

Spelling

What is spelling?



Spelling is the ability to arrange letters in the correct order to make words that are communally understood. Spelling is considered one aspect of literacy (reading, writing and spelling).

Why is spelling important?

Accurate spelling is important for a child to get through their schooling years, as spelling is required in order to pass assessments. Learning to spell helps a child to develop a strong connection between the letters and their sounds and learning high-frequency 'sight words' (i.e. words that can not easily be sounded out) will assist a child in both their reading and writing. The more thoroughly a child knows a word, the more likely it is that they will be able to recognise it in unfamiliar texts, spell it and use it appropriately in their own speech and writing.

Studies have identified that the importance of learning the *alternative spellings* for words that sound the same (e.g. rain, rein, reign) means that it is easier to quickly discern the correct meaning of that word.

Given the *advent of technology* there has been much debate about the relevance of teaching children to spell. One of the disadvantages of the spell check in technology is that a child must be able to start the word correctly and get most of the letters right. BUT what happens when the student spells the word 'does' as 'dose'? The spell check on the computer will not recognise this as an incorrect word and consequently the student will continue to entrench the incorrect spelling habit and the reader of the document will become confused.

Spelling is not an easy process, but when children *understand its clear structure* and rules, unfamiliar words become more easily decodable (i.e. able to be sounded out). It is important that parents understand these rules in order to help their child outside of the school environment using consistent strategies. Only with understanding the spelling rule structure can children understand the many spelling rule 'exceptions'.

What are the building blocks necessary to develop spelling?

- **Articulation:** Clarity of speech sounds and spoken language. A child needs to be able to say a word correctly in order to be able to write it. If a child cannot articulate a particular sound they may end up writing the word the way in which they say it (e.g. if a child says a 'w' instead of an 'r' they might write 'ring' as 'wing' which creates a totally different word and affects the meaning of what the child is trying to write).
- **Phonological awareness (sound awareness):** In order to be able to spell words, a child first needs to be able to hear how sounds go together to make words (e.g. c_a_t = cat), the individual sounds in the word (i.e. initial, final and middle sounds) and to be able to break words into their individual sounds (e.g. cat = c_a_t). Being able to hear the syllables (i.e. beats) of a word will help a child spell longer words with more than one syllable (e.g. he_li_cop_ter). Rhyming helps a child to recognise word families (e.g. cat, hat, bat all have an 'at' sound in them) which will make

spelling easier.

- **Understanding spelling rules:** Understanding spelling rules (e.g. vowel teams: 2 vowels together, silent 'e', double consonants) will help a child have greater success at attempting words. There are some rules that are easy to apply and others that just need to be rote learnt.
- **Recognition of 'sight words' (tricky words):** There are some words that frequently appear in a child's vocabulary that are unable to be spelt out (e.g. where, friend). If a child is able to read these words, they will be more successful at spelling them.

How can you tell if my child has problems with spelling?

If a child has difficulties with spelling they might:

- Write words that are unable to be recognised as real words.
- Spells words phonetically (i.e. as they sound) rather than applying spelling rules (e.g. 'botl' rather than 'bottle').
- Has difficulties reading.

What other problems can occur when a child has spelling difficulties?

When a child has spelling difficulties, they might also have difficulties with:

- **Articulation:** Clarity of speech sounds and spoken language. This may impact on spelling as a child might be writing the word as they say it because these are the sounds that they hear (e.g. says a 'w' instead of an 'r' so 'rabbit' becomes 'wabbit').
- **Reading** because the child may not understand how to sound out words or spelling rules.
- **Executive functioning:** Higher order reasoning and thinking skills.
- **Planning and sequencing:** The sequential multi-step task or activity performance to achieve a well-defined result.
- **Receptive (understanding) language:** Comprehension of language.
- **Phonetic awareness:** Accurate knowledge of sounds (e.g. the sounds that letters make).

- **Attention and concentration:** Sustained effort, doing activities without distraction and being able to hold that effort long enough to get the task done.

What can be done to improve spelling?

- **Develop phonological (sound) awareness** skills by helping the child to learn about rhyming, syllables, initial sounds, blending sounds to make words and breaking words into their individual sounds.
- **Sound to letter association:** Help the child to develop a good understanding of sound to letter association (i.e. recognises that letters make certain sounds).
- **Vowels versus consonants:** Understanding the difference between vowels and consonants; and long versus short vowels.
- **Speech Therapy:** See a Speech Therapist to correct any articulation difficulties.

What activities can help improve spelling?

- **Flashcards:** Make flashcards of all of the letters and practice saying the sounds associated with the letters.
- **'I Spy':** Play 'I Spy' to practice recognising words that start with a particular sound.
- **Read books** with rhyming words in them and encourage your child to think of other words that might rhyme with the words.
- **Clap out the syllables** of longer words to help a child to hear the individual sounds in shorter more achievable chunks.
- **Whiteboard:** Using a whiteboard makes writing words more enjoyable and enables a child to erase any mistakes.
- **Use rhymes** to help teach specific spelling rules (e.g. "When 2 vowels go walking the first one does the talking": this teaches a child that when there are 2 vowels together only the first one makes a sound e.g. mail; the Magic 'e'/Silent 'e'/Bossy 'e' (different people will use different labels) makes the short vowel become a long vowel e.g. bit - bite).
- **Sort magnetic letters:** Get the child to sort magnetic letters into 2

baskets: one for vowels and one for consonants.

- **Spell words** with magnetic letters so that a child does not have to focus on both spelling and letter formation.

Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with spelling in my child?

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with spelling difficulties is important to:

- Ensure that the child knows the foundation skills of letter sounds, letter formation, and how sounds go together to make words. Then, they are ready to learn the rules that govern spelling.
- Explore specific teaching approaches for teaching spelling (e.g. Jolly Phonics, Letterland, THRASS) which can supplement school programs that may be best suited to a child's learning style and can make the understanding of spelling easier for them to grasp.
- Ensure that the child has mastered the spelling rules in sequential order as it is a building block process. If the foundation skills are not mastered, the later skills cannot be successfully integrated into the learning repertoire.
- External supplementation to the classroom curriculum where students that are not traveling at the same speed as classroom peers can fall further behind without the benefit of extra support.
- The strategies used to teach spelling to our current generation of students is different to those that their parents learnt. Thus, because children with spelling difficulties need more help from adults, it is crucial that their parents understand the current strategies to ensure consistent help at home. (Note: the 'Look, cover, write, check' system of learning spelling just from memory no longer applies to most spelling words, even though this is used for 'tricky' or 'sight' words).

If left untreated what can difficulties with spelling lead to?

When children have difficulties with spelling, they might also have difficulties with:

- A deficit between what is able to be read but not written.
- Under-performance in written communication despite intellectual capacity.
- Difficulties completing higher level education.

What type of therapy is recommended for spelling difficulties?

If your child has difficulties with spelling, it is recommended they consult a Speech Therapist.

If there are multiple areas of concern (i.e. beyond just spelling) both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy may well be recommended to address the functional areas of concern. This is the benefit of choosing Kid Sense which provides both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child
on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

