

Innovative Spelling Techniques

By Gelene Strecker-Sayer

Article originally published in TESOL's on-line Interest Section Journal
For English Language Writing, Fall 2010

urpose:

fter years of watching students struggle with spelling, I began to record which of my students were having difficulty spelling along with the words that were the most problematic for them. The first thing I noticed was that it wasn't only the low readers who experienced spelling woes, but just as many of my voracious readers also struggled. In the process I discovered that many of these students were running on autopilot and continuing to make the same mistakes no matter how many times I highlighted and corrected their papers. I wanted them to take over more responsibility for their learning. In order to do so, I realized that I had to directly teach students how to do stop and think about their work as well as support them by providing constant reminders. Getting them to stop and think was the first step. Once they stopped to check their work, they also needed to have specific strategies to help them recall the correct spelling. Therefore, I began examining ways to help students become better spellers. Knowing that brains are dynamic and thrive on novelty, I developed 4 artful cognitive strategies which use multiple learning styles to build better spellers. My strategies not only helped improve students' spelling, but moreover students realize they are able to spell. This article is a synopsis of the presentation I gave on the topic called 'Innovative Spelling Strategies Using Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic and Word-morphing'.

Missississipp- Does that look right?

It is well known that English spelling is difficult even for native speakers. For some students writing spelling words 5 times, grouping them into 'families' or 'sounding' them works well. However, countless others need something more. Often these are the students who run on auto-pilot, never stopping to think about spelling OR they may know the word is spelled wrong, but don't have a way to help them recall how to write it correctly. In time, giving up becomes the typical response when they don't know how to do something; they get stuck, negative emotions/anxiety increases and they shut down. Many of these students give up and assume that they are not good spellers and continue to make the same mistakes over and over again.

Students who struggle think that the 'smart' kids are just born smart; answers just 'pop into their heads' naturally without effort. It is true, that recalling information is easier for some than others. It may appear that their friends' knowledge is more 'effortless' as they look up and immediately write down answers. However the real difference is that the 'smart' kids use strategies. Those for whom metacognitive strategies do not come naturally, these students look up or stare out and wait for the answer to pop into their heads. The difference is one group is intrinsically better able to employing strategies than the other.

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Teaching content is only a small percentage of what we do. The larger and more important task is to get students to think and act for themselves;

set them up to be life long learners who take ownership of their learning. In part it means teaching students the metacognitive strategies (Brown, 2007) necessary for them to learn for themselves. Metacognitive refers to strategies used to:

- Plan for learning- Deciding how to focus attention, knowing how you learn best, etc. - Am I ready to learn?
- Thinking about the learning process while it is happening- What can I do to help me remember?
- Self monitoring of comprehension/production- Is it making sense to me?
- Evaluating learning afterwards- Did my strategy work?



The key is to hand over ownership of learning by *directly* teaching students *how* to build and *use* their metacognition, so *they* create their own meaningful, relevant strategies to help them recall information and become independent learners.

Show them how to:



STOP...



Think about a strategy...



Apply!

I have created 4 strategy types (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic and Word-morphing) to use as scaffolds until correct spelling becomes internalized. As the brain is dynamic and thrives on patterns and novelty, the process of creating strategies can get students excited which lowers the affective filter so there is less chance of them shutting down due to frustration or anxiety. Taking spelling into this realm helps students realize they CAN learn how to spell and have fun doing it.

Strategy 1- Visual

Visual strategies entail drawing or making a mental picture that is associated with the word. Sometimes these work in conjunction with the word's meaning, other times it is a 'silly' or novel reference. Students form them via teacher modeling as well as connect it to prior knowledge. Here are 2 examples of 3rd grade spelling words from a popular publisher.

minute common misspelling: 'menit', 'minet', etc.

HabitBreaker: text message - "C u in 6"



This helps students remember that 'u' and 'in' are in the word 'minute'. In addition, the number 6 provides a way for students to recall that there are six letters in the word and not five.

office common misspelling: 'ofis' or 'offis'

HabitBreaker: Draw/Make mental picture of ice skating and falling down. Think how you had to get 'off' the 'ice' & go to the 'office'



This idea came from a student who went ice skating for the first time. I suggested she imagine someone was skating and fell. They had to get 'off' the 'ice' and go to the 'office' to call home, get an ice pack- whatever makes a connection for the student. She drew a picture and highlighted 'off' and 'ice'. She not only got it right on her spelling test, but hasn't misspelled it in her writing to date. It is very satisfying to see a student 'stop', 'think' and 'apply!'

Strategy 2- Auditory

Auditory strategies involve using oral phrasing to help recall spelling. Here are a few examples of some Dolch words which are commonly misspelled in students' work.

went common misspelling: 'wint' or 'whent'

HabitBreaker: "We went on Wednesday"

this common misspelling: 'thes'

HabitBreaker: "This is good!"

some common misspelling: 'sum '

HabitBreaker: "So give me some!"

Usually these are based on simple words that students can spell (so, me, we, he, is, an, on, in, etc.) It makes it easy to connect with patterns and words that students already know and are comfortable spelling.

Another way to take this further is to make characters out of these smaller 'words' and group other words around them. Below are 3 characters we have used in class, 'Al', 'Ant' and 'Ed' for a series of 3rd and 4th grade spelling words from another popular publisher.

recital common misspelling: 'risatel' or 'resital'

HabitBreaker: 'Don't rec it Al'



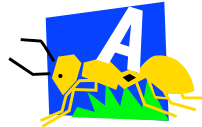
We pretend 'Al' is having a music recital at school. We tell him not to mess it up or 'wreck' it. This can be turned into a text message we send to him before the make-believe show. We try to apply our friend 'Al' to as many words that end in 'al' as possible. If we group them using 'Al', they are better able to differentiate between similar endings like 'el' and 'le'. ☺

'Ant' is another one of our characters students enjoy. It helps them distinguish between the other common ending 'ent'.

defendant common misspelling: defendent, difendint
HabitBreaker: draw a 'defendant'- an ant that defends others;



ignorant common misspelling: ignorent, ignurint
HabitBreaker: draw 'ignorant'- the ant that doesn't pay attention or remember; etc.



There is also 'Ed' for various past tense conjugations. Students draw a picture or go online to create 'Ed' and use him as a basis of their strategy.

abandoned common misspelling: 'ubandent' or 'abandit'
HabitBreaker: "There was a band on Ed"



presented common misspelling: 'prusinded', 'prasentid'
HabitBreaker: "**Pre sent Ed** a letter"
or "Pre 'presented' a letter to Ed"



'Pre' 'Ed'

Students like making up clever examples for 'ant', 'Ed' and 'Al'! Try to figure out one of your own!

Strategy 3- Word Morphing

Morphing is using a word that a student already knows and morphing it into target word. Many cartoons involve aliens and machines 'transforming' or 'morphing'. Students are fascinated with how their spelling words can 'morph' like a secret code. Sometimes a phrase can be added to help cement the idea. Again here are examples from a popular 4th grade publisher.

HabitBreaker: stuck luck => tuck => stuck
"What luck, I tuck and got stuck!"

In creating this example, the student knew how to spell 'luck', so we changed the 'l' into a 't' and then added 's'. We live in a state that experiences the occasional tornado. Therefore we practice 'tuck' and 'duck'. If it isn't already in their vocabulary, then it is good to have it!

Here are a couple more examples below. Again they began with words the student knew and morphed into the target word. Give it a try!!

pocket
HabitBreaker: lock => locket => Pocket
"I lock my pocket with a locket."

paint
HabitBreaker: paint rain => pain => paint
"It's a pain to paint in the rain."

Strategy 4- Kinesthetic

The kinesthetic strategy involves physically moving letters to form words and/or using body movements.

who vs. how commonly confused

HabitBreaker: Write &/or cut out 'ho' and 'w'. Put the 'w' in front of 'ho' to spell 'who'. Then move the 'w' to the end to make 'how' and repeat. For reinforcement say, "Who knows how to spell who?"

h	o
---	---

w

w	h	o
---	---	---

here, there, where? commonly confused with homophones; hear, their/they're, were/wear

Habitbreaker: Write &/or cut 'here', 't', and 'w'. Again move them around to spell "Where? Here? There?" More movement can be added by asking 'Where?', then removed 'w' and push 'here' closer to you. In turn 't' can be added to form 'there' which can be pushed away. Not only do all 3 words share the base word 'here', they are also related to placement, which further support the strategy.

t	h	e	r	e
---	---	---	---	---

h	e	r	e
---	---	---	---

w	here
---	------

Most of these strategies are used in combination. This is the best approach because it aids in better reinforcement and recall. Think of having 1 marble (strategy) going through a labyrinth as opposed to having 2 or 3 marbles (strategies) at the same time, all heading to the hole (target word). One will travel the neural pathway and reach a dendrite faster, making it spark first. Therefore a combination will stimulate quicker recall and better reinforce more accurate spelling.

In the process, students build more than just their metacognitive knowledge and improved spelling. They also...

- are exposed to new vocabulary and higher level syntax
- build on and improve reading strategies: chunking, rhyming, root words
- increase ability to see/awareness of patterns
- correct mispronunciation
- develop abstract thinking

In the end it is about students being active and having a plan when it comes to their own learning. We don't want students to surrender to the idea of working on autopilot and winging it, in 'HOPES' of succeeding. This only leads to frustration, shutting down and giving up. It is about students taking possession of their learning by making and using their own meaningful and relevant strategies to learn new information. This is key to creating independent, confident, competent and happy life long learners.



If you would like a sample copy (40 words/**HabitBreaker** kinesthetic letters &/or spelling cards) send an email to:
gelene@eslanswers.com

Brown, H. Douglas (2007). Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (5th Ed.) New York: Pearson Education.

Brown, 2007: Metacognitive "Is a term used in informational-processing theory to indicate an "executive" function, strategies that involved planning for learning, thinking about the learning as it is taking place, monitoring of

one's production or comprehension and evaluating learning after the activity is completed (Purpura, 1997)"

- pg 134 Principles of Language Learning and Teaching
by H. Douglas Brown, 2007 5th ed.