11 Strategies
Parents Can Use To Help Students Study Spelling Words

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Welcome!

You’re holding a GREAT “tool” in your hands for helping students study for spelling tests.

Most students have regular spelling tests. Teachers have various exercises they like to use to help students learn the correct spelling of words. For some students those exercises are very effective. For other students, they may need more or different activities to really “anchor” the correct spelling.

**How to use this guide** –
This was developed to give you some alternatives, some additional ways to study for spelling. **It is NOT intended to be applied all at once.** In this case, more is not better. Choose ONE of the activities and try it.

If it’s successful, keep using it. If not, try a different one. Or try a different one until you’ve tried them all.

Not all strategies will work for all students.

These activities were compiled by a group of some of the best learning specialists from across the United States who are currently practicing.

This guide will not fix learning problems. But it will give parents a multitude of strategies to try when helping their kids study for spelling tests.

Here at Pathfinders Learning, we specialize in helping bright students who struggle with reading, math, attention, learning disabilities (including dyslexia), as well as students who are just working too hard for the grades they get.

Oh, and we also help students who struggle with spelling.

We offer many services that fix learning problems permanently. **If your student struggles with school,** we have multiple resources that can help, including:

- **Parent Information Meetings** to better understand why bright students struggle and what can be done to end the pain, turmoil, and tears...permanently.

- **Parent support group** to help parents share their burden and get revived.

- **One-on-one sessions** that eliminate learning issues, problems, and hurdles...permanently.

If we can be of help, visit us online at [www.pathfinderslearning.com](http://www.pathfinderslearning.com) or call us at (949) 713-2300.

In the meantime, enjoy these strategies and let us know how you’re doing.
#1 - Visualize!

To be a good speller, you must be able to think about the sounds in the word and have a mental picture of what the word looks like.

Here is a fun strategy for visualizing how words look. Use this to practice difficult spelling words. Break the word into parts if needed and then put it back together and practice the whole word.

1. Look at the word.

2. Look up and visualize the word on a large imaginary screen slightly eye level. The letters should be large.

3. Point to each letter in the air and say the letter. Repeat 3 times to get a clear image of the letters. (Draw the letters with two fingers if needed in order to get a good image).

4. Now point to and say the letters in random order as fast as you can. (If the student can do this rapidly, he is getting a good image of the word).

5. If there are tricky letters that the student tends to miss or make mistakes on, have him make those letters especially large, bright, or colored in his image.

6. Spell the word forward again and say the word.
#2 - The Red Letter in the Sight Word

This is a strategy that works for spelling “Sight Words” which are commonly misspelled. Sight words are tricky because some of the letters don’t make the sound that they usually do (ex. said, done, goes, could). Follow these steps to help your child remember how to spell those tricky sight words:

1. Pick a list of 10-15 sight words for your child to spell on paper.
2. Out of that list, pick 3-4 words that were misspelled and write them down on an index card using a black marker, and write the first misspelled letter in red marker (ex. does, could).
3. Hold one card above eye level, and ask him to tell you what the word is. Explain that the letter is red because it’s a tricky letter and it doesn’t say the sound it should make.
4. Have your child stare at the word until he can see it in his mind with his eyes closed.
5. Have your child visualize the word on a blank wall and ask him to point to each letter and say its name; saying the Red letter LOUDER. Do this step twice (ex. d-o-e (loud)-s)
6. Now have him “write” and say the letters of that word on a textured surface (table, desk, dirt, carpet, etc.) in big letters using his index and middle fingers together. Say the Red letter LOUDER. (ex. d-o-e (loud)-s) Do this twice.
7. Finally have him write and say the letters of that word on paper. Say the Red letter LOUDER and underline it. Do this twice.

After 30 minutes, or the next day, ask him to spell out the 3-4 words you practiced. For each word spelled correctly, he should put a checkmark on the back of the index card.

Do this every day and “retire” the cards that have 4 checkmarks. Every time you retire a card, add a new sight word to the bunch.

Using sound, touch and visual imagery will help make repetition more fun and stay in long-term memory much more easily than just drilling your child with spelling words.
#3 – Make Up a Story That Helps You Remember How to Spell the Word

For words that are challenging, help students create a story to help them remember.

For example, a student is struggling with the word “dinosaur” and spells it “dinusaur.” They can picture a T-Rex holding a bowling ball to symbolize the letter o.

One of the most commonly misspelled words is the word “separate.”

Explore with your student ways he can remember that an “a” separates the first syllable (sep) and the third syllable (rate). Maybe he can envision a capital “A” with hands and feet separating them because the “sep” and “rate” got into an argument.

You or your student can go so far to even act that part out. It sounds oh so silly, but it helps build connections when a story is involved.

Be creative! Be as goofy, colorful, and outrageous as you can to make it stick! HAVE FUN!
#4 – Studying Spelling While Building a Stronger Visual Memory

Here’s a way to use the time you’re spending working on spelling to simultaneously develop stronger visual memory skills that will ultimately make studying easier and help words to stick longer.

Students are typically assigned a variety of assignments to help them learn the weekly list of spelling words. You will fairly quickly notice which words the student already knows and which he doesn’t. Use the following types of practice for words he doesn’t know:

1. Each time he has to transfer (copy) a word from his list to a practice activity, have him look at the word, “take a picture” of it in his mind, look up and mentally “see” the letters in the air. Have him point to the letters and say them aloud.

   Next have him “move the letters down to the page and write them. Look back up quickly to check his mental image and see if his spelling seems right.

2. Spell a word out loud to him and have him visualize the letters as you say them and “read” the word back to you. To activate visualization, have him focus his eyes slightly above eye level.

3. Difficult words can be placed on 3x5 cards (or strips of paper) with “tricky” parts in a different color. Hold the word slightly above his eye level and have him mentally “take a picture” of the word in his mind. Take the word away after a few seconds and have him spell the word (orally and/or on paper) and tell you which letters were in color on the card.

When you use THESE strategies to study spelling words, you’ll find that, not only spelling improves, but other subjects as well.
#5 – Use Gross Motor Movements

Involving gross (or large) motor movements or rhythm really helps with memorize spelling words…and can be more fun than just sitting! Pick out one or two of these to use.

- Write really large imaginary letters in the air, on the sidewalk using sidewalk chalk, or in a large cookie sheet of rice.
- Make up and sing a song or chant.

- Print the words on giant paper.
- Put paper over sandpaper and write the words in crayon
- Print each letter in the word separately on a square of paper; then scramble them up and re-assemble them in the correct order.
- Walk on a line or a curb as you spell.
- Bounce a ball as you spell, saying one letter on every other bounce; then on every bounce.
- Jump on a trampoline as you spell, saying one letter on every other bounce; then on every bounce.
#6 – Neurological Impress Spelling

1. Write each of your child’s spelling words on an index card in large print.
2. Have your child trace each word using a thick crayon, pressing firmly as she writes each letter.
3. Have her put down the crayon and trace over the letters with her finger as you say them together.
4. Have her “take a picture” in her mind of the card so that she can look up and still see the letters.
5. Have your child trace over the visualized word, saying each letter as she traces it.
6. Play with the word – ask: What color are the letters? What is the first letter? What is the last?
7. Have her spell the word from her visualized image, pointing to each letter as she says it.
8. “Move” the visualized image back to the paper and write the word exactly as she remembered it.

This technique uses the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic channels to anchor the word and its spelling. This technique sometimes seems to parents that it will take longer. Getting prepped may be a bit longer, but this system is very effective at getting those words “down cold” in about the same amount of time most students spend studying.

Give it a try and see what happens!
#7 – Learning the Spelling of the Same Sound With Different Spellings

Often spelling lists have words with the same vowel sound spelled in different ways. Here’s a way to help kids remember which spelling goes in which word.

Have the student think of a word and picture to go with the different spelling codes.

For example if the student is studying the “oy-oi” spelling codes, he might think of oil to represent the oi code and toy to represent the oy code.

Have the student organize the words into the appropriate groups (example: group all words with oy together) and create an image and a verbal statement to rehearse.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Verbal statement to rehearse</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>annoy</td>
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<td>airfoil</td>
<td>airfoil spelled like oil</td>
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<tr>
<td>points</td>
<td>points spelled like oil</td>
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</table>

Practice saying the word and the verbal statement. When the student is ready to write the words, dictate each word, and have the student say the rehearsed statement; then write.

Example:

Parent says: “spell annoy”
Student says: “annoy spelled like toy”
Student writes the word and states again, “like toy.”
#8 – Use the Word in a Sentence

Teachers often ask students to make up sentences using their spelling words. Here is an example.

Sample sentences:

Maddie is going to the circus tomorrow to celebrate her birthday. ~Suzy Wilson

Joey’s pet **frog**, Kermit, couldn’t go to the movies, because his jumping around would bother people. ~Patrick White

Even if the teacher didn’t assign sentences, sometimes it’s easier to remember how to spell words by making up a sentence.

NOTE: The better the sentence, the easier it will be to remember the spelling word.

**WHAT TO DO**

Choose a word from the list. Concentrate on the word you want to use. Make a picture about it in your mind. **Think, think, think.** Add details to the picture you are seeing. If you don’t like the picture you’ve created for this word, just “erase” it from your mind and make a new picture.

Now describe what you are seeing out loud. Write down what you just said. Terrific! You’ve got yourself a spelling sentence. To make it special, try these ideas:

- **Use a large vocabulary.** Try action verbs like jumped, giggling, bubbled, etc. Use new and exciting words. Exciting words produce exciting sentences. Check your Word List for ideas.
- **Add details to your sentence.** Begin by describing nouns you used. Think about size, age, condition, location, color, emotions, and feelings. If you wrote about something that happened, see if you can add why it happened.
- **Work at it.** Sometimes it just takes asking more of yourself and thinking of more than one idea. Give your sentences your very best effort.

**WHAT NOT TO DO**

Do not begin your sentences with the words I, My, or We.

“I have…” or “We saw…” or “My friend…”

It’s best if you don’t write about yourself. Writing about yourself can be boring and limits you to your own little world. Think and write about other people, other places, and other things.

Look at the difference between these two sentences:

It was a **cold** day.

Some people are **busy** making cookies for the bake sale.

The second sentence is more concrete. Can’t you picture people making cookies? It’s more visual and, more importantly, it will stay in your memory more easily.

Start with just a couple of sentences and then work your way to a few more.
#9 - Say and Write

Spelling often “goes out the window” when students are trying to write sentences and stories.

If your child is continually asking you how to spell words, or is misspelling words you’re absolutely sure he knows, try having him “say and write.”

It’s pretty simple, but it can be VERY effective at slowing students down and having them consider each word as they spell it.

The student should say each sound as he writes it. Remember, saying the sound is not the same thing as saying the letter!

For example, if I were writing the word letter, I would say:

Get him to really focus in the sound AS he writes. This keeps him from guessing and being impulsive. It helps him think about all of the sounds in the word.
Multisyllable words can feel overwhelming to students, but in reality, these words are just a bunch of small little words or syllables put together.

Did you know that most students could spell 90% of the word “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” on the first try if they just realized that it is made up of 14 tiny little two and three letter syllables?

Here’s a strategy for breaking up and learning multisyllable words:

1. Say the words and count the beats or “chunks” in the word. Have students count on their fingers or tap the table to count the chunks. (For example, Disneyland has 3 beats or chunks: Dis – ney – land).

2. The student should draw a line on the paper for each chunk.

3. Have the student say each sound as she writes it. Example:
   
   “disappointment” – 4 chunks
   
   __________  __________  __________  __________
   
   Student writes d-i-s on the first line while saying each sound, followed by the remaining syllables.
   
   dis  a  point  ment

4. Then have the student write the whole word, saying each chunk or syllable as he writes it.
#11 – Take A Picture!

1. Look at the word
2. Write the word on the line
3. Look at the word again, and as you look at it, mentally ‘take a picture’ of it
4. Now holding that picture in your head, cover the first word and then write the word again
5. Check to see if you were correct (circle yes or no and make corrections)
6. Go back to the picture in your head and see and spell each letter
7. Cover the first three words and write the word one more time

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