

Spelling – using word study techniques



Driver Youth Trust

What's the idea?

The 250+ graphemes used to spell words in English mean that children need to be taught a variety of techniques to be able to spell accurately, with specific techniques required to recall spellings of highly irregular high-frequency words. Word study is one approach to teaching reading which is built upon the finding that our brains are primed to detect patterns and organise information into groups.

What does it mean?

Once children have developed an understanding of the approximately 40 phonemes used in speech, and become increasingly able to decode the written word, they need to develop an understanding of the ways in which spellings of English words broadly follow conventions, and

that words are built upon meaningful roots.

Word study, in which children explore root words, prefixes, suffixes, inflectional endings and irregular spellings, enables children to build their knowledge of spellings of both regular and irregular words.

What are the action points for teachers?

1. Develop your understanding of the common root words appropriate for the age of the children you are supporting. Knowledge of the Latin, Greek and Old English origins of root words enables children to become word detectives as they develop their awareness of common patterns found in English spellings.
2. Understanding the meanings of the most common prefixes (un-, re-, con-) and suffixes (-ness, -ful, -ion)

helps children's awareness that spellings of words have underlying structure.

3. A significant number of high-frequency words have irregular spellings in which the letter-sound correspondences are unusual. These spellings should be developed as children learn to read and write the words.

4. Once children have developed awareness of phonemes, they need to develop advanced letter-sound knowledge, as well as increased awareness of regular and irregular word spelling. As children develop their ability to read and write independently, they will generally spell most words correctly.

5. Children should be taught to identify words in their own writing which they think they have spelled incorrectly, and teachers should model a variety of methods to correct errors.

THE DRIVER YOUTH TRUST IS A CHARITY COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE OUTCOMES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE WITH LITERACY.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Devonshire V, Morris P and Fluck M (2012) Spelling and reading development: The effect of teaching children multiple levels of representation in their orthography. *Learning and Instruction* 25: 85–94.
- » Puttman R (2017) Using research to make informed decisions about the spelling curriculum. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education* 5(1): 24–32.
- » Sumeracki M (2018) Classroom research on retrieval practice and spelling. Available at: <http://www.learningscientists.org/blog/2018/8/16-1> (accessed 7 February 2020).