

SPELLING STRATEGIES ● by J. Richard Gentry

Promote smart spelling with partner quizzes

Many aspects of an individualized spelling program are daunting. What teacher, for example, has time to give each student a separate weekly test? Getting kids to quiz one another is one solution. This idea not only saves you time, but it also strengthens skills because students work together on words they care about. To prepare for partner quizzes, students need to collect and study six to ten words that they have not yet mastered, but would find useful. These “need to know” words should come from weekly whole-class quizzes that you conduct and from students’ own writing. (For details on “need to know” word lists, see my article in the September, 1977 *Instructor*.)



Grades 2 - 6

Matching Partners

PURPOSE:
To establish a weekly routine for bringing spelling partners together.

MATERIALS:
A set of student name cards, students’ “need to know” word lists

TIME NEEDED:
5 minutes at the end of each week

1. To prepare / create cards with individual student names on them.
2. Ask students to get out their “need to know” lists for the week and gather in the classroom meeting area. Be sure their lists are neat and readable. If a list contains homophones, such as our and hour, the student should draw a picture clue, such as a clock, next to one of the words to help the test giver distinguish them.
3. Shuffle the cards and draw pairs randomly to determine who will work together.
4. Have students find their partners and select a spot in the classroom.

PURPOSE:
To clarify procedures for administering partner quizzes.

TIME NEEDED:
10 minutes

Carrying Out Partner Quizzes

- Once students have agreed on a place to work, explain that the purpose of partner quizzes is to help them help each other become better spellers. Then ask them to follow these steps.
1. Exchange lists and decide who will be quizzed first.
 2. Quiz givers should call out each word and use it in a sentence, while the quiz taker writes the word down. Remember no hints - your partner is responsible for knowing his or her own spelling words.
 3. If you’re the quiz giver and you can’t read a word, let your partner help if he or she can (without looking at the word), or ask the teacher to whisper it to you.
 4. When you’ve finished the first quiz, switch roles and repeat the process.
 5. Work quickly and efficiently. Two partner quizzes should take only about ten minutes.

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Scoring Partner Quizzes

PURPOSE:

To assess students and use results to inform teacher.

TIME

NEEDED:

5 minutes

1. After students have quizzed each other, have quiz givers call out the correct spelling of each word, while quiz takers mark the ones that they misspelled.
2. Ask students to turn in their quizzes so you can quickly check their work.
3. Have students recycle misspelled words by putting them back on their “need to know” lists.
4. If a student is continuously scoring poorly, confer with him/her to find out why. Students may need to try harder, work on fewer spelling words at a time, or choose easier words.
5. Have your super spellers use spelling time for vocabulary enrichment. Encourage them to identify words that they might use in their writing, but aren’t sure how to spell. One-fifth grader, for example, chose the word *millennium* to use as the title of a movie he wanted to write about. Most adults misspell *millennium*, but this student mastered it by researching the word and including it on his individualized spelling list.

Tips for Making partner quizzes work

1. **Keep spelling lists short.** Second graders should choose about six words a week, while older children should choose about ten. Short lists will reduce the time needed for partner quizzes and other spelling activities, leaving more time for reading and writing.
2. **Make sure lists are composed of words and patterns that your students use.** *Egypt*, for example, is generally more appropriate for fifth graders than *sarcophagus!*
3. **Don’t underestimate the power of recycling words.** Continued practice is a good way to build spelling consciousness.
4. **Set a tone of comfortable rigor.** Encouraging shorter lists or easier words for good reason doesn’t mean you’re lax about spelling.

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2nd grader's list

1. making
2. doing
3. riding

4. brown
5. they
6. house

5th grader's list

1. receive
2. neighbor
3. patient
4. frontier
5. pierce

Missed on spell check

6. bargain
7. modern
8. rearranging
9. interesting
10. orchestra

Missed in writing

These are typical individualized spelling lists, containing words derived from spell checks and kids' writing. On the 2nd graders list words 1 - 4 were misspelled on spell check. Words 5 - 6 were misspelled in writing. On the 5th grade list words 1 - 5 were misspelled on spell check and words 6 - 10 were misspelled in writing.

Focus kids' efforts with need-to-know words

Forget those romantic notions of learning to spell automatically by reading and writing. Children need focused word study. However, the practice of assigning 20 generic words weekly is inefficient because good spellers wind up working on words they already know, while poor spellers may not be ready to take on those words.

One solution is to help kids create *individualized* weekly spelling lists made up of developmentally appropriate words. By doing so, students will see the relevance of spelling because they'll be working with words they use. These activities will help you and your students find words for lists.

Grades 2 - 6

Finding Words Through Spell Checks

PURPOSE
To help students identify typical, developmentally appropriate spelling words that they haven't yet mastered.

1. Prepare for the activity by choosing ten developmentally appropriate words for your grade 3-6 classes, or six words for second graders. From this whole-class list, students will identify words for their individualized lists.
2. Introduce the activity by explaining to students that each week you will check their spelling of words writers like them often use. The ones they misspell should go on their Words-I-Need-to-Know list.

MATERIALS
spelling notebooks

TIME NEEDED
two 15 minute sessions
per week

3. Call out each word, use it in a sentence, and repeat it. Have students write the word down. Then, once you've presented all the words, write them correctly on the chalkboard or an overhead.
4. Ask students to check their spellings of each word using the circle-dot method- put a dot under each correct letter and a circle around any incorrect letters.
5. Have students choose up to five misspelled words for their individualized weekly lists; complete weekly lists with words from their writing (see the next two activities). Keep in mind, a good word list mixes pattern words, such as compounds, and nonpattern words.
6. Keep records on all students, even those who consistently spell all words correctly. Unlike traditional methods, a spell-check is not a waste of strong spellers' time - it simply confirms their ability to handle age-appropriate, high-frequency words and patterns.

Grades 2 - 6 **Green-penning Words in Kids' Writing**

PURPOSE

To help teachers pinpoint spelling words in students' writing

MATERIALS

**spelling notebooks,
green pen**

TIME NEEDED

10 minutes to introduce the routine

1. Keep a green pen on you at all times, with the goal of using it to help writers, not punish them.
2. If you spot a developmentally appropriate, high-frequency word misspelled in a student's piece of writing, write it correctly in green at the bottom of the page. Look for words during writers' workshop or whenever you're reviewing drafts, science logs, and even intercepted notes.
3. Have students place words on their individualized spelling lists - green means "go add this one."

Grade 2 - 6 Kids Catch Words That Don't Seem Right

PURPOSE

To help students locate spelling words in their writing by building consciousness of correct spelling.

MATERIALS

**spelling notebooks,
chart paper**

TIME NEEDED

10 minutes a week

Once a week, have students follow these steps.

1. Circle three words on your draft that don't seem to be spelled correctly.
2. "Have a go" at spelling those words again by asking yourself.
 - ★ Can I see the word in my mind's eye?
 - ★ Have I accurately represented all the sounds I hear?
 - ★ Is there a meaning relation to help me with the spelling pattern, such as nation and national?
3. Find the correct spellings by looking in the dictionary, using a computer spell-checker, or asking.
4. Add incorrectly spelled words to your individualized list. Consider posting these steps as a reference for students.