

Mnemonics for Spelling

Spelling is an important part of education and relates to many other areas in school. Good spellers are skilled at memorizing how to correctly spell words, even when the words are difficult or unpredictable. These students often have special strategies for remembering hard-to-spell words. Memorizing spelling words requires a good plan or strategy to be effective and efficient. It also requires that students understand the relationship between the letters in words. This intervention is intended to help students remember how to spell difficult words, particularly ones that are not spelled the way they sound.

Memory or mnemonic strategies are techniques for increasing learning. A *mnemonic* is a specific method that is applied to learn information. Mnemonics have been found to have considerable positive effects on student success. When students spell words and try to memorize them, they are more successful if the spelling facts are made more meaningful. Mnemonic spelling strategies make words more meaningful by combining the difficult spelling word with a part of the word in a sentence or a clever sentence or rhyme. One mnemonic uses a smaller word to focus the speller on the difficult portion of the word. Here are some examples:

- The school *principal* is your *pal*.
- Do not *mar* your *grammar* with bad spelling.
- You *gain* when you *bargain*.
- Ask someone to feed the *cat* before you leave for *vacation*.
- You would rather double your dessert than die in the hot desert.
- The word *believe* has a *lie* in it.

Other mnemonics for spelling are:

- When two vowels go walking, the first does the talking.
- The silent *e* makes the vowel say its name (e.g., *tape*).
- *I* before *e* except after *c* or when sounded like “a” as in *neighbor* or *weigh*. Note that *weird* is weird, and there are a few other words that do not follow this rule (e.g., *kaleidoscope*).
- Arithmetic can be spelled using the first letter of each word in the mnemonic “a rat in the house might eat the ice cream.”
- *Separate* is spelled with a *rat*.

How to Teach Mnemonics

To help a student spell better using mnemonics, the teacher should first tell the student what mnemonics are and how they can help. From there, the teacher or student can identify words that are particularly difficult and create special sentences or tricks to remember them. The process of creating the mnemonic may itself help the student remember how to spell the word better.

Who Should Learn to Use Mnemonics?

Mnemonics can be helpful for all students, especially ones who have trouble remembering how to spell using traditional methods (i.e., memorization). Mnemonic strategies may be particularly helpful for students who score low in Planning because they provide specific strategies. It may also be helpful for students who score low in Successive processing because it gives them a different way of working with the words that focuses less on the successive nature of the word (Naglieri, 1999).

Resources

- Mastropieri, M.A., & Scruggs, T.E. (2000). *The inclusive classroom: Strategies for effective instruction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Naglieri, J.A. (1999). *Essentials of CAS assessment*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.