

Learning to spell – some ideas

Look, say, cover, write, say, check is the method used to practise spellings in most primary schools. It works because it's a multi-sensory approach, using sight, sound and touch: research shows that the more senses a child involves in their learning, the better the outcome.

With this method, your child will start with a list of spellings written down on paper. They then go through the following steps:

1. **Look at the word carefully.** Pay attention not just to the letters and their order, but also to the shape the word makes on the page
2. **Say it aloud.** Say the word both as you would usually say it, and then again enunciating any silent letters, e.g. Wed – nes – day.
3. **Cover the word** with a piece of paper or your hand
4. **Write the word** down from memory.
5. **Say it aloud again to check it.**
6. **Check** your answer letter by letter. If you've got it wrong, write it out again correctly. Children are usually encouraged to repeat this once a day.

Dictation

This is similar to spelling sentences, but instead of children writing their own sentences, the teacher reads out a sentence that includes the spelling word. The child has to write down either the word itself, or the whole sentence, for example:

'A shape with four sides is called a quadrilateral. Spell 'quadrilateral'.'

Listen and Spell

This may seem like an old-fashioned way of learning spellings, where **the word is simply read aloud and your child has to write it down**. But while it may not be the most revolutionary or exciting technique, it works well for children who are **auditory learners**.

There are two different ways to do this:

- Saying the whole word aloud and getting your child to write it down.
- Spelling the word out letter by letter, with your child writing each letter as you say it.

You can make the task more engaging by letting your child record themselves saying the words aloud using your phone or tablet; they can then play the recording back and write the word down.

Mnemonics

Often used for so-called tricky words (generally those that don't follow a spelling rule), a mnemonic is any sort of **memory aid** that helps you remember something. The most common type of mnemonic is an acrostic, where you make up a sentence where each word starts with the letters in the word to be learnt, for example:

Big elephants can always understand small elephants = 'because'

However, mnemonics can take many forms: a **visual learner**, for instance, might draw a picture that helps them remember how to spell the word.

Tracing

Here, your child copies out the words that they need to learn using their best **cursive handwriting**. They then place a sheet of tracing paper over the top and trace the words they've written. **This helps your child build a**

muscle memory of the word, and can be a useful tactic for **kinaesthetic learners** who learn best when they're doing something physical.

Beat the clock

If your child is the competitive type, getting them to practise their spellings against the clock might appeal. This is as simple as it sounds: you read out the word and get your child to either write it down or spell it out aloud, and see if they can do it a bit faster each day.

It's a useful task if your child is preparing for a spelling bee or similar timed spelling competition, but make sure that you check that they're spelling the words correctly, especially if they're spelling them out loud.

Word puzzles

These take a bit more preparation, but **word puzzles** such as **crosswords, wordsearches, anagrams and Hangman are great ways to make spelling that little bit more fun.** These encourage children to think carefully about the order of letters in a word. You'll find lots of wordsearch and crossword makers like **Puzzle-Maker** online.

Games

Pass the Bomb! Scrabble, Boggle, Bananagrams, ghost, wordsearches, crosswords and many others.

Ghost is Ghost is a written or spoken word game in which players take turns adding letters to a growing word fragment, trying not to be the one to complete a valid word. Each fragment must be the beginning of an actual word, and usually some minimum is set on the length of a word that counts, such as three or four letters. The player whose letter completes a word loses the round and becomes one-third of a ghost. Three losses make a player a full ghost, putting him out of the game. This is an ideal game to play on a car journey.