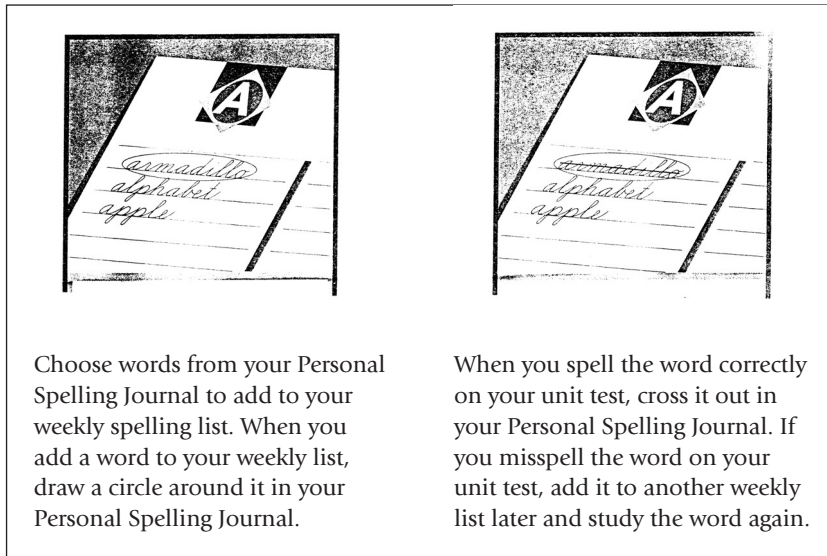


FIGURE 5-5 Personal Spelling Journal

## An Instructional Framework for Teaching Spelling

Good teaching of spelling may be coordinated in a teaching framework for teaching words, teaching spelling patterns, teaching strategies, and teaching important spelling principles or rules. Automatic and correct mastery of appropriate words at each grade level aids spellers in developing knowledge and predictability of spelling patterns as well as in developing knowledge of the strategies they need to spell even those words that are not studied formally. In this section, I present a comprehensive framework appropriate for instruction during Phase II, when children are adding new entries to the dictionary in their brains and learning new patterns and strategies that can be generalized, adding new vocabulary words that fit known spelling patterns, and increasing the number of words their brains recognize and retrieve automatically and correctly. The framework includes explicit study of words presented in word list form, explicit study of regular patterns that can be generalized, focus on effective strategies, the teaching of a few good rules, and the connection of spelling with other content areas, with an emphasis on connecting spelling to writing. It includes whole group, small group, and individualized instruction. The framework is *writing based* and includes the study of misspelled words gleaned from children's independent writing. The framework is *individualized*, as it results in each child developing an individual list of unknown spelling words on a weekly basis that he or she learns and adds to the repertoire of automatic and correct spellings in his or her brain. Each week the list to be studied is composed of words a

### Green-Penning Words

Help children find words they misspell in their writing by green-penning words. Here's how it works. Keep a green ink pen with you at all times. If you spot a developmentally appropriate, high-frequency word misspelled in a student's writing, circle the word, and write it correctly in green at the bottom of the page. Look for these words in anything the child writes. When the child sees a word you have written in green, it means "put this word in your spelling word journal." Green-pen two pages of each child's writing at least once every three weeks. Green penning is for spelling only. Editing is a separate process.

### Student-Found Spelling Words

Students should also be responsible for finding misspelled words in their writing for their spelling journals. Once a week, have them follow these student-directed steps:

1. Circle three words on your draft that may be misspelled.
2. "Have a go" at spelling the words again. Try one of these:
  - Visualize the word.
  - Spell it like it sounds.
  - Spell it by analogy to a spelling you know.
3. Find the correct spelling by asking someone, looking it up, or using a computer spell-checker.
4. Add the correctly spelled words to your list of "Words I Need to Know How to Spell."

FIGURE 5-6 Teaching Activity

particular child has misspelled—either on the pretest or in writing. So the procedure has explicit content relevance. The framework also includes the best features of spelling study anchored in developmentally appropriate word lists. The structured routines are easy to implement, largely managed by the students, inclusive of cooperative learning, and multi-leveled for the range of spellers in any classroom. The framework has five basic steps:

1. *Assessment.* Teachers or partners administer a pretest based on a weekly unit of Core Words and patterns in a specified, grade-level curriculum. The weekly classroom lesson objective is presented and students are assessed to determine whether they already know the words, patterns, spelling principles, or strategies.
2. *Ownership/Responsibility.* Students build an individual word list of Core Words and Personal Words, using a routine they are taught at the beginning of the year. It consists of a split list format, including both

Core Words from the curriculum (misspelled on the pretest) and Personal Words collected in their Personal Spelling Journals. Each week the child's list contains words misspelled on the pretest and words they should know (i.e., words that are easier than their instructional level) but have misspelled in their writing.

3. *Relevance*. Personal Spelling Journals become vehicles for making the spelling–writing connection. Misspelled words are gleaned from writing or recycled through the Spelling Journal. Not only is the Spelling Journal an excellent record-keeping device, responsibility for adding words to the journal constantly keeps writers in the habit of checking their writing for misspelled words and collecting them. Correcting spelling in writing naturally becomes a good habit.
4. *Teaching*. Spelling is taught explicitly, and new words and patterns are learned each week.
5. *Competency/Accountability/Accomplishment/Contextual Authenticity*. Students are expected to learn new words each week and are held accountable for this expectation. Words spelled correctly on the final spelling test are recycled through the Personal Spelling Journal. During the writing block, decontextualized spelling is integrated back into authentic writing as student writers edit and are guided to focus intently on the words and patterns they have studied in spelling over the past several weeks. For example, a writing checklist for editing used by third graders in Writing Workshop connects directly to decontextualized word study in Spelling Workshop and might look like Figure 5–7, reflecting four weeks of spelling study. Notice that the student had completed units in spelling over the previous four weeks on double consonants + *y*, adding *-ing* to words ending in *e*, adding *-ing* and doubling the consonant, and contractions.

Thus Whole–Part–Whole instruction not only comes full circle, but continues to revolve. Connecting spelling to writing maximizes a natural transfer from words learned in spelling lessons to correct spelling in writing. Teachers should not assume that the transfer will occur without efforts to make the connection.

In summary, anchor the program in a classroom lesson objective for each week, systematize spelling instruction, differentiate three levels for teaching/learning the concept (high, grade-level, low), individualize student word lists, and include individual need-to-know words that the student has misspelled in writing.

### **Getting Ready to Implement Your Spelling Program**

Begin the year with one spelling group. Allow several weeks to (1) enable students to learn the routines of the spelling block and to (2) complete

<b>Editing Checklist</b>	
Author's Name	_____
Writing Work in Progress	_____
<b>Make your corrections in red.</b>	
<b>Capital Letters</b>	
_____	Important words in the title
_____	Names (proper nouns)
_____	Beginning of all sentences
<b>Punctuation</b>	
_____	End marks (. ? !)
_____	Other marks (, " ")
<b>Sentences</b>	
_____	Each sentence is complete (subject and predicate).
_____	I have only one <i>and</i> in a sentence.
<b>Spelling</b>	
_____	Words that I am unsure of are circled.
_____	I checked for double consonants + <i>y</i> .
_____	I checked adding <i>-ing</i> to words ending in <i>e</i> .
_____	I checked doubling VC endings + <i>ed</i> (e.g., <i>-VCCed</i> in <i>hop</i> , <i>hopped</i> ).
_____	I checked for contractions.
_____	I used my dictionary and my partner to check.
_____	I added circled words to my Personal Spelling Journal.

FIGURE 5-7 Editing Checklist

assessment activities so that you may divide the class into three flexible instructional-level groups:

- Above grade-level spellers
- At grade-level spellers
- Below grade-level spellers

Teachers should not underestimate the importance of teaching students to work independently. Many teachers begin the fifteen minutes daily spelling block using a fairly traditional test-study-test routine for three to four weeks, with emphasis on determining the three basic groups—above, at grade-level, and below grade-level spellers—and teaching students how to use each routine described in this chapter in

detail. It is during this first month that the teacher sets up specific guidelines and routines and takes time for students to practice them so that they learn to do the routines independently. Students learn to take a pretest; use a self-correction technique (e.g., Circle Dot); learn a strategy to study unknown words (e.g., Flip Folder); learn to take a partner test; learn to play various spelling games (though new games may be introduced later in the year); set up and use a Personal Spelling Journal; learn how to find misspelled words in their writing and record them in their Personal Spelling Journal; learn the dynamics of word sorting, including how to participate in a teacher-led sort; learn how to do individual and buddy sorts and how to do speed sorts; and, finally, learn how to recycle any misspelled words on the final test back into the Personal Spelling Journal. Teachers also stipulate a standard for how many words students are responsible for each week and stipulate the times when various routines are expected to occur. Students learn expectations for completing routines in a timely manner. All the routines are practiced with teacher guidance during the first month of school, which is devoted to learning the process and establishing the initial three flexible instructional groups. The time invested in teaching the students to work alone has great returns once students learn how to use each routine in detail.

The following weekly framework has already been introduced in a number of resources (Gentry 2000b, 2002; Gentry and Gillet 1993). The framework presented here has been greatly refined, however, as a result of hundreds of teachers who have used it since it was first introduced as a “spelling workshop” (Gentry and Gillet 1993). It is now a combination of many research-based strategies and of several theoretical stances, and it continues to withstand the test of time, receiving accolades from teachers who use it. For conventional and practical reasons, I favor the five-day unit format, though some teachers extend the time in spelling block and collapse the following framework into a three-day routine. Teachers who do not have spelling books or a curriculum have had to find words and plan the weekly lessons themselves. As described early in this chapter, this is not desirable because it places unrealistic demands on the teachers’ time. Nevertheless, the framework still works well for teachers forced into this position. Its effectiveness, however, may vary depending on the teacher’s skill in choosing the right words and patterns for Core Word study. Teachers who use spelling resources that may not be of high quality sometimes adjust the provided curriculum as best they can but replace busywork exercises with the recommended procedures in this writing-based, individualized framework. Some teachers with fairly decent developmentally appropriate traditional programs accommodate by adjusting the traditional spelling book to fit the framework presented here.

### The Day 1 Routine—Ten-Word Pretest and Self-Correction Check

Day 1 introduces the Core Words and the classroom Lesson Concept or Goal for the week. All students will attend to this concept and be assessed to see whether they already know it.

The teacher needs three, ten-word spelling lists based on the concept being studied for the week: one list on grade level, one list above grade level, and one list below grade level. (A good research-based spelling program generally will provide three levels of word study for each weekly lesson.)

The teacher administers the ten-word pretest to each group in the following manner:

Group 1, your first word is \_\_\_\_\_. (Use the word in a sentence.)

Group 2, your first word is \_\_\_\_\_. (Use the word in a sentence.)

Group 3, your first word is \_\_\_\_\_. (Use the word in a sentence.)

Continue in this manner until all three groups have received their ten-word pretest. Keep in mind that all three groups are flexible in the sense that children move easily from higher to lower groups, depending on their performance on the pretest over a three- or four-week period. For example, a child in Group 2 who makes 100 percent for three weeks in a row may be moved to the higher group. A child who misses more than half the words may be moved to a lower group.

Here is an example of what the pretest looks like in grade 3:

**Concept for the Week:** Listen to bush, wood, and could. The vowel sound in these words is spelled in different ways: u, as in bush; oo, as in wood; and ou, as in could.

Group 1 (above)	Group 2 (grade level)	Group 3 (below)
bull	bush	book
couldn't	wood	cook
crooked	could	good
good-bye	cookies	hook
helpful	sure	look
poor	wool	put
shouldn't	should	took
wooden	sugar	foot
woodpecker	stood	—
wouldn't	would	—

The next activity on Day 1 is the student-directed self-correction technique, such as Circle Dot. The teacher directs the self-correction technique with one group, and student volunteers direct the check with the other two groups.

1. Listen as I spell your first word out loud—one letter at a time.
2. Put a dot under each correct letter as I say it. If you wrote a letter that is not correct, or if you left out a letter, draw a little circle.
3. Use the circles to see the parts of the word that gave you trouble.
4. At the end of the Circle Dot, you will write the words you missed in a column to be used on Day 2 when you construct your weekly list. Check your spelling with your partner.

### The Day 2 Routine—Making the Individual List of Ten Words

The split-list routine using Core Words and Personal Words is easy to teach to students. Start out with a Weekly Spelling List form such as the one in Figure 5–8, with one column for school and another to take home. The student records his or her spelling list for the week in the school column, copies the same list in the home column, and then cuts the list apart. The school list stays at school, and the home list is used for home study. This practice eliminates problems that may arise with lost spelling lists.

The student first records up to five Core Words chosen from any misspelled words on the Day 1 pretest. (Many teachers have students record this part of the weekly list on Day 1 immediately following Circle Dot.) Words 6 to 10 are Personal Words selected by the student from his or her Personal Spelling Journal. These do not have to fit the unit pattern. Students who get all Core Words correct on the pretest may construct their entire list using Personal Words. If a student only misses three Core Words on the pretest, the remaining words for cells 4 to 10 are Personal

SCHOOL	HOME	SCHOOL	HOME
1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.	6.
7.	7.	7.	7.
8.	8.	8.	8.
9.	9.	9.	9.
10.	10.	10.	10.

FIGURE 5–8 Form for Individual List

SCHOOL	HOME	
1. <i>cookies</i>	1. <i>cookies</i>	CORE WORDS
2. <i>should</i>	2. <i>should</i>	
3. <i>sugar</i>	3. <i>sugar</i>	
4. <i>stood</i>	4. <i>stood</i>	
5. <i>wool</i>	5. <i>wool</i>	
6. <i>they</i>	6. <i>they</i>	PERSONAL WORDS
7. <i>when</i>	7. <i>when</i>	
8. <i>what</i>	8. <i>what</i>	
9. <i>snake</i>	9. <i>snake</i>	
10. <i>isn't</i>	10. <i>isn't</i>	

FIGURE 5-9 Making the Individual List with a Split-List Routine

Words. Students who miss more than five Core Words choose any five and complete cells 6 to 10 with Personal Words.

A third grader's list in Figure 5-9 shows Core Words in lines 1 to 5 (missed on the pretest) and Personal Words in lines 6 to 10 (taken from the Personal Spelling Journal). She will cut the list in half and take the home word list for home study, leaving the school list at school so that she never loses her word list.

Why focus on only ten words, one may ask? The answer is that, based on conventional wisdom, ten seems to be the correct number of *unknown* spelling words that works well for students' independent study. It is very important to keep the list short enough to handle in a fifteen-minute daily spelling block but long enough to have substantial impact on the child's growth of word-specific knowledge. When compared with the traditional practice of having children study twenty words each week, ten *unknown* words are appropriate, because children can already spell about half of the words when they are appropriately placed in a traditional twenty-word-list spelling program. Henderson, for example, found that the appropriate instructional level for a basal spelling program is the level at which the student spells about half of the words correctly (Henderson 1981). This being the case, the traditional practice of focusing on twenty words per week is comparable to focusing on ten *unknown* words. I like the more efficient ten-word list because students do not waste time working with words they can already spell, and they manage the list in half the time needed for a twenty-word list. Some second grade teachers have found it works well to begin the second grade



year having students construct individual spelling lists with six rather than ten words. Beyond second grade, ten words works very well at every grade level.

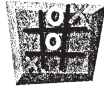
### **Days 3 and Day 4—Word Study Days**

Days 3 and 4 are never the same because what happens depends on how the group responds as a whole on the pretest and what the teacher determines to be the best plan for teaching the unit based on this group's pretest feedback—whole-group focus, small-group focus, individual word list focus, or a combination of these three possibilities.

Suppose the weekly unit focuses on an important spelling pattern. If a lot of students do poorly on the pretest and seem to struggle with the pattern, the teacher might conduct a teacher-led sort with the whole class on Day 3 to demonstrate the pattern, teach how the pattern works, and help students learn how to think about various possibilities when applying the pattern in different contexts. Students might make the word sort and practice it as Day 3 homework, and they might do speed sorts with buddies on Day 4 to help consolidate the sort into their repertoire of word-specific knowledge. Here's an example of what a weekly word sort might look like.

<b>bush</b>	<b>wood</b>	<b>could</b>	<b>?</b>
bull	crooked	couldn't	sure
helpful	good-bye	shouldn't	
sugar	poor	wouldn't	
put	wooden	should	
	woodpecker	would	
	cookies		
	wool		
	stood		
	hook		
	cook		
	good		
	look		
	took		
	foot		

Take a moment to revisit the four types of word sort activities in Figure 5–4. Reread the routines for the four types of word sort activities that are described in the figure: Teacher-Led Sorts, Individual or Buddy Sorts (1-2-3-/Make-Sort-Write), Speed Sorts, and Practice Spell Check, using Column Formation Sorts. These are powerful routines for



## Spelling Tic-Tac-Toe

1. Find a partner. Draw a tic-tac-toe grid on a piece of paper.
2. Trade spelling lists. Make sure you can read all the words on each other's lists.
3. Decide who will go first. (It's best to take turns going first.) Decide who will use **X** and who will use **O**.
4. Say the first word on your partner's list out loud. Your partner should spell the word out loud while you use his list to check the spelling. If your partner is correct, he should write either **X** or **O** (whichever he is using) on the tic-tac-toe grid. If your partner is not right, spell the word correctly—out loud and one letter at a time—for your partner.
5. Trade jobs. Your partner will say a word from your spelling list and you will try to spell it. If you are right, make an **X** or **O** (whichever you are using) on the board. If you are not correct, your partner will spell your word out loud.
6. Keep taking turns until you or your partner makes three **X**'s or three **O**'s in a line on the board. If you fill up the board before either of you makes a line, start again.

FIGURE 5–10 Spelling Tic-Tac-Toe

teaching patterns, and these activities may be used with whole-class or small groups any week the Core Words and lesson objective focus on a pattern.

Often the teacher may determine that it's best to allow children to work independently or with spelling buddies on Days 3 and 4. A wide range of independent and partner strategies makes it possible for students to choose their own favorite methods of engaging in word study and word learning to focus on their words for the week. Research-based activities described earlier in this chapter may be used, including the Flip Folder, a Look-Say-See-Write-Check individual word study technique (see Figure 5–2), spelling games such as Spelling Tic-Tac-Toe (Figure 5–10), and board games (see Figure 5–3).

### The Day 5 Routine—The Partner Quiz

One of the most daunting aspects of using individualized word lists in the classroom is the teacher's concern about how to administer the final test. The secret is the shorter word list. If each student's list has been built

with ten unknown words, it is easy for spelling partners to quiz each other and easy for the teacher to quickly check the quiz on the spot, because the partners' completion of the task will be somewhat staggered. The specific guidelines presented here, taught at the beginning of the year, enable partners to administer the final test quickly, accurately, and effectively, addressing issues such as correct reading and pronunciation of another child's list.

1. *Pronunciation.* The test taker is responsible for correct pronunciation of his or her spelling words for the week. Once children construct their word lists on Day 2, they are asked to make sure they can pronounce the words correctly and, if needed, supply the correct pronunciation for their spelling buddy. (Practicing correct pronunciation makes for a good Day 2 spelling homework activity.) If the test giver mispronounces a word, the test taker politely says the correct pronunciation out loud, such as "The correct pronunciation of my spelling word, *asterisk*, is /as' tēr-isk/."
2. *Reading the Words.* For the final test, test givers are directed to bring any word they cannot read to the teacher, who whispers the word to the student, who then resumes testing. In practice, reading the word is rarely an issue because most test takers already know the words in their lists, having worked with them since Day 2. "You are not sure how to read the word in my list that starts with *a*? Oh, that's *apple-sauce*" is an example of this dynamic at work in a partner quiz. Some teachers establish spelling buddies earlier in the week so that by Day 5 partners are already familiar with their buddy's words and are more likely to be able to read them.
3. *Preparing the List.* The test taker must prepare the list for the test giver to read. It must be neat and readable. Homophones such as *our* and *hour* are designated with a picture clue to enable the test giver to differentiate the correct word to be spelled by the test taker.
4. *Procedure*
  1. Partners exchange lists and decide who goes first.
  2. The test giver calls out the word.
  3. If the test giver cannot read the word, he or she asks the teacher to pronounce it.
  4. Once the test is completed, the partners switch roles.
  5. When both tests are complete, partners take the test to the teacher to check on the spot.
  6. Words spelled correctly are crossed out in the Personal Spelling Journal. Words misspelled are not crossed out so that they may be recycled on a later test.

Day 1	10-Word Pretest and Self-Correction Check	Introduce the Core Words. Take the Pretest. Self-correct. Introduce the lesson objective. Put up to 5 Core Words on the individual word list.
Day 2	Individual Word List	Complete adding Core Words. Add Personal Words. Copy List for school and home.
Days 3 and 4	Word Study	OPTIONS: Teacher-Led Sorts Individual or Buddy Sorts 1-2-3/Make-Sort-Write Speed Sorts Practice Spell Check Column Formation Sorts Flip Folder Look-Say-See-Write-Check Spelling Games for Individuals Board Games for Buddies
Day 5	Partner Quiz	Partner quiz Teacher check Record in Personal Journal

**FIGURE 5–11 Five-Day Instructional Framework for the Spelling Block**

Figure 5–11 provides a quick overview of the Five-Day Framework for the fifteen-minute daily spelling block for Phase II spellers.

## Implications

The following implications are relatively easy, but they go far beyond simply stirring the paint. Use them as you apply spelling to the broad canvas of literacy and watch a masterpiece of word-specific knowledge transform individual students.

1. Use a research-based curriculum of words and patterns to make it easier for you to implement effective spelling instruction.
2. Use research-based techniques.
3. You really must assess and teach spelling individually. If you employ resources, organization, and well-rehearsed routines, it is easier to individualize spelling instruction than you may think!