



## What's in this section?

- Writing
- Spelling
- Handwriting
- Useful references for this section

## Who is this section for?

This section is relevant to all adult literacy tutors. Even if your student says they have no need to write and want to concentrate on reading, the two go hand in hand, so some attention to writing and spelling is necessary. Suggestions are included for beginners and more advanced students.

We are not primarily concerned with handwriting style in this section. By 'writing' we mean getting ideas on paper.

## Writing

Your aim is to help your student:

- manage the writing which they need to do now
- develop some strategies for coping with their writing needs in the future
- feel relaxed about writing for pleasure.

Everyone has some need to write from time to time, so find out what your student's main needs may be. Is it filling out the job sheets or docketts at work, writing SMS message to mates, writing on greeting cards, letters to school or family or job application forms? Begin by helping with the problems which arise with these tasks and help them develop some models which can be used for future reference.

But the writing shouldn't end there. Every session you have with your student should include some writing activity, even if they are a beginning reader/writer. For a beginner the writing may just take the form of copying to start with. They might copy out the language experience story which you have just written down, or you might help them write their address and the names of members of their family. However, as soon as they have developed some letter/sound knowledge, you should try to encourage them to move on quickly from copying to 'having a go first' at the spelling and to composing small pieces of writing themselves.

The best way for your student to improve their writing (and reading) is to write often. Their progress will be very slow if they only write once a week when they are with you. They need to write every day.

Not many people actually enjoy sitting down writing. Most of us find lots of excuses to put it off until tomorrow ... tomorrow ... tomorrow; even authors who write for a living. So your student is in good company if they don't much like the thought of putting pen to paper. You probably don't either.

By writing we mean composing, writing down your thoughts for the day, reminiscences, notes or letters. Writing does not refer here to handwriting style.

## The writing process

### 1. Pre writing - thinking time



There is an important stage in writing for all of us before we pick up the pen or sit down at the computer, and that is the thinking stage - thinking about what we are going to write and mustering our ideas. The writer needs time to rehearse a topic, perhaps to think up a good phrase to use or a good beginning sentence. Ideas will come while driving to work or doing the washing up .... This is especially important for novice or reluctant writers.

### 2. Looking at other models

It is also important that your student is familiar with other examples of the type of writing which they are about to do. Even if they are writing in a journal or a diary or writing a postcard, don't assume that they know what sort of things to write about or what sort of language to use. If they are about to do some journal or diary writing for example, you might need to write some models for them. Or if they need to write a business letter you could bring along a number of similar letters and look carefully at the way they are laid out and the way the language is used. *What kind of writing does your student want or need to do?* in Section 5 (page 6) deals with this in more detail.

### 3. Modelling the writing process

The best way for you to discover the difficulties of writing is for you to write to and with your student. You might, for example exchange stories about your school days, or your township as you remember it when you were young. You might exchange letters or emails with them. Write a letter to your student one week and ask them to write a reply during the week or at the next session. This will give them time to think about what they are going to write, and you have given them a model to work from.

If you do start to write with your student you will discover for example that it is often not possible to know exactly what you are going to write until you start to write it. The old school rule of planning a composition before you start to write it usually does not result in good writing. You often just have to start writing whatever comes into your head first and it will fall into shape as you are writing or you can shape it in the redrafting stage.

### 4. The first draft - getting ideas on paper

One of the problems with writing is that you can't have your mind on composing and spelling and correct punctuation and neat handwriting all at the same time. When we dash off a postcard to a friend, we have our minds on the composing process because the spelling and punctuation and handwriting have become almost automatic for us.



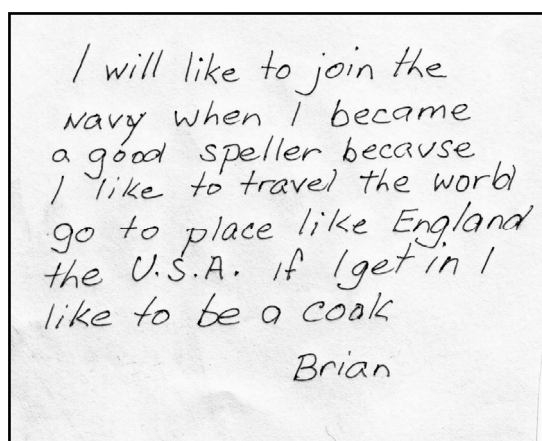
We need to help our students focus on one thing at a time. To start with, you should encourage your student to concentrate on the composing part of the process. In this first step they shouldn't worry about the spelling. Tell them to try to make it up. The first aim is to get them to do a lot of writing and to feel happy about doing it. If they have to stop at every second word to ask *How do you spell ...?* or to consult a dictionary, they will forget what they were going to say in the first place and the process will be tedious and frustrating.

If they can't even guess at some of the words then they could write part of the word and fill in the rest with a dash like *th--*. After all, this is just the first rough draft. It is just for them to look at and they will know what the word is meant to be.

We are not suggesting that spelling is not important. It is. But we deal with that later.

This approach will also help a student avoid another problem with writing; that of leaving out words, of writing incomplete sentences or ungrammatical sentences. We are referring here to students who have a good grasp of the oral language but who write ungrammatical sentences which they would not say orally. The issue of grammar for students of a non English speaking background is referred to elsewhere. (See Section 7 *Is your student from a non-English speaking background?*)

Consider this piece of writing. What advice would you give the writer?



At first glance we might be tempted to say that Brian is a careless writer and must be encouraged to slow down and take more care. However, Brian's writing is in fact the result of a very careful and painful process. He is a very poor speller but an avid dictionary user. He would have consulted the dictionary for many words in this piece. He is so concerned with the spelling that he can't hold a whole sentence in his head as he is writing. The result is that he loses control of the sentence and ungrammatical sentence fragments result.

Just as the poor reader, who tries to sound out nearly every word, doesn't understand what they are reading because they are concentrating on letters and sounds, so also the writer who has to concentrate on spelling can't have their mind on the overall flow of the sentence. Just as one piece of advice to the poor reader would be to read faster by guessing what the problem words might be, so the advice to the poor writer would be to write faster by guessing at problem spellings.

This procedure, writing quickly in the first draft would help avoid many of the errors in Brian's writing. He also needs to be taught to proof read what he has written very carefully. In the long run, however, Brian's writing errors will only decrease with a lot of writing practice. Only practice will help him hold a whole sentence in his head while he is working on part of it.

## 5. Proofreading

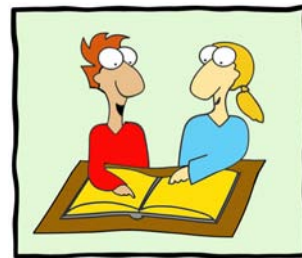
Having done a quick first draft, your student needs to be taught to proofread and correct it. This is a two step procedure: the spelling and punctuation and then the ideas. It is probably best to start by fixing the spelling. Tell your student to put a line under any words they were not sure of or which they think may be wrong, and to have another try at them if they can.

To fix the punctuation (only worry about full stops and capital letters initially) and to make sure they have used complete sentences. It is useful to get them to read it aloud so that they can hear what they have written and try to pick up the omitted words and parts that just don't sound right. They may be able to correct a lot of it themselves at this stage.

Then look at the ideas. Have they said what they intended to say? Have they left something out? Does one idea flow naturally to the next?

### Your role

When your student gives it to you to read, respond to the ideas first. Remember, it is a piece of communication, just as if they had told you an anecdote orally. (*Yes, I know just what you mean ...*) Then help them work out the correct spelling or just write it for them. (See the next section on *Spelling*.) Some pieces of writing, such as journal or diary entries, may be just left at that point. The exercise has provided some writing practice and your student will learn some spelling words from it.



However, it is good to encourage your student do some pieces of writing which are rewritten again until they are perfect. In this case you correct all the spelling errors and punctuation then help them edit it if necessary. You might decide together that it needs a better introduction or they might decide to leave out something which turns out to be irrelevant. The best way that someone else can help a writer is to help them talk about it. To ask *What is it mainly about?* helps to clarify their ideas and sort out the irrelevant parts much better than the red pen. You should avoid the role of critic.

## 6. The final draft

Then the student copies it out as a final draft.

## What kind of writing does your student want or need to do?

Think of some different occasions when we need or choose to write, and the different styles or types of writing which we adopt:

- notes to the family
  - messages on greeting cards
  - formal business letters
  - letters to family or friends
  - emails
  - text messages
  - diary or journal writing
  - poetry, short stories
- Work related writing such as:
- invoices
  - end of shift reports
  - accident or incident reports
  - quotations
  - log records
  - instructions
  - memos

There are different rules or conventions concerning these different types of writing which your student needs to learn also. We use language differently according to the purpose for which we are using it. The rules governing the way the boss uses language to write a staff memo are different from the rules governing the way we might write a note to the family to tell them dinner is in the oven. Don't assume your student knows these rules.

Think of the type of language we might use if we had to write an accident report and compare it with the language we might use in a postcard to a friend or if we are writing out a recipe. You have probably unconsciously absorbed the different conventions for writing these different text types but they need to be made explicit for your student.

These different text types are called genres. Below are some of the common genres which your student might need to write and some of the common features of each. You should note however, that sometimes we use several genres in the same piece of writing. A personal letter for example may contain one part which is a recount and another which is a description.

### Some common text types (genres)

Genre or text type	Examples	Features
<p><b>Recount</b> (telling what happened) This may be the most common type of writing your student does.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A personal letter</li> <li>• Journal entry</li> <li>• End of shift report</li> <li>• Accident report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure usually consists of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ orientation (who, when, where)</li> <li>◦ then detail the events, usually time sequenced</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Use past tense</li> <li>• Action verbs (went, did, thought ...)</li> <li>• Linking words to do with time (after, then, next ...)</li> <li>• May include personal reactions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Narrative</b> (like a recount but with a twist)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure usually consists of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ orientation (who, when, where)</li> <li>◦ then detail the events, which contain one or more twists or complications</li> <li>◦ then conclusion or resolution</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Use past tense</li> <li>• Action verbs (went, did, thought ...)</li> <li>• Linking words to do with time (after, then, next ...)</li> <li>• Lots of describing words</li> </ul>
<p><b>Description</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A letter</li> <li>• Journal entry</li> <li>• Study assignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of describing words</li> <li>• Use of comparisons</li> </ul>
<p><b>Procedure</b> (how to do something)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recipes</li> <li>• Do-it-yourself instructions</li> <li>• Equipment instructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure usually consists of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ the goal (sometimes just a heading)</li> <li>◦ materials (listed)</li> <li>◦ method (sequentially in steps).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Verbs are action words and commands usually placed at or near the beginning of the sentence (take, beat, dampen, screw ...)</li> <li>• Usually set out in point form or a series of numbered steps.</li> </ul>

### Some common text types (genres)

<p><b>Argument</b> (or point of view) Presents only one side of the case, ie for or against.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A letter to the editor</li> <li>• Study assignment</li> <li>• Exam question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid the use of over emotive words</li> <li>• Frequent use of passive voice (The man was hit by the car.)</li> <li>• Verbs are mainly simple present tense</li> <li>• Use of logical connective words (therefore, so, because of, however ...)</li> <li>• Structure usually consists of:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ statement of the point of view first</li> <li>○ then development of the argument point by point with use of examples, statistics and facts</li> <li>○ restatement of the position at the end.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Discussion</b> (similar to an argument but presenting two or more points of view)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study assignment</li> <li>• Exam question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid the use of over emotive words</li> <li>• Verbs are mainly simple present tense</li> <li>• Use of logical connective words (therefore, so, because of, however ...)</li> <li>• Structure usually consists of:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ introduction - states the issue and the points of controversy</li> <li>○ then statement of the argument for, point by point with use of examples, statistics and facts</li> <li>○ then argument against, point by point with use of examples, statistics and facts.</li> <li>○ then conclusion - a recommendation based on the weight of evidence.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Explanation</b> (how or why something happens)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study assignment</li> <li>• Exam question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbs are simple present (or sometimes past) tense</li> <li>• Structure usually consists of:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ a general statement</li> <li>○ a sequenced explanation of how or why, usually a series of logical steps in the process, in the order in which they happen</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Linking words to do with time (first, following, finally ...)</li> <li>• Linking words to do with cause and effect relationships (if/then, as a result, since ...)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social action</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter of complaint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure usually consists of:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ statement of events/facts</li> <li>○ statement of results of the problem</li> <li>○ request for it to be fixed. What next?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Avoid the use of over emotive words.</li> </ul>



## Different text types - a helpful teaching/learning approach

1. Look at a number of examples of the type of text your student needs to write.
  - What is the purpose of the text? (to inform ... to instruct ... to tell what happened ... to argue a point of view?)
  - Who is the audience? (Family or friend ... the boss ... unknown bureaucrat?)
  - How is the text laid out?
  - What sort of language is used? Are the verbs in the present or past tense? Is the language warm and friendly or distant and formal?
  - Do the texts have a particular structure? What does the author write about in the first and last paragraphs?
  - What information does the author include?
2. Work with your student to jointly write an example.
3. Now your student writes one by themselves.

### A model

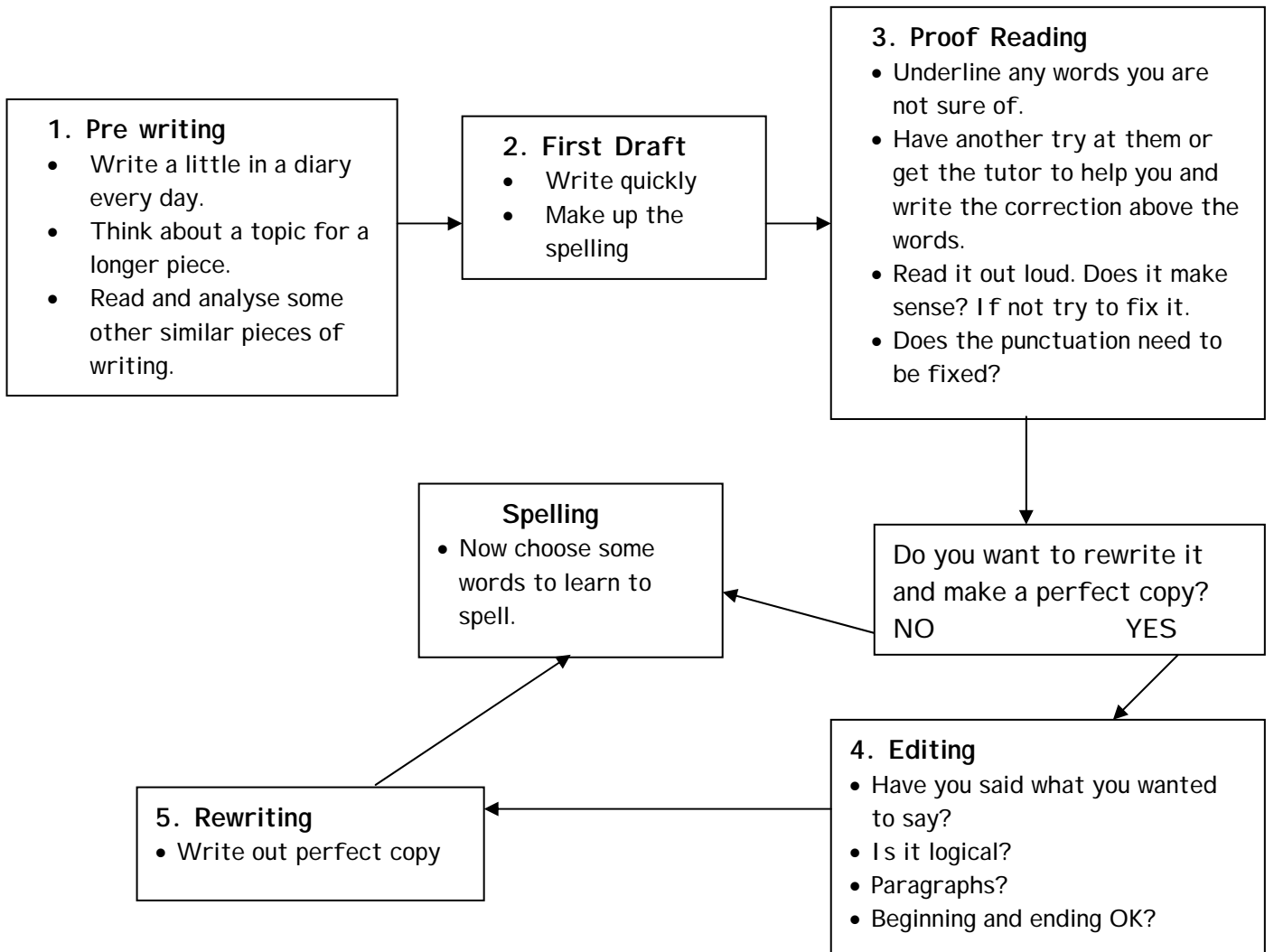
Your student needs to write a letter to the real estate agent to complain about a leaking roof.

1. You look at some similar letters that fall into the social action genre, such as this one:

	5 Bass Rd Punchbowl NSW 1234 15.4.05	← Your address
		← Date
Address of receiver →	Bloggs Real Estate 66 Smith St Punchbowl	
Greeting →	Dear Sir/Madam	
Subject of the letter →	Re: Bellevue Apartments 3 Bass Rd	
	I wish to inform you that in the storm last Friday, a large branch of a tree in the garden of the above property, which you manage, fell into my front garden and knocked down the fence.	
	I rang your office on Monday to ask for it to be fixed but nothing has been done.	← Statement of facts
	The fence looks unsightly and I am worried that it will fall right down.	← Statement of results
	Will you please send someone to cut off the branch and fix the fence as soon as possible.	← Request for action
Signature →	Yours faithfully	
Printed name →	Maria Poulos	

2. Look at:
  - the way the letter is set out
  - the language used - that is, slightly formal and a bit distant, but polite.
2. Gather the information needed to write your student's letter (address, dates of events etc).
3. Write the letter together.
4. Set another scenario for your student to write a practice letter with less help from you.
5. After your student has proofread it and is happy with it, edit it together and if necessary they write a perfect copy.
6. Your student should keep this as a model to use in the future.

## The writing process



## What to write about?

Apart from the writing that your student needs to do, you need to find topics to write about so they get plenty of writing practice and hopefully start to enjoy it. These are some suggestions which you might like to consider (together). It is also a good idea to get a copy of an adult literacy magazine with student writings in it as a stimulus for other ideas. Most states in Australia have one or more organizations which publish student writings.

### A diary

It is a good idea to encourage your student to keep a diary or journal and to write a few sentences every night. It might be about something that happened during the day or maybe something they heard on the radio or TV has prompted some thinking. The diary may be something they choose not to share with you - somewhere to make their own mistakes and that's okay.

It may be useful for you to model diary entries - for you to keep a diary which you share. The entries may be centred on your sessions together - what activities you did, how you felt about it etc.

### Email

If you both have access to a computer, help your student register for an email address (See section 9 *Getting started on the computer*) and email each other regularly.



### Longer pieces of writing

If your student gets used to keeping a diary they will develop a list of topics which they might like to expand when they get time to sit down and do a longer piece of writing.

They will feel happier about working on successive drafts and perfecting them if they are writing for a real purpose rather than just writing for you. They may like to:

- Send their most interesting pieces to an adult literacy student magazine to be published.
- Write a birthday letter to a friend or relative.
- Write a story for children or grandchildren about the funny things they get up to.
- Ask an older relative to talk about the family history and write it up for the family.
- Write about their country of birth and arriving in Australia for younger generations of the family.
- Write out favourite recipes and put them in a booklet.
- Stick all those loose photographs in a scrapbook and write captions under them.
- Make a scrapbook about a hobby. Stick newspaper or magazine pictures in it and write captions or stories beside them.

- Write a mini-article about an area of expertise - breeding dogs or fixing cars or growing tomatoes.
- Find a pen-friend to write to, perhaps someone like themselves who is working on improving their writing skills.

## **What materials do you need?**

- Pens
- Writing paper for drafts
- A folder or exercise book to keep completed work and models for future reference
- Examples or models of different text types (eg postcards, business letters, journal entries, recipes)
- Stimulus materials (magazine articles, adult literacy student magazines, photographs)

## Spelling

Your aim is to help your student:

- learn to spell the words which they need to use often
- develop a range of strategies for dealing with spelling problems as they arise.

### The problem with spelling

The buoy and the none tolled hymn they had scene  
a pear of bear feat in the haul outside hour rheum.

Reading this passage gives us further insights into the reading process. It also gives us insights into the problems with English spelling on which we are now going to focus.

The words in the above sentence are just a few of the many in the English language for which there are two or more spellings for words which are pronounced the same.

Here are some more. You could easily add to them.

sea see	course coarse
where wear we're	write right
their there they're	pair pear pare
hear here	to two too
great grate	

In other words, the English language does not have a 1:1 correspondence between letters and sounds. The same sound can be represented by different combinations of letters.

Consider the different spelling of the *sh* sound in these words:

chaperone	mission	sugar	fuschia
ocean	shoe	nation	

Moreover, the same letters can be represented by different sounds. Consider the different pronunciation of *nat* in these words.

nature	nation	national	nativity
--------	--------	----------	----------

It is understandable therefore that your students will have trouble with spelling. In general, progress with spelling is slower than with reading because with reading there are other clues to help us predict what the word will be.

The problem is due, in part to the influence of other languages on the English language. For example the *ʃh* sound is spelt *sh* in Old English words but the same sound is spelt *ch* in French and we have imported a number of French words such as *chef*, *chauffeur*, *chateau*. Words which are spelt with *ph* pronounced *f* are of Greek origin, so we have words of Greek derivation such as *phantom* alongside English words in which the *f* sound is spelt with an *f*.

The other main reason for the problem with spelling is that English is a living, changing language and changes in pronunciation occur faster than changes in spelling. For example, words which now have silent letters would once have been pronounced as they are spelt. *knot* would once have been pronounced with the *k* and *should* would have been pronounced with the *l*. Consider also the *wh* words such as *when*, *where* and *why*. They were once spelt and pronounced *hwaenne*, *hwaer* and *hwȳ*. However, that pronunciation was clumsy so the *h* was, in time, dropped from pronunciation and simply moved to second position in spelling.

Of course this adds to the wonderful richness of the English language but people who are struggling with the spelling don't always see it that way. Don't forget however that a great many words are spelt as they sound. In fact 80% of English spelling is regular and follows a pattern.

## What do you do when you have a spelling problem?

It is important that your student knows that even people who consider themselves good spellers occasionally have a spelling query and the rest of us strike problems very often. The main problems seem to be:

- deciding whether to use double or single consonants in a word
- working out which vowel to use – especially when it is the indeterminate vowel (*schwah*) or *uh* sound which can be represented by any of the vowels.



Most of us would say we deal with these problems by:

- Writing the word in alternative ways to see which one looks right. This is not very useful for someone who is struggling with literacy and who doesn't have a very large bank of words in their visual memory.
- Consulting a dictionary. To begin with this is not very helpful for your student either. You need to be able to spell the beginning of the word and know how to find your way around a dictionary to start with.
- Asking someone. However most of our students don't feel secure enough about their literacy to be able to expose themselves by doing this.

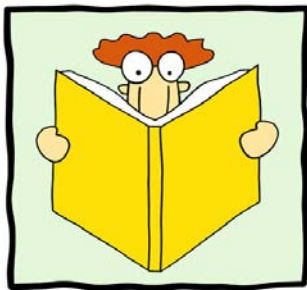
It will help your student if you model this *How do I spell ...?* behaviour for them frequently. Admit that you are not sure about a word and use the dictionary often.

## Learning to spell

When we are spelling or learning to spell, we are using three senses:

1. The **visual memory** for the appearance of the word. This is perhaps the most important factor in learning to spell.
2. The **sound** of the word is also important. You should check that your student is saying the word correctly and hearing the sounds in the word. You should be aware however, that even the most careful speakers do not pronounce words the way they are spelt. For example, when we say *walked* we do not pronounce the ending as it is spelt. What we are actually saying is something like *wor<sup>h</sup>kt*. People from a non-English speaking background in particular will have trouble with this aspect of spelling.
3. The feel of the word as we write it is also important in learning to spell. Many people say that a mis-spelling can actually feel wrong.

We are also drawing on our knowledge of the meaning of the word and its context.



**LOOK** at the word carefully.  
Photograph it in your mind



**HEAR** the sounds in the word.  
Spell it to yourself and say it slowly.



**FEEL** the flow of it as you write it



**THINK** about the difficult bit  
Why did you get it wrong?  
How can you remember it?

## Learning to spell routine

### Selecting words to learn

Your student will have two sources of words to learn. One source is from the 'survival words' which they need to learn. These may be words for filling in forms for work or in other contexts. The other source is from their writing.



- When the first draft of a piece of writing is finished make sure your student first proof reads it themselves. Tell them to put a line under any words they think may not be right, then have another try at them, perhaps with prompting from you. (*It's almost right but have another look at the ending. Can you think of another way it could be spelt? ...* )
- Praise the attempts. Very few mistakes will be all wrong so reinforce the parts that are correct.
- You write the words which they have identified as mistakes correctly on the piece of writing, perhaps above the mistake or at the bottom of the writing.
- Then help the student select a number of words to be learnt during the week. Don't try to work on all the mistakes as they will probably become confused and dispirited. If there are any words which are important words for the student that they need to use often, and that are not selected as possible mistakes, then you might point these out also. The number of words which you choose will depend on the student. For a beginner, two or three words a week may be enough to start with.
- Don't go through the piece and correct all the mistakes unless of course the piece of writing is for someone else to read, such as a letter or unless the student wants to rewrite it to produce a perfect draft just for their own satisfaction.

### Work at committing the words to memory

- Write the words out clearly on a sheet of paper. You should print in lower case letters.
- If it is a long word help the student to break the word into syllables and pronounce it that way. For example *un/for/gett/able*.
- Ask the student to copy the word carefully. If it is a long word, encourage them to study the word and try to remember it in chunks and not to copy letter by letter. Then ask them to underline the difficult bit which causes the mistake and ask themselves why they got it wrong and work out a way to remember it.
- The student then re-writes the word several times while spelling it to themselves. Writing words over and over usually seemed like punishment at school, but it is really a most effective way of learning to spell a word. You are reinforcing the three senses: the look of the word, the sound of it and the feel of it.

### Self testing

- The student should then cover it over and try to write it from memory then check it themselves.
- Ten minutes later, try again.
- At the end of the session, try again.
- Next session, try again.



### **Keep a record of these selected words**

You might choose to record these words in the back of an exercise book or in a small notebook. Many adult literacy students keep a small notebook with an alphabetical index down the side (eg an address book) This becomes their personal dictionary. It serves two purposes - to review what has been learnt and also to serve as a reference to consult when the need arises.

For a real beginner writer who is not familiar with the letters of the alphabet, it is useful to stick a picture on each page (from a magazine or the internet) depicting a word which begins with the particular letter. (See *Handwriting p 28*)

Or you may like to use a spelling practice sheet such as the one on the next page.

## Spelling practice sheet

<b>WORD</b>	<b>Memory jogger</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> try 10 mins later</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> try 1 hour later</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> try next day</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> try next week</b>

## Some more helpful hints for learning to spell

Some words take a little more effort to learn or maybe your student has to unlearn an incorrect spelling. This section will suggest some activities which they might find useful. Experiment until you find which activities work for your student. If they need to sharpen up their visual memory, then concentrate on the visual strategies. If they have trouble hearing the sounds in the words, then concentrate on the auditory strategies also. Some of these suggestions are just variations on the 'write it again and again' instruction, included here to give a little variety to the spelling diet.



- Stress the **rhythm** of the word as it is said. Break it into syllables and give a stress to each syllable.
- It may help to **exaggerate the pronunciation** of some words so that the spelling pattern is heard in the pronunciation. This is useful in words which have silent letters in them. For example:

par/i/a/ment

Wed/nes/day

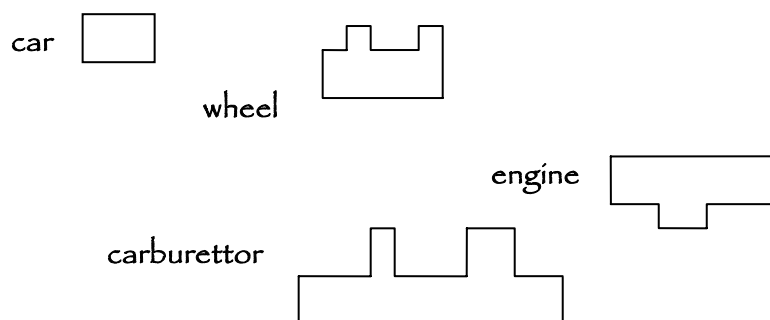
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- **Colour** aids the visual memory. Try writing the word with the problem bit in red.

embarr**ass**ment

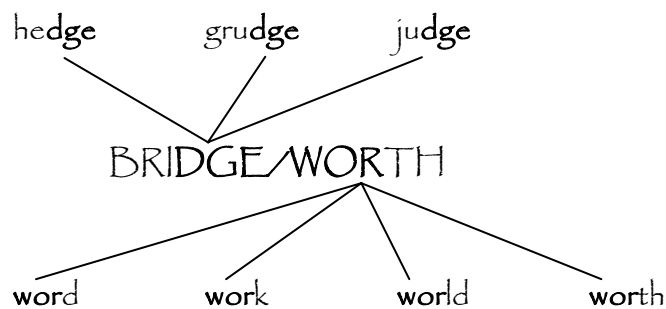
Feb**ru**ary

- Use **flash cards** to sharpen the visual memory for the way a word looks. Write a word the student wants to learn on a piece of paper or flash card and allow a quick peep at it. Just a flash. During that peep the student has to try to photograph it in their mind. Then they write down as much of it as can be recalled. If they can't recall all of it then allow another peep and try again. Then let them check it themselves.
- Another way to help a student become conscious of the appearance of words and sharpen up their visual memory is to get them to match some words to their **outline shapes**. You might start by getting the student to draw the outline shapes, taking into account the letters that go below the line and those that go above. Then mix them up and a little later, ask them to match them up again.



- **Speed copying** is another way to improve the visual memory and fluency of handwriting. Ask your student to copy out three or four lines of writing as quickly as possible and time each effort. The trick is to encourage picturing larger and larger chunks rather than copying a few letters at a time.
- Encourage **curiosity about words**. Encourage your student to take notice of the words all around us in environmental print - in advertisements, signs etc, and try to remember the spelling of one or two words they have noticed during the week.
- Help your student to build lists of words which share **similar spelling/sound patterns** using their personal errors as a basis. For example, they have just learnt to spell *light*. Then add *might, sight, flight, fright, right, tight*.
- **Using a hook** is a variation of this approach. Take a longish word which your student knows how to spell, for example, their name, the name of their street or town etc. and use parts of it to remember other spellings or to 'hook' other spellings on to.

For example, the address is Bridgeworth Rd.



- **Mnemonics** or trick ways of remembering spellings. For example:

Which is correct?                    *necessary*

*neccessary*

*necesary*

*necessary*

You could remember that it is necessary to have one **C**ollar and two **S**ocks. That is, one **C** and two **S**'s.



Which is correct?            e**m**barassment  
   e**b**arrassment  
   e**b**arrasment  
   e**b**arrassment

You could remember that when you are embarrassed you have two **R**<sub>osy</sub> ears and two **S**<sub>carlet</sub> cheeks. That is, two **R**'s and two **S**'s.

Which is the correct spelling?    p*ie*ce  
   p*ei*ce  
   p*ea*ce

If you can spell pie then you can remember a *pie*ce of *pie*.

Of course we can't remember a mnemonic for every word we need to learn to spell but it is sometimes useful to make up a trick way of remembering the ones which we find most troublesome. Moreover, your student will remember them better if they are mnemonics which they have made up for themselves.

- **Visual mnemonics** are also useful.



Confusion over **b** and **d**? Get your student to think of **bed**. It looks a bit like a bed but if you turn the letters around the other way (**deb**) then there is not much room to lie in.

- Another way to drill a difficult word over and over is to ask your student to try writing it out several times, each time with one letter missing. After half an hour they should go back and see how quickly they can **replace the missing letters**.

Feb\_uary

Februa\_y

F\_bruary

Febr\_ary

Fe\_ruary

Febru\_ry

- Thinking about the **meaning** of a word can help connect it with other words with similar meaning and this will help with the spelling.

For example, which is correct?

medecine or medicine

The *uh* sound in the middle is the problem here. It could be spelt either way. However, if you think of *medical* or *medic* you can hear that the problem vowel is clearly *i*.

Sometimes parts of words carry their own meaning. For example, we usually add *s* or *es* to words to indicate the plural. It will help your student to remember that rule when they are tempted to write *I washed up the dishes*. It sounds like *ers* but only *es* is necessary to give the 'more than one' meaning.

For the student who can't remember how to spell the number *two*, think of *twin*, *twice*, *twenty*, *twelve*, all words which are linked in meaning and which share the same spelling pattern. Incidentally, the *w* in *two* would also have been pronounced long ago, but is now dropped from the pronunciation but not from the spelling.

It is a general rule then that words which are linked in meaning share similar spelling patterns but may not be pronounced the same (but there are exceptions).

- Understanding about **root words and prefixes and suffixes** will also help your student to see words in smaller, meaning based chunks which are easier to remember. Longer words which are built up in this way are usually spelt in a phonically regular way.

The rule is that when we add a prefix (the bit at the beginning), we just add it and don't change the spelling of the base or root word:

*dis* + *similar* → *dissimilar*

*un* + *natural* → *unnatural*

However, when we add a suffix or ending we sometimes have to change the spelling of the root word.

*replace* + *ing* → *replacing*

Take some common beginnings (prefixes) and endings (suffixes) and see how many you can add to some root words to make real words:

**Beginnings**

trans-

un-

pre-

re-

anti-

**Endings**

-ion

-ation

-able

-er

-ly



- Knowing the **origins of a word** can often help us remember the spelling. For example, which is correct?

coconut OR cocoanut

It helps if we know that the word is not linked with *cocoa* but comes from *coco*, a Portuguese word meaning *goblin*, the reference being to the monkey-like face on the coconut.

Knowing a little of the history of words helps to understand some of the apparently illogical aspects of the English language. It also helps develop a sense of curiosity about the language which is a very useful learning tool.

- You can create a **crossword puzzle** to practise spelling words. A free internet site can be found at [www.crosswordpuzzlegames.com/create.html](http://www.crosswordpuzzlegames.com/create.html). You can create your own crossword and print it.
- Some words sound the same but have different spellings (*to/too/two*, *here/hear*, *there/their*). Don't tackle these easily confused words at the same time, since things that are learnt at the same time tend to be associated in the mind. Instead, tackle one member of the confusing group on one occasion and the other some weeks later.

**What about spelling rules?**

There are a number of spelling rules which usually work, but most people don't remember them, other than perhaps *i before e except after c*. Your student may, however find it interesting to find out what some of these rules are. It helps to overcome the feeling that the language is very random and they will never master it. However, helping your student to make discoveries about these rules is a much more interesting way to go about it, and they are much more likely to remember them or work them out again at another time. (See *Some spelling rules or patterns p 26*) There are a number of books with lists of spelling rules and spelling patterns which you can use as a reference. See the reference list at the end of this section. Select patterns for attention as they arise in your student's writing rather than working systematically through a book.



## Using a dictionary

Your student needs to be taught how to use a dictionary. First, check that they know the alphabet sequence. If not, teach it by breaking the alphabet into four or five chunks and drill them.

They then need to know how to find their way around the dictionary. For example, they need to know that other tenses of a verb are listed after the main word and not as a separate entry. Most dictionaries have a section which will help you with this.

A speller's dictionary will probably be a useful friend for your student. This is a dictionary which also lists common mis-spellings or phonetic spellings with the correct spelling beside. There are several of these dictionaries on the market. (See the reference list.)

## What materials do you need?

- Lists of words that the student needs to write (eg for work)
- Pieces of writing that they have done
- Pens and scrap paper to practise spelling
- Coloured pens
- Somewhere to keep a list of personal spelling words, such as a personal dictionary note book
- A spelling practice sheet
- Dictionary

## Some spelling rules or patterns

Spelling rules don't always apply and your student won't remember them anyway. Do you? Nevertheless, it is sometimes interesting to see how they work.

In order to talk about spelling rules we need to know a few simple terms:

**Vowel** – a e i o u (sometimes y)

**Consonant** – all the other letters

**Long vowel sound** – The sound the vowel makes when you say its name in the alphabet. mate, here, ripe, rope, tube

**Short vowel sound** – mat, met, rip, top, tub

In general, if you are talking about spelling rules, it is best to help the student discover the rule. For example:

We usually add *s* to words when we mean more than one of them.

one apple   many apples

However, look at these words:

baby - babies

fly - flies

lady - ladies

cherry - cherries

berry - berries

enemy - enemies

These words do not just add *s* to the singular to make the plural form. Can you work out what rule is used? Your rule should go something like this:

*Words which end in .... change the ..... to .... and add ...*

## Some useful rules

1. Silent *e* at the end of a word can change a short vowel sound into a long vowel sound.

mat - mate   rip - ripe   tub - tube

2. *q* is always followed by *u* plus another vowel. Sounds kw.

quiet, queen, squash (except QANTAS - which is an anagram.)

3. A single *s* or *z* at the end of a word is always followed by a silent *e*.

horse, cause, sneeze

4. *f*, *l* and *s* are doubled at the end of most words of one syllable

ball, full, loss, dress, sniff

5. í before e (piece, quiet) except after c (receive, ceiling) or when it sounds like long a (reign, weight)
6. The sound í at the end of a word is written y (reply, spy)

## Forming plurals

Most words make their plural form by adding *s*.

apple – apples

- Words which end in *s*, *sh*, *ch* or *x* form their plural by adding *es*

bus – buses

church – churches

bush – bushes

fox – foxes

- Words which end in *f* or *fe* form their plural by changing the *y* to *i* and add *es*.

calf – calves

knife – knives

wife – wives

(A few exceptions including roofs)

## Adding other endings

- When a word ends in a consonant + *y*, change the *y* to *i* before adding *-er* or *-est*.

silly – sillier

funny – funniest

- Drop the silent *-e* at the end of a word before adding *-er*, *-est*, *-ing* or *-ed*.

write – writer

ripe – ripest

shine – shining

bake – baked

- Some short words with short vowels in them double the final consonant before adding *-ing*, *-er*, *-est*, or *-ed*.

run – running

slip – slipped

fat – fatter

red – reddest

# Handwriting

## The tutor

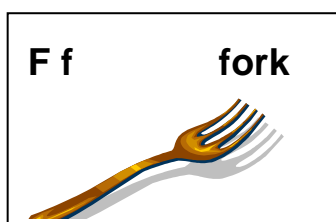
You should print when you are writing for your student. If you are not sure of the right way to form some of the letters, check the alphabet chart on the following page.

## The beginning reader/writer

The beginning reader/writer should be taught to print rather than to attempt running writing.

If your student is from a non-English speaking background and is new to the Roman script, or for some other reason has not learnt to write at all:

- Introduce one or two letters at a time, both upper and lower case, accompanied by a word which begins with that letter. This should be a word which is familiar to the student and which can be used as a memory prop. You can build up a word book or personal dictionary this way and they can add more words to the page as they learn to spell them. It is useful to begin with the letters in their name and address.



- Now print the letters in reasonably large print several times and ask your student to trace over them.
- Then ask them to copy the letter, perhaps ten or fifteen times.
- It may help to group together letters that are formed in a similar way. For example, r, n, m, h all start with a downward stroke.

## The post-beginner student

If your student has had some schooling and is confident about forming the letters, then let them write in whatever style they are comfortable with. In general, if their writing is legible, don't worry too much about handwriting style – they probably have more pressing learning needs. However, there are exceptions to this. If messy writing causes embarrassment at work or in other contexts, or if they print and particularly want to learn how to do joined-up or 'running writing' they may see their handwriting as one of their priority needs.

If your student wants to tidy up their printing style, follow the suggestions above. If they want to learn to do joined-up writing, the best advice would be to buy a book from a bookshop. Most bookshops sell cheap handwriting books written for children. There are a number of different styles and the style used in schools in each state is different. For example, the style used in NSW is called Foundation Style.

<b>A a</b>	<b>B b</b>	<b>C c</b>	<b>D d</b>
<b>E e</b>	<b>F f</b>	<b>G g</b>	<b>H h</b>
<b>I i</b>	<b>J j</b>	<b>K k</b>	<b>L l</b>
<b>M m</b>	<b>N n</b>	<b>O o</b>	<b>P p</b>
<b>Q q</b>	<b>R r</b>	<b>S s</b>	<b>T t</b>
<b>U u</b>	<b>V v</b>	<b>W w</b>	<b>Y y</b>
<b>Z z</b>			

## Useful references for this section

- Barnard B. Kerr J. & Wilson L. *Writing Skills*, AMES NSW, 1997.
- Bossard P. Holloway J. & Mackey J. *To Write ... Too Right!* Canberra Institute of Technology, 1997.  
Ideas for writing and some brief useful information about punctuation, grammar and spelling. Takes a genre approach to writing. A good self-help book for the post-beginner student.
- Collins G. & Shore C. *Adult Spelling*, Books 1, 2 & 3, Jillicoe, 1997.  
Lots of exercises. Book 1 at a useful level for beginner reader/writer.
- Hague M. & Harris C. *Spelling Works*, Heinemann, 1996.  
Self help ideas. Assumes the student has some sound/letter knowledge. Also has links to some online spelling exercises at:  
<http://www.hi.com.au/spellingworks/worksheets.htm>
- Mullen D. *Numbers and Letters Workbook (It's Over to You series)*, NCELTR, 2005.  
Provides extensive practice in writing and speaking the alphabet and numbers.
- Sadler B. *Spelling Matters*, The Jacaranda Press, 1981.  
Now out of print but possibly available at libraries. An excellent source of stories about the history of the language and some exercises on spelling rules etc.
- Tucker E. *Spelling Essentials - A Handbook of English Spelling Rules and Definitions*, RIC Publications, 2003.  
A useful reference for tutors.
- *The Macquarie Spellers Friend*, The Macquarie Library, 2001.  
A useful spelling dictionary.

## Websites

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/> An excellent interactive site, written for adults, with exercises in literacy and numeracy.