

## Spelling Helps Part 2

If you missed last week's bonus, you might want to check it out; we talked about how learning style affects learning spelling; and we introduced the Super Spelling Technique, proven to improve spelling.

This week we'll look briefly at history to see why English spelling is the way it is, and what that means for your spelling program. We will identify three basic approaches to spelling, and look at the first approach, taking spelling words from the child's writing.

Then next week we'll look at the two other approaches: developing your own program using various techniques, and using a ready-made spelling program such as Natural Speller.

### A (very brief) Historical Perspective

With the onset of written language, for thousands of years words were spelled the way they sounded.

Thus, different dialects had different spellings for the same word.

About 400 years ago the dictionary was invented, standardizing spelling. Each language developed its own phonics rules. (For example, the Spanish use ll for the /y/ sound while the English use y.) But the English had a French king at the time and did not want to tell the king he spelled his words wrong. So their solution was to use the French spelling and phonics (pronunciation rules) for French words. And they did the same for each language of origin! This is why, in English, nearly every letter makes several different sounds.

Take the letters *ch*, for example. In a word of Greek origin the *ch* would be pronounced *k*, as in *chemical*. But in a French word, like *chef*, the *ch* sounds like *sh*.

And just to complicate matters, here's a backwards twist; an Italian word will create the *ch* sound with the *ce* spelling, as in *cello*. Imagine your child's frustration!

How often does English borrow words from other languages? Five out of every eight words are from another language; and seven out of every 10 multi-syllabic words are from Latin or Greek origin.

Add to this a fundamental problem with all languages: Over time, pronunciation of a word changes. For example, 600 years ago every letter in the word *knight* was sounded. Now half of them are not. We tend to be lazy speakers, so our pronunciation of words tends to simplify over time. Yet the spelling has not changed!

At age five, your child has about 5,000 words in his vocabulary. By the time he or she reaches 12th grade your child will have added 36,000 words. This is too large a number of words to memorize. We need spelling strategies to help teach spelling.

### **Three approaches to spelling**

Homeschoolers generally choose from three basic approaches to spelling, ranging from least to most formal:

1. create spelling words from the student's writing
2. develop your own program using various techniques
3. use a spelling program such as Natural Speller, Spelling Power, etc.

Of course, usually we tailor any approach to our own children and our own style. That's one of the plusses of homeschooling!

No matter how you choose to handle spelling, ensure that your child's spelling skill-building, or practice (input), includes output in the same form your child will use. In other words, if you want your child to use correct spelling in his writing, some of the learning practice and instruction needs to involve his correctly spelling the word in written form.

This may seem obvious, but we sometimes slip away from doing what we need to do. Our daughter is a very auditory learner, and while she resisted writing her spelling words, she was happy to practice them orally. She did well at the oral spelling, too. As a result, however, she learned to correctly spell words orally, like *horse*, for example. But when she wrote the word, she would spell it *hors*. We needed to have her input match her output.

### **Creating Spelling Words from Student's Writing**

The first approach, the least structured, is presented by Dave Marks, author of the Writing Strands curriculum. Dave recommends having your child read, discuss the reading with you, the parent, and write. Dave suggests that each week you take one misspelled word from your child's writing. Have the child

write the word on several note cards and place the cards through the house - on his mirror, headboard, dresser, computer. Have the child look the word up in the dictionary - its origin, root, definition, and antonyms. He continues to say: as a family, talk about the word during the week.

Dave Marks likes the idea of studying only one spelling word a week, and he makes an engaging argument for it in a workshop on his Writing Strands website: [http://www.writingstrands.com/company\\_background.htm](http://www.writingstrands.com/company_background.htm). But we've seen his approach work with more than one word also.

See you next week with more spelling helps.