

Course Topic: Teaching Writing, Teaching Pronunciation**Course Instructor**

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Course Synopsis

Students and teachers alike often complain about the challenges of English spelling, given the myriad rules which seem to break other rules, which break other rules. There does not seem to be much consistency between how words are pronounced and how they are spelled. One sound can be spelled three, four or five different ways. In this informative session, we will establish that there are actually patterns in English spelling, many of which are rooted in the history of the language. We will then examine these patterns in detail as a foundation for helping to understand the rules of English spelling. Finally, we will look at various teaching strategies and activities that you can use in order to effectively teach spelling to your students.

Course Agenda

1. Why is Spelling Important?
2. What is Spelling?
3. Patterns? What Patterns?
4. Historical Influences on English Spelling
5. Activities and Strategies for Teaching Spelling

1. Why is Spelling Important?

“Becoming a competent speller is a lifelong pursuit that is complex and iterative.” (McQuirter, 2007)

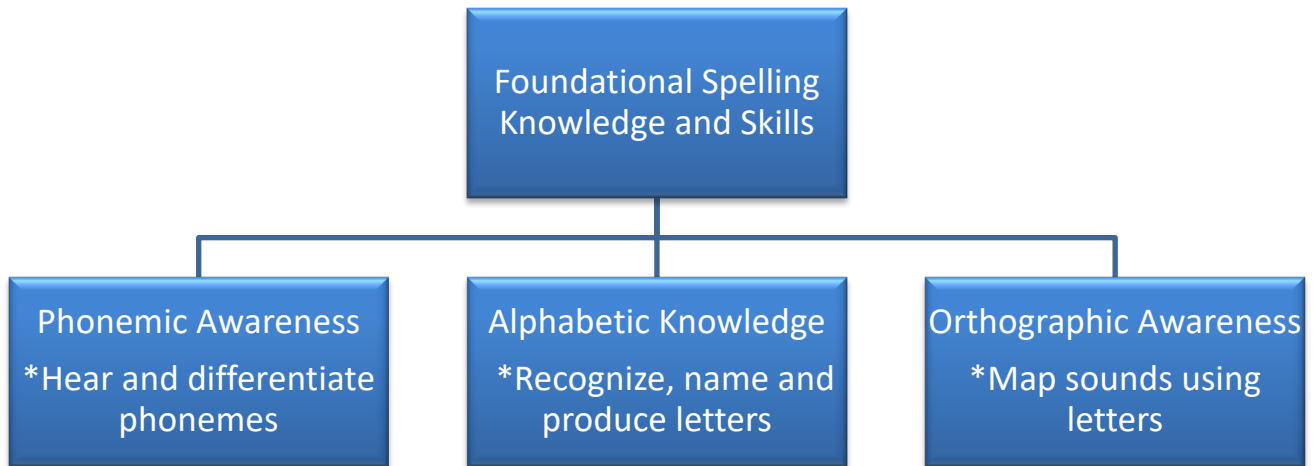
- Spell check doesn’t identify all errors!
- Good spellers are good readers.
- Good spellers are good writers.
- Good spellers use a greater range of vocabulary.
- Good spellers are perceived as professional and competent.

(Graham & Harris 2006)

2. What is Spelling?

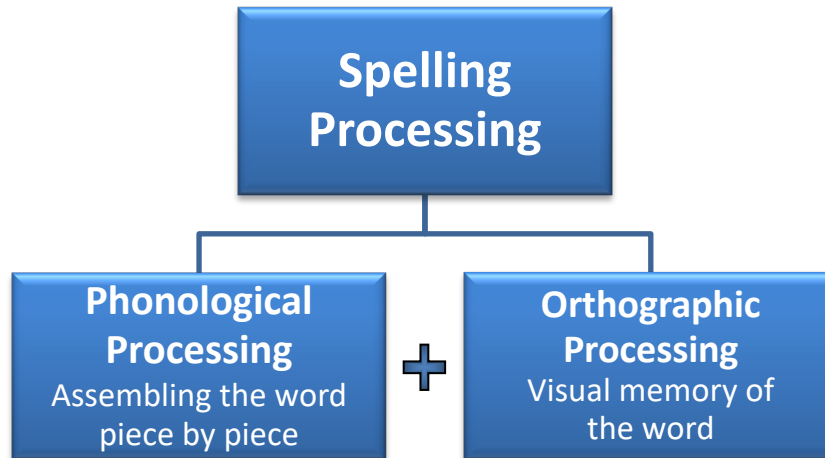
“Spelling is the application of phonemic awareness and alphabetic knowledge to letters in an accepted orthographic or writing system.” Sayeski (2011)

Students need the following knowledge and skills in order to be able to spell:



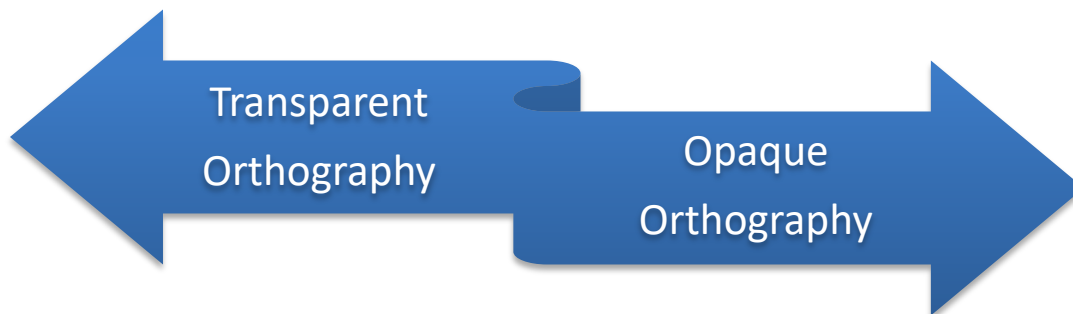
Additional spelling knowledge and skills:

- Morphemes
- Syllables
- Grammar and syntax
- Semantic organization at the word, phrase, sentence and discourse levels



3. Patterns, What Patterns?

Phonemicity is the degree to which we can predict the spelling of a word from its pronunciation and the pronunciation of a word from its spelling. In other words, it describes how strong the relationship is between the language's sounds and the symbols it uses in its writing system. English has weak phonemicity; it has different ways of representing the same sound and letters, and letter combinations that can represent more than one sound.



A language with **transparent orthography** has a strong relationship between the sounds of the language and the written symbols used in the writing system.

A language with **opaque orthography** has a weaker relationship between the sounds of the language and the written symbols used in the writing system. English is considered to have opaque orthography.

The Chaos by Gerard Nolst Trenité

Dearest *creature* in *Creation*,
Studying English pronunciation,
I will teach you in my verse
Sounds like *corpse*, *corps*, *horse*, and *worse*.
I will keep you, *Susy*, *busy*,
Make your *head* with *heat* grow dizzy;

Tear in eye, your dress you'll *tear*;
So shall I! Oh, hear my *prayer*.

For the rest of the poem go to: <http://grammar.about.com/od/alightsideofwriting/a/chaosverbpoem.htm>

Homophones are words that are pronounced the same but have a different meaning. They may or may not have the same spelling.

heir and *air*
read and *red*

Homographs are words that are written the same but have a different meaning and usually origin. They may or may not have the same pronunciation.

bear 'to carry' and *bear* 'animal'
lead 'to conduct' and *lead* 'metal'

Homonyms are words that are both homophones and homographs. They are exactly the same in both sound and spelling but different in meaning.

lean 'to prop against' and *lean* 'thin'

English appears to have more opaque orthography than it really does because a high percentage of its high frequency words are irregular. The overall percentage of total words that are irregular is much smaller than it seems.

Reasons for the lack of phonemicity are largely historical.

4. Historical Influences on English Spelling



Norse Spelling Patterns

- slaughter, slight, tight
- wheeze, whirl
- wreck, wrong
- kid, kilt, kindle
- scab, scale, scare, score, scout
- knife, knee

Latin/French Spelling Patterns

- faction, action, satisfaction, auction, rejection, diction

- nation, aviation, calculation, cancellation
- familiar, peculiar
- necessary, ordinary, secretary
- millionaire, questionnaire

Greek Spelling Patterns

- anthology, anthropology, arithmetic, athlete, authentic, enthusiastic, ether, ethic, marathon, method, myth, theatre, theme
- philosophy, photography, phobia, graph, audiophile
- diphtheria, diphthong, ophthalmic
- hymn, hygiene, hysteria, hydro-, hyper-
- aura, austere, authentic, centaur, nausea

Good websites for lists of words with specific patterns:

- www.morewords.com
- www.scrabblefinder.com

The following are some other historical circumstances that influenced English spelling:

1. The adoption of the Latin alphabet.
2. The work of individual scribes.
3. The advent of the printing press.
4. The Great Vowel Shift.
5. Initiatives to restore historical spellings of words.
6. Initiatives to standardize spelling.
7. Initiatives to align spelling to sound.

Here are some good YouTube videos on the history of English:

- History of English in 10 Minutes www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfKhJIAhew
- The Adventure of English: Birth of a Language
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1XQx9pGGd0&feature=youtu.be>

For a detailed look at the origins of English spelling:

- Crystal, David. 2012. Spell it Out. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Upward, Christopher and Davidson, George. 2011. The History of English Spelling. Wiley-Blackwell.

5. How Should We Teach Spelling?

Incidentally, as errors or challenges occur.

Targeted and systematically by word: move from less complex words to more complex words, on a graded or levelled scale.

Targeted and systematically by letter pattern: move from more commonly occurring patterns to less commonly occurring patterns.

Targeted and systematically by sound: Focus on one sound at a time, teaching students all of the different letter combinations that can represent each sound.

There are four key elements to spelling instruction:

1. Systematic study strategies.
2. Immediate, corrective feedback.
3. Repeated practice.
4. Teaching of patterns.

Activity 1: Group words together that have the same vowel sounds in them:

sound	adjourn	group
though	thought	through
bought	borough	ought
cough	plough	account
rough	bound	foul
generous	labour	mouse

Answer key:

Though, borough	/əʊ/
Through, group,	/u:/
Cough, Ought, bought, thought	/ɒ/
Rough, generous,	/ʌ/
Plough, sound, bound, mouse, foul, account	/aʊ/
Adjourn, labour	/ɜ:/

Activity 2: Match words together that have the same vowel sounds in them:

head	laugh	seize	law
girl	put	rent	soon
apple	heat	cook	heard
prune	bottle		

Answer key:

head--rent laugh--apple seize--heat law—bottle girl--heard put--cook soon--prune

Activity 3: Students hunt for words in a reading text that have specific letter combinations. They identify the sound each combination makes. OR Students hunt for words in a reading text that have specific sounds. They identify the letter combinations that make each sound.

Activity 4: Students work in small groups to create a word map, with a letter combination or sound in the middle, and all of the words they know with that letter combination or sound around the edge.

Activity 5: Students keep a word study notebook, with one letter combination OR sound on each page.

Activity 6: Conduct a class dictation using words with the same letter combinations OR the same sounds.

Activity 7: Conduct a class spelling bee that focuses on specific letter combinations or sounds.

Activity 8: Students work individually to write a poem on a topic of their choice with a designated sound rhyming pattern.

Additional Resources

Bryson, Bill. 1990. The Mother Tongue: English and How it Got that Way. New York: Harper Perennial.

Bussano, S., Cross, J., & Panganiban, K. 2002. Sounds Easy: Phonics, Spelling and Pronunciation. Burlingame, CA: Alta Book Center Publishing.

Cooke, Gina. Making Sense of Spelling. <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/making-sense-of-spelling-gina-cooke>

Crystal, David. 2011. The Story of English in 100 Words. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Crystal, David. 2012. Spell it Out. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Book Review of Spell it Out: www.huffingtonpost.com/david-crystal/spell-it-out_b_3491037.html

Liberman, Anatoly. 2005. Word Origins and How We Know Them: Etymology for Everyone. New York: Oxford.

Sayeski, Kristin L. 2011. Effective Spelling Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 47 (2) 75-81.

Shemesh, R., & Waller, S. 2000. Teaching English Spelling: A Practical Guide. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Spelling Words Well. www.spelling-words-well.com.

The Spelling Society. www.spellingsociety.org.

Upward, Christopher and Davidson, George. 2011. The History of English Spelling. Wiley-Blackwell.

Thanks for participating!

www.aceducation.ca