

## Tip Sheet

# Spelling Remediation for Upper Primary and Lower Secondary Students

Students who experience difficulties with spelling may struggle to accurately represent all the precise sounds within words, confuse the sequence of letters, have difficulty retaining learnt spelling patterns over the long term, and have problems transferring this knowledge to their writing. They often use inefficient visual strategies, such as relying on visual memory to recall spellings, and this often results in incorrectly sequenced or missing letters. Just like reading, improving spelling is not something that “just happens”. A structured, systematic, and intensive program is needed focussing on the acquisition of skills in six core areas (as detailed below).

It is important that any literacy intervention undertaken focuses on the development of both reading and spelling skills.

## 1. Phonological Awareness

- Spelling words should be introduced by listening to the word (e.g., parent or teacher reads spelling words aloud) before the student even sees the word. This will encourage the student to focus on the sounds in words which can then be mapped to their letters and letter patterns rather than emphasising only the visual features of the word.
- When introducing new spelling words, students should be encouraged to identify key aspects of the word's phonological structure before they are shown the word (e.g., How many syllables? What is the first sound? What is the last sound? etc.).

## 2. Phonics Knowledge

- Upper primary and lower secondary students who struggle with spelling often lack knowledge of the extended phonic code (i.e., complex patterns and alternative spelling choices) They need to understand that speech sounds (phonemes) are represented by one or more letters (graphemes), and that when we spell we choose the most likely representation (e.g., the /k/ sound is sometimes spelt with a 'c' as in cat, or 'k' as in kick). A good way to do this is through Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping, in which a grid is used to map sounds to their corresponding letter/s (see Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping tip sheet for more details on this approach).
- In order to develop children's phonics knowledge, a structured and systematic program focusing on synthetic phonics is highly recommended. Some examples of highly structured, evidence-based programs include *Sounds~Write*, *Alpha to Omega*, and *Teaching Literacy to Learners with Dyslexia: A Multi-Sensory Approach* (see Examples of Phonics Programs tip sheet for more details regarding specific programs).
- Any program will be most effective when it is undertaken on a regular basis (4-5 days per week) for a limited time (15 -30 minutes).
- A trained specialist teacher or tutor is the best person to deliver remediation.
- Useful resources to support phonics development
  - The **DSF Tune into the Sounds of English Pack – Extended Code** features colourful information cards detailing the sounds of English and the way we write them down (spelling patterns), in addition to a Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping pad for practicing spelling and a comprehensive and user-friendly Spelling Rules and Grammar booklet.
  - The **DSF Phonics Activity Pack** is an ideal resource for phonics-based intervention at any level. It includes a small magnetic whiteboard with a full set of 78 magnetic alphabet letters, digraphs, trigraphs, and vowel teams. Use the letter tiles to assist with a phonemic approach to spelling and to encourage the blending of sounds and segmenting of words. It also encourages reluctant writers to have a go at spelling.

## Tip Sheet

## Spelling Remediation for Upper Primary and Lower Secondary Students (continued)

- **Computer-based programs** are useful and motivating resources for children to reinforce and consolidate their learning. Both *Wordshark* and the *Nessy Learning Program* are effective highly-structured, games-based computer programs aimed at improving reading and spelling skills.

### 3. Spelling Conventions and Patterns

- Children need to develop their knowledge of orthographic rules including acceptable letter combinations, letter sequences and the use of certain letters. Spelling conventions provide us with guidelines about the use of letter combinations and sequences and when to use them. For example, the letter 'c' usually represents the /k/ sound when followed by an 'a', 'o' and 'u' as in *cat*, *cot*, *cut*, and it usually represents the /s/ sound when followed by 'e', 'i', and 'y' as in *centre*, *city*, *cycle*.
- Explicitly teach syllable division patterns and rules for contractions, possessives, plurals and abbreviations.
- Encourage children to become "word detectives" and look for consistencies in English spelling rules. Word sorts are a useful activity to explore patterns within words.
- *Spell-It* has been created by the team behind the *MultiLit* programs. It is specifically designed for students in the upper primary and secondary years who have limited knowledge of spelling conventions.
- Some useful resources for spelling rules are: the *Tune into the Sounds of English Spelling Rules and Grammar booklet* (DSF), the *Spelling Rules Directory* (Smart Kids), *Signposts for Correct Spelling* (J. Bullus & P. Coles), *The Spelling Rulebook* (SEN Marketing), and *Spelling for Life* (L. Stone).

### 4. Metacognitive and Memory Skills

- Children may benefit from using memory 'tricks' and strategies to remember irregular words and complex patterns. These include:
  - Over-articulation of words to inform spelling choices (e.g., *Wed-nes-day*, *iSland*)
  - Knowledge of word families, including letter patterns in common (e.g., 'wh' question words: when/who/what/which; words with links in meaning: two/twin/twice; common orthographic patterns: light/night/sight)
  - Occasional use of mnemonics (e.g., "Bears Eat Apples Under Trees" for beautiful)
  - Does it look right? (e.g., *friend/frend*, *teech/teach*)

### 5. Morphology and Syntax (Grammar)

- Explicit instruction in morphology and syntax teaches children to identify and analyse units of meaning within words (i.e., roots, prefixes and suffixes), and consider their spelling within the context of a sentence. Knowledge of a word's grammatical function informs spelling choices when typical sounding-out strategies are unsuccessful (meaning trumps pronunciation e.g., musician, not musishun). This includes:
  - Expanding knowledge of grammatical function within a sentence (e.g., although we say a /t/ at the end of regular past tense verbs as in 'kicked', we always write 'ed' to show the tense).
  - Expanding knowledge about typical changes at the end of words to indicate grammatical changes (e.g., we always use 's' to signal plural, although it can sound like /z/ as in 'dogs').
  - Developing knowledge of suffixes to recognise parts of speech (e.g. -ly = adverbs, -ive = adjectives, -ment & -ion = nouns).

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## Spelling Remediation for Upper Primary and Lower Secondary Students (continued)

- A useful resource to assist in the development of children's knowledge of morphemes is the **DSF Magnetic Morpheme Cards**. Each magnetic card contains a morpheme – an element of speech which carries meaning. These include prefixes, base words and suffixes. The cards can be used on a small whiteboard for word building activities which focus on word families and Latin word structure. These activities are perfect for upper primary and secondary students.
- **Spelling Through Morphographs** is a direct instruction program designed to teach older students the rules for combining prefixes, suffixes, bases and roots.

### 6. Semantic Knowledge and Etymology

- For older children, developing their knowledge of word origins and meaning is a key component in the development of their spelling skills and helps to inform their spelling choices. For example:
  - Consideration of word meaning will aid in the spelling of homophones (e.g., where/wear).
  - Consideration given to the origin of the word will assist in determining the most likely spelling (e.g., /s/ = 'ps' in Greek-derived words like *psychologist*).
  - Understanding that many long words have a base component which carries meaning, influences the spelling, and remains constant despite the sounds we hear (e.g., *definite, finish, infinity*).
- Fun and engaging card games such as **CaesarPleaser** and **SocraTeaser** are great resources aimed at building students' spelling and word building skills, specifically focusing on Latin and Greek words.