

# Spelling Techniques

## Author's Notes

The attached resource is my 'spelling techniques' file. I use this every year with whatever level classes I happen to have as it works with E1-L2 learners equally. Returning learners are always happy (well, they haven't complained yet) to use the material again as it makes a good reminder. To try out every technique would take about two 2-hour classes. Sometimes I devote two classes to it; sometimes I choose a few techniques and just do one class; sometimes I do one technique every week over a year.

In essence:

- (i) The first part of the file is a hand-out describing all the spelling techniques. It's a bit too wordy for E1/E2.
- (ii) The second part is a 'Spelling for Me' sheet.
- (iii) The last part is one sheet per spelling technique which I print out once and have laminated.

To use:

- (i) Give out the hand-out and discuss if you want.
- (ii) Give a 'spelling for me' worksheet to each learner.
- (iii) Learners choose a technique to practise and select the appropriate laminated sheet.
- (iv) Learners choose a word they can't spell. (Generally, the first couple of words are everyday ones for E1/E2; the next couple are harder for E3/L1; the last two are completely obscure and no-one really wants to learn them but I can be pretty sure L2 won't know them so they can use them to practise the technique.)
- (v) Practise the technique using the instructions on the laminated sheet.
- (vi) Learners record on the 'spelling for me' worksheet whether they think the technique would help them learn.

To obtain a copy of the original Word document please send teaching ideas or any adult basic skills resource that you would like to share to

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**THANK YOU**

## Adult Literacy Curriculum References

(also suitable for underpinning all levels of Functional English – writing)

Ww/E1.1 Spell correctly some personal key words and familiar words (for example days of week, numbers to ten).

- (a) understand that, to be written down, words have to be spelt
- (b) understand that spelling is rule governed: the same word is always spelt in the same way
- (c) understand how letters are formed and used to spell words
- (d) understand that cursive writing can aid spelling by activating motor memory
- (e) understand that there are different strategies for learning to spell
- (f) understand that spelling is only one aspect of the writing process

Ww/E1.4 Develop a variety of strategies to aid spelling

- (a) Understand and apply some strategies for remembering words they want to spell, e.g. use a simple mnemonic or highlight common letter combinations in colour
- (b) Understand the value of using visual memory to learn English spelling, e.g. find words inside words (football: foot, ball) and look at the shapes of words

Ww/E2.1 Spell correctly the majority of personal details and familiar common words such as months of the year, numbers to 20.

- (a) understand that for most people spelling has to be learnt
- (b) understand that all learners need a range of strategies but that some work better for some people than others
- (c) understand that not all spellings can be worked out from the sound of the word; visual strategies are needed as well
- (d) understand that looking carefully at letter patterns when reading helps remember the spelling for writing

Ww/E3.1 spell correctly common words and relevant key words for work and special interest

- (a) know and understand their own preferred strategies for extending spelling competence, including personal strategies for memorising spellings
- (b) understand the importance of cumulative learning in spelling, of relating new to known spellings
- (c) know that there are dictionaries specifically for spelling, and understand that ordinary dictionaries can be used to check spellings if the initial letters are known
- (d) understand that some special-interest texts have glossaries of terms which can be used as reference for spelling as well as meaning
- (e) understand that a computer spell-checker is of limited use until the user can judge how appropriate the suggested corrections are for the sense

Ww/L1.1 Spell correctly words used most often in work, studies and daily life.

- (a) know and apply a range of methods (visual, phonetic, kinaesthetic, analogies, mnemonics ) to help learn and remember correct spellings.
- (b) know and apply some spelling rules to help attempt and check spellings
- (c) understand that the spelling of homophones is related to meaning and grammar
- (d) Use suffixes and prefixes to build word families and extend their range of words with accurate spelling

Ww/L2.1 Spell correctly words used most often in work, studies and daily life, including familiar technical words.

- (a) know and apply a range of methods (visual, phonetic, kinaesthetic, use of analogies, mnemonics) to help learn and remember correct spellings
- (b) understand how knowledge of root words, prefixes and suffixes can support spelling, including the spelling of some technical words
- (c) understand that some polysyllabic words have unstressed vowel sounds, and that it is often helpful to segment the word into its parts, e.g. diff-er-ent, inter-est-ing, poison-ous.

# Spelling Techniques

There are lots of different ways of learning how words are spelt and of making sure that all words are spelt correctly in your finished piece of writing. This hand-out briefly describes some of those ways.

## Remember:

⇒ only you can decide which technique you are going to use to learn to spell a word.

⇒ you don't have to use the same technique to learn to spell all words.

⇒ your technique has to be logical and understandable to you. It doesn't matter if your technique isn't useful to anyone else.

⇒ you are more likely to remember a word if you decide on the technique.

⇒ you can combine the techniques.

## *Here are the different techniques.*

### 1. Use a dictionary.

There is nothing wrong in using a dictionary or electronic spell-checker, particularly for a complicated word which you will rarely use. However good someone is at spelling, they still use a dictionary sometimes. The drawback is that you have to know which word you can't spell to know that you need to look it up.

### 2. Practise writing down the word.

Write out the word several times. This may be enough to ensure you remember it.

### 3. Make a reminder.

Write out the word on a 'post-it' note and stick it somewhere where you will look at it often e.g. on your bathroom mirror or on the fridge door.

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### 4. Use the "Look, say, cover, write, check" method.

This method has several steps:

- (i) Write down the word.
- (ii) Look at it carefully.
- (iii) Say the word loud enough so that you can hear it.
- (iv) Cover up the word.
- (v) Write the word.
- (vi) Check the word with the original.
- (vii) If the word is incorrect, try again until it is correct.
- (viii) Repeat these steps at intervals (e.g. after 10 minutes, 1 day, 1 week) until you can spell the word.

### 5. "Photograph" the word.

Look carefully at the word and take a "photograph" of it in your mind. You may be able to recall the "photograph" next time you want to spell the word.

### 6. Break up the word into syllables.

Split up a complicated word into syllables and concentrate on spelling one syllable at a time.

#### Examples

consonant splits into con - so - nant  
excellent splits into ex - cell - ent  
unhappiness splits into un - hap - pi - ness

You could write down the word and cut it up to make a word jigsaw.

### 7. Look for words within words.

You might be able to learn a long word by noticing that it contains one or more smaller words.

#### Examples

separate - there is a rat in separate  
piece - piece of pie

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### 8. Make up your own reminders (mnemonics).

Try and make up your own reminders, perhaps using pictures, connecting words to other words you already know or making up nonsense rhymes or sentences.

#### Examples

because - big elephants can't always use small exits

occasion - on special occasions I have coffee cream and sugar

necessary - draw a picture of a shirt with one collar and two sleeves

I believe I would grieve if I lost my shild in this siege.

Neil is like nail

### 9. Sound out silent letters.

Learn words with silent letters by sounding out the silent letters and making the words sound silly.

#### Examples

gnome - g-no-me

knot - k-not

### 10. Trace the letters.

Try tracing over the letters in a word with your finger.

### 11. Make the word.

Make the word using Plasticine, form it from wooden letters or 'Scrabble' tiles, or print it with an alphabet stamp and ink pads.

### 12. Highlight the hard bits.

Highlight the hard bits of words to draw your attention to them. You could underline them or write them in a different colour.

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### 13. Say the letters or sounds.

Look at the word and read it out, one letter at a time. You choose whether it is more helpful to say the name of the letter or the sounds.

#### Examples

people - p-e-o-p-l-e

splash - s-p-l-a-sh

### 14. For groups of similar words

You may find that you often make mistakes with 'similar' words. If so, one of the following ideas may help.

#### 14-1. Learn a spelling rule.

Words may follow a spelling rule. If you learn the rule, you will be able to spell words which follow that rule. Unfortunately, there are exceptions to most rules.

#### Examples

"i" before "e" except after "c" whenever it rhymes with "me" - this helps you spell words like "niece" and "ceiling".

When you add "full" to the end of a word, use one "l" - this helps you spell words like "helpful" and "useful".

## Spelling Techniques

### 14-2. Look for letter patterns.

Write down groups of words which have the same letter pattern. The patterns might be at the beginning, middle or end of a word. You may find it helpful to use colour.

#### Examples

All these words have the pattern 'ch'

church      champion      choir      cheat      chasm

Try using colour. (You'll have to imagine the colour as these pages haven't been photocopied in colour!)

should	sh(in green)	ould(in purple)
could	c(in blue)	ould(in purple)
would	w(in red)	ould(in purple)

### 14-3. Prefixes and suffixes.

There are some common letter patterns which can be added to the beginning (prefix) or the end (suffix) of a word. Learn the spellings of common prefixes and suffixes but, beware, sometimes the spelling of a word changes when you add a suffix.

#### Examples

Prefixes include: un, dis, re

For example: unhappy, disappoint, reposition

Suffixes include: s, ing, ed

For example, writes, walking, talked

## 15. Keep a personal dictionary.

Make or buy a small notebook. Label the pages alphabetically and write in words which you find hard to spell. Decide which technique you're going to use to learn these words. Perhaps you might want to record the technique too.

## Spelling Techniques

### 16. Write without looking.

Try to write the word without looking at what you are writing – shut your eyes, cover your work or look in a different direction.

### 17. Be active.

You do not have to sit still when you are learning to spell. If you like fiddling, then have something to fiddle with such as a squishy ball. You could walk about, spelling out the word as you walk. You could throw and catch a ball. Think of activities which could help you.

### *Finally - have a go.*

Keep a piece of rough paper to hand when writing. Try out any words you're unsure of on the rough paper. You can have several attempts before you think the spelling is correct. If you're still unsure, check the word in a dictionary.

### *Can you think of any other techniques?*

One learner knew how many letters there were in a problem word and could then check they had included the correct number of letters.

## Spelling For Me

You have been given a 'Spelling Techniques' hand-out. Try out as many of these techniques as possible. Record which techniques you think will work for you.

Technique	Will I use this again?
1 – Use a dictionary	
2 – Practise writing down the word	
3 – Make a reminder	
4 – Use the "Look, say, cover, write, check" method	
5 – Photograph the word	
6 – Break the word into syllables	
7 – Look for words within words	
8 – Make up your own reminders (mnemonics)	
9 – Sound out silent letters	
10 – Trace the letters	
11 – Make the word	
12 – Highlight the hard bits	
13 – Say the letters or sounds	
14.1 – Learn a spelling rule	
14.2 – Look for letter patterns	
14.3 – Prefixes and suffixes	
15 – Keep a personal dictionary	
16 – Write without looking	
17 – Be active	

# 1 – Use a Dictionary

Look at the following words.

Tuesday

thyme

Mediterranean

tolbutamide (a medicine)

- 1) Which of these words do you think you should know how to spell?
- 2) If you don't need to know all of them, why not?
- 3) If an electronic spell-checker is available, try entering slight mis-spellings of the above words eg 'Tusday' for 'Tuesday'.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you would use a dictionary to spell a rarely-used word. If you have had the chance to try an electronic spell-checker, would you use one again?

## 2 – Practise Writing Down the Word

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

was

chair

escalator

meteorology

Zwanziger (old Austrian coin)

surquedry (arrogance)

- 1) Write down the word several times.
- 2) Cover up your work.
- 3) Try to write down the word from memory.
- 4) Could you remember the word?
- 5) Now try with another word.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by writing it down several times.

## 3 – Make a Reminder

The class needs to split into two groups.

- 1) Each group uses a dictionary to find a word (5-10 letters long) which the other group is unlikely to know, for example, 'zizel' (a ground-squirrel).
- 2) Write down the word quite large on the board, on pieces of paper placed around the room and anywhere else the group can think of.
- 3) After a period of time (for example, 30 minutes), remove your group's word.
- 4) Try to write down the other group's word from memory.
- 5) Could you remember the word?

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by making a reminder.

## 4 – Use the “Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check” Method

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

are

goes

language

competence

surtout (item of clothing)

staretz (Russian holy man)

- 1) Follow the instructions on your “look, say, cover, write, check” worksheet. (Make sure you say the word loud enough to hear it yourself.)
- 2) Could you remember the word?
- 3) Now try with another word.

Now record on your ‘Spelling For Me’ sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word using “look, say, cover, write, check”.

## 5 – “Photograph” the Word

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

who

fragile

muddle

argument

paracosis (disordered hearing)

kirbeh (skin for holding water)

- 1) Write down the word.
- 2) Look at it for 10 seconds.
- 3) Shut your eyes and try to “see” the word.
- 4) Repeat opening and closing eyes as many times as you wish.
- 5) Cover up the word before writing it down again.
- 6) Could you remember the word?
- 7) Now try with another word.

Now record on your ‘Spelling For Me’ sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by “photographing” it.

## 6 – Break Up the Word Into Syllables

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

poison

coffee

common

occasionally

indaba (tribal conference)

Fothergilla (plant)

- 1) Write down the word, breaking it up into syllables.
- 2) If you like, cut the word into a word "jigsaw".
- 3) Say the word one syllable at a time.
- 4) Cover up the word.
- 5) Try to write down the word from memory.
- 6) Could you remember the word?
- 7) Now try with another word.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by breaking it into syllables.

## 7 – Look For Words Within Words

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

dinner

Sunday

sincerely

opportunity

whiggamore (historical political group)

wagenboom (South African tree)

- 1) Write down as many little words in the word as you can find.
- 2) Cover up your work.
- 3) Write down the word from memory
- 4) Could you remember the word?
- 5) Now try with another word.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by looking for little words in it.

## 8 – Make Up Your Own Reminders (Mnemonics)

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

gin

look

rhythm

accommodate

upas (Javanese tree)

suspercollate (to hang)

- 1) Make up a reminder to help you learn the word such as drawing a picture or making up a nonsense sentence.
- 2) Cover up your reminder.
- 3) Write down the word from memory
- 4) Could you remember the word?
- 5) Now try with another word.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by making up a reminder.

## 9 – Sound Out Silent Letters

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

knew

gnat

pneumonia

psychology

gnotobiology (study of germ-free life)

knobkerrie (club)

- 1) Find the silent letter(s) in the word.
- 2) Say the word by sounding out the silent letter(s).
- 3) Write down the word from memory
- 4) Could you remember the word?
- 5) Now try with another word.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by sounding out silent letters.

## 10 – Trace the Letters

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

could

about

kettle

prefix

hirple (limp)

dreich (tedious)

- 1) Write the word down very large. (Fill the paper!)
- 2) Trace over each letter with your finger.
- 3) Repeat the tracing as many times as you wish.
- 4) Cover the word.
- 5) Write down the word from memory
- 6) Could you remember the word?
- 7) Now try with another word.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by tracing it with your finger.

## 11 – Make the Word

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

your

sail

hyphen

agency

clarty (sticky and dirty)

goral (Himalayan goat-antelope)

- 1) Make the word using one of the provided methods.
- 2) Cover the word.
- 3) Write down the word from memory
- 4) Could you remember the word?
- 5) Now try with another word, making it in a different way.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by making it.

## 12 – Highlight the Hard Bits

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

some

which

immediately

discussion

meprobamate (medicine)

perruquier (wigmaker)

- 1) Cover the word then write it down.
- 2) Compare your spelling with the correct word.
- 3) Underline any parts of the word you mis-spelt.
- 4) Cover the word again.
- 5) Write down the word from memory
- 6) Could you remember the word?
- 7) Now try with another word.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by underlining the hard bits.

## 13 – Say the Letters or Sounds

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

must

shampoo

remember

hooligan

rhipidate (fan-shaped)

trilith (ancient monument)

- 1) Say the word one letter or sound at a time.
- 2) Repeat as many times as you wish.
- 3) Cover the word.
- 4) Write down the word from memory
- 5) Could you remember the word?
- 6) Now try with another word, making it in a different way.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by saying the letters or sounds.

## 14.1 – Learn a Spelling Rule

Look at the following list:

giant

hangar

pages

village

giraffe

maggot

green

urgent

long

danger

gammon

merge

- 1) 'g' sometimes sounds like a 'g' and sometimes like a 'j'.
- 2) List the words above where 'g' sounds like 'g'.
- 3) Make another list where 'g' sounds like 'j'.
- 4) Can you work out the rule for knowing the sound?

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by learning a spelling rule.

### Hint:

If you are stuck, try looking at the letter which comes after the 'g'.

## 14.2 – Look For Letter Patterns

Look at the following list:

light

bright

flight

right

heighten

straightened

- 1) Find the letter pattern which occurs in all the words.
- 2) Choose one word from the list.
- 3) Write down the word from memory
- 4) Could you remember the word?
- 5) Now try with another word.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by looking for letter patterns.

## 14.3 – Prefixes and Suffixes

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

unwell

telling

disappointing

uncovered

circumlocutionist (someone using too many words)

subdiaconate (subordinate to a deacon)

- 1) Write down the word.
- 2) Underline any prefixes or suffixes.
- 3) Cover the word.
- 4) Write down the word from memory
- 5) Could you remember the word?
- 6) Now try with another word, making it in a different way.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell a word by looking for prefixes and suffixes.

## 15 – Keep a Personal Dictionary

*Example of personal dictionary entry:*

*Wednesday – day of the week*

*Underlined hard bit; break into syllables (Wed-nes-day); say in a funny way.*

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

apple

today

technique

alphabet

crithomancy (a way of predicting destiny)

jobernowl (stupid person)

- 1) Write down an entry as if it were in a personal dictionary.
- 2) Read your "entry" several times.
- 3) Cover the word.
- 4) Write down the word from memory
- 5) Could you remember the word?
- 6) Now try with another word, making it in a different way.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell words by keeping a personal dictionary.

## 16 – Write Without Looking

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

write

have

daughter

succession

palafitte (prehistoric lake dwelling)

deipnosophist (someone who talks learnedly at dinner)

- 1) Look carefully at the word.
- 2) Cover the word.
- 3) Shut your eyes (cover your work or look away) and write the word. (Don't expect your writing to be neat!)
- 4) Repeat looking at the word and writing it without looking as many times as you want.
- 5) Could you remember the word?
- 6) Now try with another word.

Now record on your 'Spelling For Me' sheet if you think you could learn to spell words by writing without looking.

## 17 – Be Active

Choose a word (which you cannot spell) from the following list:

house

make

autumn

beautiful

bronchiectasis (bronchial disease)

xiphohumeralis (a muscle)

- 1) In a small group, think of “active” spelling methods.
- 2) Learn your word using one of the active methods.
- 3) Write down the word from memory.
- 4) Could you remember the word?
- 5) Now try with another word.

Now record on your ‘Spelling For Me’ sheet if you think you could learn to spell words by being active.