



Spelling

Explicit spelling instruction

Spelling is an essential word-formation process when creating written texts. The components of an effective spelling lesson follow an inquiry approach. Lessons can be implemented with a whole class or in small groups, according to the needs of students and can be integrated with phonics lessons.

Understanding spelling development

To be efficient spellers, students need to combine knowledge of:

- **phonology** - the units of speech sounds in words (syllables, onset and rime, and individual phonemes)
- **orthography** - common letter patterns and rules
- **morphology** - the meaningful word parts and how they can connect.

Spelling should be explicitly taught by explaining the phonological, orthographic and morphological features of words as appropriate. When using words to teach spelling generalisations and strategies, students should be taught their meaning and how to read and spell them. This is important from the beginning of instruction in Early Stage 1 and beyond.

We use our **phonological knowledge** of syllabifying to assist with spelling. Breaking a word into syllables allows students to break up the word into manageable parts. When we can hear the phonemes in these parts, we can represent the word using **orthographic knowledge**.

As a student builds **orthographic knowledge**, they become aware of the letter combinations that can be used in different words.

There can be many ways to represent a given phoneme. However, there are some orthographic generalisations that students can learn to assist with their spelling choices.

Learning **morphological skills** includes knowing the function of the meaningful units in words. Students need to learn how to add prefixes and suffixes to a base word and how that affects the meaning.

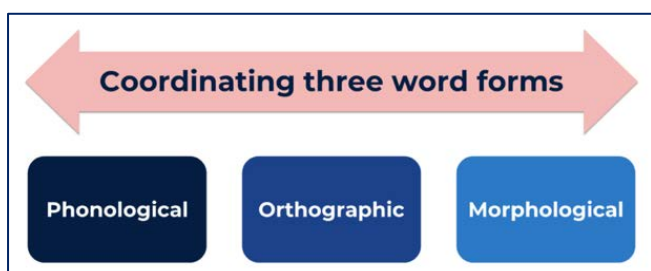


Figure 1: Coordinating the three word forms – image from 'Focus on Spelling' professional learning.

Components of a spelling lesson

To support spelling skill development, the following components of a lesson, incorporating an evidence-based inquiry approach, are considered best practice.

Stimulus: To begin the lesson use a stimulus for spelling word inquiry, such as reading a quality text which features appropriate words to suit the planned spelling focus. Words for teaching spelling should be carefully selected using words students have learnt to decode. Words should follow a common pattern or generalisation. These may be orthographic or morphological.

Learning intention/Success criteria: Co-construct the learning intention and success criteria to clearly communicate with students what they are learning and why it's important.

Explicit teaching: Explicitly teach the new learning using metalanguage to explain the phonological, orthographical or morphological focus of the lesson.

Word study: Students use an inquiry tool to support them to investigate or build words, using the phonological, orthographic and morphological components of spelling as a framework. Inquiry tools could include:

- **word sorts** - Using a set of the inquiry words for the lesson either provided by the teacher or generated themselves with guidance, students are asked to sort them in some way. They may be prompted to look for phonological, orthographical or morphological features of the words according to the learning intention. They then make decisions about what may connect some words. For example, students may sort words that use the grapheme 'ou' and words that use 'ow' to represent the /ow/ phoneme into two groups. They may sort words according to a word family, or words could be sorted according to matching base words. Students need to justify and explain their choices.
- **word webs** - similar to a mind map, students create a web of related words. They need to articulate how or why they relate
- **word sums** - can be used to analyse or build words. They are a useful way to explore the meaningful parts of words such as the base, or root word, suffixes or prefixes and they allow investigation of

word families. An example of a word sum could be: jump + ing = jumping

- **flowcharts** - a useful way to set out the decisions that have been made as part of a word inquiry. A flowchart can be used as a summary of the spelling choices and why those choices were made
- **word matrix** - a word matrix is built around a base word. Prefixes and suffixes that could be added to the base to make a new word are shown around the word.

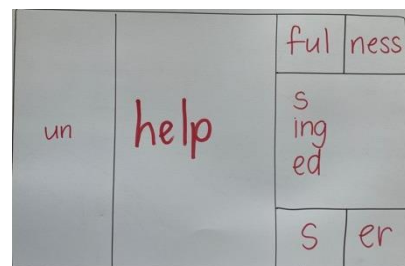


Figure 2: Word matrix example

Form a theory: With guidance from the teacher, students are encouraged to form their own theories about spelling generalisations following their word inquiry. Teachers may ask students prompts like, "What patterns do you notice?", or "Why does that/doesn't that word belong there?" The teacher encourages students to use the correct metalanguage to describe how words are structured.

Consolidate and practice: Connect the taught concepts with the relevant words and provide many opportunities for consolidation. Students could record the spelling generalisation they have discovered including word examples. Words could also be added to a word wall. Students should be prompted to handwrite their spelling words as, this supports committing to memory. It is also important to encourage students to write the spelling words in continuous text. Students are also supported to consolidate their learning through activities and games focussing on the taught linguistic properties within words.

Review new learning: Revisit the learning intention by making an explicit statement about the new learning, for example "Today we learnt...".

Checking for understanding: This component happens throughout all steps in the lesson, and includes providing constructive feedback. Focus on individual student learning needs to provide additional challenge or additional support as necessary.

Adapted from 'Focus on Spelling' on the [Literacy and numeracy website](#).