

soft g	hard g
edge	bag
cage	twig
gage	slug
huge	drug
judge	leg
stage	flag
badge	hog
page	drag

How Will My Child Learn Words?

Since we want to support children with recognizing and transferring spelling words into their long-term memory, we use a strategy called *word sorting*. Word sorting uses about 20 words that follow contrasting features, (like soft g words and hard g words), and asks children to place them into categories. These sorts are more beneficial than writing the words over, using sentences, or other more traditional methods of practice because they force the child to learn and attend to the features of the words.

At home, as your child is working with their spelling lists, be sure to draw their attention to how the word features are all similar or different.

Ways to help my child at home

Help your child focus on words they are close to spelling correctly. If your child spells confident like this (confadint), help them focus on the feature that they are close to understanding.

Remember that a step forward may mean a step backward. To help your child understand a new pattern of words, it is beneficial to work with words they know and then transfer it to unfamiliar words.

Help your child notice their patterns in words they read at home. Making connections between words on their lists and words they are reading will move the patterns into long-term memory.

Help your child notice words that follow the pattern of the week as well as words that "break" the rules.

Have your child sort their spelling words by the way they sound as well as the way they look.

Help your child proofread their writing for words they know how to spell. Proofreading is an excellent way to help your child understand the importance of spelling correctly.

Don't hold your child accountable for words that are too hard. In general, if a child has only one or two letters to learn in a word, they are probably ready to learn it.

Play games at home. Play lots of word games including word searches, hangman, crossword puzzles, Scrabble, etc.

Use print around the home to reinforce word patterns. Food boxes, newspapers, mailings, fliers, ads, and magazines can provide lots of opportunities to connect what they are learning in school to real life.

THE WORD STUDY APPROACH TO TEACHING SPELLING

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### WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW



### ~~ INTRODUCTION ~~

Spelling instruction has undergone a change in recent years. Parents often find it confusing trying to make sense of what their children are doing with respect to spelling, word study, phonics, and vocabulary. This brochure is designed to help you understand what word study is and how it relates to helping our students become successful spellers.

## Brain Research and Impact on Spelling

In the past 20 years, there has been a flurry of research done that looks at how the brain learns and accesses information. This brain research has translated into concrete classroom practices designed to help learners access and remember increasingly complex information.

In the past, we understood that learning meant providing time and opportunity to fill the brain with knowledge. To that end, we would provide students with lists of words to memorize and we would test them on their ability to recall words. This skill and drill allowed us to utilize only a small portion of the brain. For most of us, learning spelling meant cramming for Friday's test and forgetting the words by the next Monday. We know the brain strives to organize information into meaningful chunks. To learn new words, we must connect what we know to what we are trying to learn. The information must be meaningfully organized in order for the brain to make the most sense of it.

### How do children learn to spell?

When we observe children at different ages, it becomes clear that there are certain recognizable stages they move through on their way to competent spelling. These stages are developmental, meaning students naturally move through them and with appropriate support, can become good spellers. At every stage, students learn to spell using a three pronged approach. In *writing*, students attend to certain features of words at each stage. These features are increasingly complex, but the brain is able to take what it already knows and connect it to the new features. Through *reading*, the student is able to recognize features and patterns in new contexts. This builds the ability to connect learning. Through *proofreading* their writing, students are able to apply in a concrete way what they have learned. All three parts are essential if students are to become competent spellers.

# What Is Word Study?

| Stages of Development |             |                      |
|-----------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Emergent              | ages 1 - 7  | K - 2nd grade        |
| Letter Name           | ages 4 - 9  | K to Early 3rd grade |
| within word           | ages 6 - 12 | 1st to mid 4th grade |
| syllables and affixes | ages 8 - 18 | 3rd to 8th grade     |
| derivational          | ages 10 +   | 5th to 12th grade    |

### What will my child do every day?

Most days, students will be engaged in sorting words into groups by comparing and contrasting word features. Through daily writing, students will practice and correct words that relate to the unit being studied. Other times, students may be asked to find examples of words in their reading that have similar features to the words they are studying.

### How will my child be graded on spelling?

While testing is a traditional and easy way of assessing short-term spelling learning, our ultimate goal is for our students is to apply what they have learned into their writing. Your child may be given weekly spelling tests as a means of checking their learning, but other types of assessment may be used as well. In many classes, students are directed to proofread and fix their writing for spelling. We have an expectation

that students be responsible for what they know how to do. Researchers have helped us understand this area, too. We know that in order to solidify learning, the learner needs time. It takes 3 - 30 days for the brain to integrate what it has learned.

### Why do the words seem easier than when I was in school?

When we were in school, the theory driving our study of words was rote memorization. The theory driving teachers' practice today is *feature analysis*. The main goal of spelling instruction is to help children transfer words from weekly spelling lists into daily writing. When you try to memorize 10 or more words weekly, without focusing on the features of the words, your brain dumps old words to make room for new ones. In order to assist the brain in making connections, word study uses familiar words. This enables students to transfer the features of words into their writing. Accurate spelling is a natural outgrowth of word study. Instead of learning a set of words a week, we are enabling students to recognize whole families of words, identify when words need to be fixed in their writing, and organize information in their brain.

### Resources

Here are a few websites that can support spelling development.

<http://www.carlscorner.us/>

<http://www.sadlier-oxford.com/phonics/>  
[www.eslus.com/LESSONS/SPELL/SPELL.HTM](http://www.eslus.com/LESSONS/SPELL/SPELL.HTM)  
[www.howard.k12.md.us/elementary/laresources/web](http://www.howard.k12.md.us/elementary/laresources/web)