



Westbury Park School

How to Support Your Child's Spelling at Home



Guidance for Parents and Carers



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Foreword

“That was what I wanted to ask you,” said Pooh, “because my spelling is wobbly. It’s good spelling but it Wobbles and the letters get in the wrong places.”

A. A. Milne, Winnie the Pooh, 1926

Most children will have experienced ‘wobbly spelling’ at some point; this can be very frustrating and can even lead to them not wanting to write or to make ‘safe’ word choices for fear of being ‘wrong’. Most of us, even if we consider ourselves to be good spellers, make spelling mistakes at some point. What is important is that we know what to do when we get stuck and know how to correct our mistakes. The English language is a rich but complex language but, despite its complexity, 85% of the English spelling system is predictable.

As with all aspects of the curriculum, children learn best when parents provide active encouragement and support. Parents are also able to extend what happens in school and help children apply their learning to the world beyond the classroom. All children are different and the development of spelling will vary with individuals.

Some general points to bear in mind:

- Children learn best through play – spelling activities are best seen as ‘playing with words’.
- Good spellers are usually good speakers and good readers – children need to be listened to, read to and read with.
- Spelling is a visual skill, backed up by knowledge of letter-sound correspondence, spelling rules, morphology and etymology. Spotting patterns, making analogies and generalizing are key skills –it would be impossible to memorise each word separately.
- Good spellers tend to ‘see’ the word inside their heads and triangulate their knowledge of the word with other information. The more information you have about a word, the more confident you are in spelling it.
- Being able to spell is not an indicator of intelligence or overall writing ability,
- Many children find computers highly motivating. Some useful websites are referenced at the end of the booklet.



THE STAGES OF SPELLING

Most children move through a series of stages on their way to becoming efficient spellers and whilst these are never 'neat' and discrete stages, they are recognizable with most children.

- Stage one: random letters or symbols are used to express meaning. (2-3 yrs)
- Stage two: letter-sound correspondence is attempted; for example, 'cts' for 'carrots'. (4 and up)
- Stage three: all sounds are represented phonetically (from 5 onwards)
- Stage four: a knowledge of visual patterns becomes apparent; for example, 'eightee' for 'eighty' and children begin to know when words 'look right'. (6-7 years)
- Stage five: at this stage the child can use both visual and auditory skills and memory as well as meaning-based strategies (how a word fits in context for example). Children can write multisyllabic words from memory and find learning new spellings much easier as they apply their skills and strategies from one situation to another. (8 years and upwards)

With the above in mind, it is important to remember that invented spellings are a natural step along the spelling route and that errors may well signal progress. Children will enjoy spelling if it feels like fun and if they feel good about themselves as spellers. We need, therefore, to be playful and positive in our approach –noticing and praising what children can do, as well as helping them to correct their mistakes.

At Westbury Park we use the phonics programme 'Letters and Sounds' which meets the statutory requirements of the curriculum and provides a clear progression. Rigorous and systematic teaching of phonics with on-going assessment supports reading and writing and provides children with a firm foundation on which to build.

Key points to remember when helping your child with spelling

- Practise weekly spelling little and often; revisit them in short bursts of 5-10 minutes in the morning, after school or on car journeys. Remember practice makes perfect.
- Encourage your child to use the words they have practised – write stories together, use the words in sentences (perhaps dictated by you) and keep revisiting ones previously learned so they are not forgotten. Keep a notebook of spellings learnt.
- Discuss the meanings of spellings. Explore what they think the word means. Does it link to another word they know?

What skills are required to be able to spell?

For children to become effective spellers, it is important that they are immersed in a rich language environment that supports them as readers, offers them many varied opportunities to write and encourages an environment where it is natural to explore words and 'play' with them. The following are the 10 basic skills that spellers need:

- ❖ **Understanding basic alphabetic concepts** – knowing that written symbols (**graphemes**) stand for individual sounds (**phonemes**);
- ❖ **Understanding variations in grapheme/phoneme relationships** (sound-symbol correspondence) eg the sound 'ow' can be represented differently – 'cow', 'out' and 'plough';
- ❖ **Using syllabification** – breaking difficult words into syllables;
- ❖ **Learning spelling rules and patterns** – eg 'drop the 'e' being adding 'ing';
- ❖ **Memorizing highly irregular words;**
- ❖ **Decoding skills** – being able to sound out words by using their knowledge of sounds and their written representation;
- ❖ **Using whole word strategies** – as we attempt to write the whole word, it may not 'look right';
- ❖ **Using context and meaning** –writers use knowledge of the world to choose the right word. Eg choosing 'bough' to write 'I cut the bough off the tree', not 'bow';
- ❖ **Using associations or connections between words**
- ❖ **Using syntax and grammar** – applying knowledge of language syntax to make spelling choices. Eg using 'there' in 'I put it over there', not 'their'.

The above represent the major skills that we use to learn, recall and spell words and are acquired both incidentally ('caught') and by explicit help ('taught') and instruction and have their foundation in learning to read and write. The following are examples of further explicit strategies that teachers and parents can use to support spelling development.

Explicit strategies to help with spelling development

1. 'Have a go'

Teach your child to apply the following strategy when they need to spell an unknown word.

- ❖ Ask yourself, have I seen it before?
- ❖ Say the word out loud and try to predict how many syllables you can hear.
- ❖ Ask do I know any other words that sound almost the same?
- ❖ How are those words spelt?
- ❖ 'Have a go' at the word.
- ❖ Ask yourself, does the word look right?
- ❖ Have additional attempts at getting the word right.

2. Visual Strategies - Look-say-analyse-cover-write-check

This is a strategy that you can teach children of any age (who have started to write) to acquire new words.



- ❖ When you need to remember how to spell a new word, look at it.
- ❖ **Say it out loud.**
- ❖ Examine the number of syllables (say/clap them out loud), **Try to memorise the most difficult part of the word (e.g. the 'ght' in sight).** Look for words within words eg 'rat' in 'separate'. **Try to picture it in your mind – imagine it covered in glitter.** Trace the word with your finger.
- ❖ **Cover the word.**
- ❖ Try to write it from memory.
- ❖ **Check it.**

3. Auditory Strategies -

- ❖ Ask the child to write the word after saying it slowly at least twice.
- ❖ Encourage them to listen to the word as they say it and to try to write the sounds in order.
- ❖ Now repeat the word breaking it into its parts or syllables **c-a-t** or **chil-dren**; for multisyllabic words ask your child to clap as they say the syllables out loud. Try to focus on prefixes and suffixes – **un** -happy, **un**-expect-**ed** , compound words – post-man
- ❖ For difficult words, **over-articulate** the syllables and say them as they **'look'** not as they are pronounced.. Eg Wed-nes-day, en-vi-ron-ment
- ❖ **Mnemonics** – eg **because** – big- elephants- can- always- understand- small elephants; **rhythm** – rhythm – helps – your- two – hips – move

Necessary/successful – a saying such as *'One collar and two socks are necessary but you need two collars and two socks to be successful'* is a way of remembering the number of Cs and Ss in each of these words.

4. Word families and word connections -

Many young children will benefit from an approach that presents words in sets that have similar phonological elements.

- ❖ For example, you might present your children with a group of words that rhyme eg ending in **'ight** 'or **'ook** or that begin with **'thr**'. You can have fun forming the lists with your child, writing them down, then trying to remember them.
- ❖ Ask the child whether the word to be spelled reminds them of another word they know. Eg **curious, serious, obvious; would, could should**
- ❖ Encourage them to explain how it is similar and then use the information to help spell the word.
- ❖ Make a table of word families eg define – definite – definitive – definitely – definition or medical – medicate – medication – medicine. **NB** If a child knows how to spell **'medical'**, they are more likely to spell **'medicine'** correctly with a **'c'** for the soft sound rather than an **'s'**.



6. Etymology –

Many words in English have come from Greek or Latin. Investigating and understanding where words come from helps build children's vocabulary as well as supporting their spelling. For example **'aqua'** meaning **'water'** as used in aquatic, aquarium; **'mare'** meaning **'sea'** as used in marine, submarine and so on.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPELLING AT HOME



Lots of things that families do every day present opportunities to learn how to spell.

- Going shopping... writing lists, helping to find goods on the shelves and reading the labels. Signs in supermarkets, names of foods that children like most will be remembered first and of course will help reading.
- Environmental print...walks, rides in the car, on buses and trains expose children to familiar words, new words and signs. You can have fun looking for spellings that have been changed for effect e.g. 'KWIK-FIT', spot the road signs and signs on restaurants. Look for words within words e.g. 'off' in 'office'.
- There are lots of opportunities for writing activities such as sending birthday cards and invitations, postcards and letters to friends and family. Get your child to see if there is a smaller word in their name e.g. 'is' and 'her' in 'Christopher'.
- Published and traditional family games help with spelling and are good fun! Scrabble, Boggle, Snap, Lotto, Upwords, Lexicon, Kan- u-go, Hangman crosswords, and word searches are just some examples. Fun things like singing rhymes, saying tongue twisters, labelling the house, using foam letters in the bath, letter fridge magnets, car journey games, alphabet blocks and joke books which play on words, can all help with spelling.
- Make up a 'Writer's Kit'... put in things such as post its, scissors, pencils, pens, staplers and glue.
- 'Find it' challenges... pages from magazines and newspapers together with a highlighter are a cheap and easy way to provide and encourage visual skills. For example, ask your child to find words beginning with 'r', or words with two syllables, or words with 'ch' in them, etc.
- Encourage your child to **READ, READ, READ.**

Tips for helping children in EYFS and KS1

Please see or print off the pdf booklet entitled '**75 Fun Ways to Practise and Learn Spelling Words**' from our website; it includes a wealth of enjoyable and motivating ways to help younger children with their spelling. Here are just some examples from the booklet:

- **Trace** - have fun and let children trace their words on your back or palm. Have them focus on properly forming each letter so you can feel it being drawn
- **Pavement Chalk (or Paint)** - go outside and spell your words using pavement chalk. Just taking the spelling practice outside makes it more fun for children.
- **Shaving Cream** - This is another fun sensory experience. Make a thin layer of shaving cream on a tray and use a paintbrush or better yet a fingertip to spell out the words. Have some napkins on hand.
- **Trace in the Air** - watch as children trace the letters in the air to spell each word.
- **Glue & Glitter** - Write out spelling words in glue and sprinkle some glitter on top. Glitter makes everything fun.
- **Small/Medium/Large Words** – It can be boring just writing out words 2 or 3 times. How about having them write the word using the smallest letters they can possibly write (this one is very popular), then doing it normal size and finally jumbo size? It makes tedious writing practice so much more fun.
- **Coffee Filters & Markers** - let your child write the words using markers on coffee filters. Once you are all done, hand them a spray bottle of water and let them turn their spelling practice into art.
- **Hidden Spelling Words** - on a white piece of paper let your child write out the spelling words using a white crayon. Once all words have been written use watercolors and paint to make hidden words appear.
- **Bounce a Ball** - bounce a ball as you spell words - 1 bounce per letter.
- **Balloon Bop** - keep a balloon up in the air while spelling your word. This one gets lots of giggles.
- **Puzzle Words** - How about using old puzzle pieces to practice spelling words?
- **Unscramble** - use magnet letters or letter tiles for each word, scramble them up and have child put letters in correct order to spell words.



Tips for helping children in KS2

In addition to the strategies mentioned previously, the following are a few other ideas you might like to try:

- ❖ When your child has learned their spelling words and is confident, write them down in a muddled fashion and then set your child the challenge of unscrambling them. The website 'Worksheet Genius' '<http://worksheetgenius.com/design.php?worksheet=anagrams> allows you to input a spelling list and automatically create a set of anagrams.
- ❖ Challenge your child to write silly sentences or a silly story using as many of the words as possible.
- ❖ Dictate sentences to your child incorporating the week's spellings and ones from previous lists so that they are not forgotten. It is important to practise words in context so that children are clear on the meaning.
- ❖ Make word searches using the spelling list. You can input spellings for free to create automatic word searches at <http://www.puzzle-maker.com/WS/>.
- ❖ Let your child use scrabble tiles to spell the words. Then ask them to add up the score for each word. Which word is worth the most points? The least?
- ❖ Encourage your child to spot familiar patterns in the words on their list and then to collect other words that contain the same letter pattern.
- ❖ Read out the spelling and then your child has to spell it back a letter at a time. Close your eyes when you try to spell the word as this can help you to visualise the word in your head.
- ❖ Use online games like Spelling City. See recommended websites at the end.
- ❖ Enlarge spellings onto cards and use like flashcards.
- ❖ Some children may learn words better if they are presented differently eg vertically, in a ring or in a shape of their choosing.
- ❖ Practise writing words with their eyes closed. Practise writing words really small and then really big.

Other Games and Activities to Help with Spelling

1. **Create a crossword** - children construct a crossword using the words that they are trying to learn and then work on making up clues. <http://www.puzzle-maker.com/WS/>.

2. **Word steps** - this enables children to write out their spellings and can be quite motivating. Children write out their words like a staircase. Each new word must begin with the final letter of the previous word. They may need to add additional words. E.g.

read

r

e

a

meeting

r

e

e

difficult

3. **Magic words** - children choose one of their words to change into another word, changing only one letter at a time, e.g.

HATE

WHEN

HAVE

THEN

HOVE

THEY

LOVE

WHEY

WHEN

Words can be changed back into the original word as in the second example.

4. **Family of words** - children could take one of their spellings and create a 'family', e.g.

REFER

REFEREE

REFERENCE

REFERENCED

5. **Find words within words**

e.g. Together - To - get - her

island - is - land

- 6. Syllables** - Beat out the syllables and say each one.
e.g. Jan - u - a - ry
Re - mem - ber

- 7. Over-articulation** – Say the word as it appears rather than the accepted pronunciation.
e.g. Wed – nes – day

- 8. Say the names of the letters in a rhythm**

- 9. Picture Mnemonics**
e.g. In the word 'see' the 'ee' could be made into a pair of eyes. In the word 'wood' the 'oo' could be made to look like the end of two logs.

GAMES TO PLAY



The following games have been divided into infant and junior sections. However, most of the games can be adapted to suit different abilities so they have only been roughly classified. By varying the words used as a basis for each game, they can be tailored specifically to your child's ability.

INFANT GAMES

- **Open Sorts**
Give your child a collection of words that can be sorted by any criteria.
e.g. car dog flower
 cat horse frog
 brick tree robin
Variations of this could be to sort words according to a given criteria.

- **Guess my Sort**
Give your child a list of words that have already been sorted and they have to work out how they have been sorted.
e.g. farm cart start
 chart dart part

Bingo

Make bingo cards from common, high-frequency words.

e.g. the when what
 who how they
 said why them

Call out the words one at a time and the players cover up the word on their card. The winner is the first to get three words in a row covered.

- **Snap**

Make a set of cards with one common, high-frequency word on each card and one replica set. Play snap in the usual way.

- **Sound Detective**

Players to list as many words as they can with a given sound or letter, in a set amount of time, e.g. words that have a 'ch' in them.

- **Feely Letters**

Ask your child to put his hands behind his back, then give him a plastic letter. Your child can then feel and identify the letter.

- **Alphabet Feast**

Ask your child to invent a menu for an alphabet feast, by listing a food item for each letter of the alphabet.

E.g. A- apples, B- bananas, C- cakes...etc.

Variations of this can be played by listing words on other themes, such as animals, household objects, or, as a more advanced version, listing adjectives to describe something,

e.g. A- awful bear, B- brown bear, C- cuddly bear...etc.



- **Alphabet Cards**

It is worth making a set of alphabet cards as there are lots of games that can be played with them. Here are some ideas.

Alphabet race- share the cards between players. The player with letter 'a' begins first by laying his card, then the player with 'b' lays his, and so on.

The winner is the first person to run out of cards.

- **Alphabet Cards Cont'd**

Pick a card- a player picks an alphabet card and has to spell a word beginning with that letter (the word may have to be of a certain length). If they spell the word correctly, they win the card. The winner is the player with the most cards at the end of the game.

Spell a word- keep taking one card out at a time and display all the cards taken out together. The player who is first to spell a word with the cards on display, wins the cards. The winner is the player with the most cards.

Speedy alphabet- time how long it takes to put the alphabet cards in the correct order. Can your child get quicker?

JUNIOR GAMES

- **Shannon's Game**

This is a version of 'Hangman' but the words need to come in order. Give a clue for the first letter, e.g. it is between 'k' and 'm'. The child then needs to guess what letter comes next. If it is a possible combination but not the right letter, write it in a column under the title 'could be'. The child then gives a word with that combination e.g. 'li' begins the word 'liver. If the child gives a letter that can not be combined, write it in a column labelled 'couldn't be' e.g. bk. Continue until the hidden word is discovered.

- **Write your own tongue twisters.**

- **Abacadabra**

The first player thinks of a word and writes down the first letter on a sheet of paper. The second player thinks of a word beginning with the letter given, and adds the second letter. The first player uses these two letters and adds a third, and soon.

Either player may challenge the word. If the player who wrote the last word cannot produce a correctly spelt word, the challenger gets a point; if he can prove his word, he gets a point. The player who finishes a word loses a point. For example:

t, te, tel, tele = challenge

Second player claims 'television' and wins a point.

- **Back-to-front**

Choose a word and write it down the left-hand side of the page. Then, leaving sufficient space between the two sides, write it backwards up the right-hand side.

The child then fills in the space between the vertical words, starting with a letter on the left and ending with a letter on the right. For example:

B	A T C	H
E	LECTRI	C
A	NACOND	A
C		E
H		B

- **Codes**

Use symbols or numbers to represent letters and write a coded message. Your child needs to crack the code in order to read the message.

- **Call my Bluff**

Each player finds an unusual word in the dictionary and writes it down along with the correct definition and two that they've made up. The words and definitions are then shared with the other players. If the other players guess the correct definition they win a point, but if they fail to spot the correct definition, the player that wrote the definitions wins a point. This is a good activity to encourage children to use their understanding of word origins.

- **Countdown**

Many versions of the popular television program can be played. Letters to play with can be picked from alphabet cards, or a longer word can be chosen, from which to make smaller words. You can play countdown online for children.

- **Switch-a-letter**

The first player says any word that comes to mind (words with four letters are best). The other players then take it in turn to change one letter at a time to form a new word. Words can't be repeated and the game continues until a player can't make a new word and they are then 'out'.

For example:

Player 1: PAST Player 2: PART Player 3: PORT
Player 1: POST Player 2: POSE

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR FOUNDATION/KEY STAGE 1

Online word searches focusing on words with key sounds.

<http://www.ictgames.com/hybrid.html>

A huge variety of spelling games to keep you sharp.

<http://www.ictgames.com/literacy.html>

BBC Bitesize activities aimed at practising a range of KS1 spelling techniques.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/ks1bitesize/literacy/>

A variety of games suitable for up to Year 2. Includes 'Print out' worksheets for pen and paper practice

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/wordsandpictures/>

SPELLADROME – from the makers of Mathletics. This requires the purchase of a licence. www.spelladrome.co.uk

SPELLING CITY – requires registration but many features are available without purchase. Customers can pay to upgrade and access the full portfolio of activities offered by this American site. www.spellingcity.com

<http://www.puzzle-maker.com/WS/> – this free site automatically creates word searches from lists of spellings

<http://worksheetgenius.com/design.php?worksheet=anagrams> – this free site automatically creates anagrams from given spellings

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR KEY STAGE 2

SPELLADROME – from the makers of Mathletics. This requires the purchase of a licence. www.spelladrome.co.uk

sPELLING CITY – requires registration but many features are available without purchase. Customers can pay to upgrade and access the full portfolio of activities offered by this American site. www.spellingcity.com

THE TIMES SPELLING BEE – a whole site full of practice games for all levels.
<http://www.timesspellingbee.co.uk/Training/Default.aspx>

THE SPELLITS. A series of spelling activities taking place within the context of mystery solving, adventures and challenges.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/spellits/index.shtml>

An American site but provides spelling practice within dictation passages.

<http://www.learner.org/interactives/spelling/index.html>

<http://www.puzzle-maker.com/WS/> – this free site automatically creates word searches from lists of spellings

<http://worksheetgenius.com/design.php?worksheet=anagrams> – this free site automatically creates anagrams from given spellings





