

## Tip Sheet

# Spelling Remediation for Older Students and Adults

Individuals 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. Just like reading, improving spelling is not something that “just happens”. A structured, systematic and intensive program focussing on the acquisition of skills in six core areas is needed (as detailed below).

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

## 1. Phonological Awareness

- When spelling, you should start by listening to the words, breaking the word into syllables and carefully pronouncing or sounding out each syllable. This will encourage you to focus on the sound basis of words rather than the visual features of the word.

## 2. Phonics Knowledge

- For effective spelling we 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).
- In order to develop your phonics and spelling knowledge, a specialist teacher or tutor would be the best approach, if it is possible.
  - As an older student or adult, you will want your course of remediation to be targeted to your specific needs. However, many people with Dyslexia have “gaps” in the foundations of the reading and spelling process, often involving a difficulty with transcribing the sounds in words to letters on paper. Most tutors will suggest that you start a program from the appropriate level for your skills, even if you move through the early stages very rapidly. Some examples of highly structured, evidence-based programs include *Sounds~Write*, *Alpha to Omega*, and *SPELD SA’s Intensive Literacy Program* (Diana Hope) (See *Examples of Phonics Programs* tip sheet for more details regarding specific programs).
- **Computer-based programs** are useful resources for students and adults to reinforce and consolidate their learning.
  - Although they are aimed at younger children, 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

- In addition to an understanding of phonics, effective spelling requires the development of knowledge around 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.
- Some useful resources for spelling rules are: the *Tune into the Sounds of English Spelling Rules* and *Grammar* booklet (DSF), *Signposts for Correct Spelling* (J. Bullus & P. Coles) and *The Spelling Rulebook* (SEN Marketing).

## Tip Sheet

## Spelling Remediation for Lower Primary Students (continued)

### 4. Metacognitive and Memory Skills

- You may benefit from using memory 'tricks' and strategies to remember irregular words and complex patterns. Some useful strategies include:
  - Saying the word aloud, pronouncing even the letters which are not normally pronounced (e.g., *Wed-nes-day, iSland*)
  - Comparing the word with a similar word you can already spell (e.g., if you have trouble remembering how to spell *who*, but no trouble remembering *why*, say the phrase, "*Who is he and why is he there?*" to remind yourself that both words start with *wh-*).
  - Use of mnemonics (e.g., "*Bears Eat Apples Under Trees*" for beautiful)

### 5. Morphology and Syntax (Grammar)

- Understanding morphology (units of meaning within words) and syntax (impact of sentence structure and context) assists with spelling. 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 your 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 your 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 your knowledge of suffixes to recognise parts of speech (e.g. -ly = adverbs, -ive = adjectives, -ment & -ion = nouns).

### 6. Semantic Knowledge and Etymology

- Understanding the meaning and origin of a word can help you recall how to spell it (e.g., *sensation* and *sense* come from the French word *sens* (= feeling); *government* has an n because their job is to govern).
- Understanding that many long words have a base component which carries meaning, influences the spelling, and remains constant despite the sounds we hear can also assist with spelling (e.g., *definite*, *finish*, *infinity*).
- Think of words as occurring in families with common parts (e.g., *tele-* means far, and is spelt the same way in words such as *telescope*, *telephone* and *television*).