

What Good Spellers Do

Good spellers read. Spellers learn words not only by seeing them in a list, but by seeing them in context in books they read. Through reading they learn the meaning of words, see how the roots of the word can combine with other elements to make different words that are related like *papel*, *papelito*, *empapelar*. Learning words along with their meanings and seeing variations on the same word reinforces knowing both the spelling and the definition of the word.

Good spellers notice patterns. Spellers see that there are often regular ways that words are put together and even regular ways in which they vary. They'll notice that words like *cantidad*, *realidad*, and *posibilidad* end in the same way and that there is a regularity in the changes from *cruz* to *cruces*, *luz* to *luces* and *paz* to *paces*.

Good spellers know the rules. Spellers know that languages have rules about when to capitalize words, how to distinguish similar sounding letters (like b and v), and when different diacritic marks, like accents, tildes, and umlauts are needed. Spellers shouldn't just memorize rules, but should know how and when they're applied. They know why, for example the word *nación* has an accent but *naciones* does not. They'll also know why *guerra* doesn't have an umlaut but *bilingüe* does.

Good spellers practice. Spellers spend a lot of time reviewing the words, focusing particularly on the ones that give them problems, not just the ones they already know well. They also practice spelling out loud, having a partner pronounce the words and check as the speller recites the letters. Practice builds both knowledge and confidence.

Good spellers use all the resources available to them. On competition day, spellers are allowed to have the word repeated once, can request the definition, and can hear the word in a sentence. Each alternative can increase the speller's knowledge about the word and help narrow down the options on spelling. When it's time for them to spell their word for the judges, good spellers speak clearly and distinctly into the microphone so there is no mistaking the letters that are being said.

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