

## Words Their Way Overview

- To help students explore and learn about words their way, instruction must be sensitive to two fundamental tenets:
  - Students' learning of phonics, spelling, and vocabulary is based on their developmental or instructional level.
  - Students' learning is based on the way they are naturally inclined to learn – through comparing and contrasting word features and discovering consistencies.
- Rather than rote memorization activities designed only to ensure repeated mechanical practice, word study encourages exploration and examination of word features that are within a students' stage of literacy development.
- Engaging instruction and thoughtful practice helps students internalize word features and become automatic in using what they have learned.

### Why is Word Study important?

- Students need hands on opportunities to manipulate words and features in ways that allow them to generalize beyond isolated, individual examples to entire groups of words that are spelled the same way.
- The best way to develop fast and accurate recognition and production of words is to engage in meaningful reading and writing, and to have multiple opportunities to examine those same words and their features in and out of context.
- Word study teaches students how to look at and analyze words so that they can construct an ever-deepening understanding of how spelling works to represent sound and meaning. We believe that this word study is well worth 10 to 15 minutes of instruction and practice daily.

### What is the purpose of Word Study?

- The purpose of the word study is twofold: it examines words in order to:
  - Reveal the logic and consistencies within our written language system
  - Help student's master recognizing spelling, defining and using specific words.

### Integration of Word Study with Reading and Writing

**Orthography:** the ways in which letters and letter patterns in words represent sound and meaning.

- **Alphabetic** – rely on the sound embedded in the names of the letters to represent the sounds they are trying to represent.
  - **Patterns** – letter and syllable patterns.
  - **Meaning** – When students explore how spelling visually preserves meaning relationships among words with the same derivations, they see how closely related spelling is to meaning and vocabulary.
- Vocabulary is learned when purposeful reading, writing, listening and speaking take place.

**Word Study:** occurs in hands-on activities that reflect basic cognitive learning processes: comparing and contrasting by categorizing word features, and then discovering similarities and differences within and between categories.

- During word study, words and pictures are sorted in routines that require children to examine discriminate, and make critical judgment about speech sounds, spelling patterns and meanings.

## Stages of Spelling Development

For each stage, students' orthographic knowledge is defined by three functional levels that are useful guides for knowing when to teach what:

1. What students do correctly – an independent or easy level
2. What students “use but confuse” – an instructional level or zone of proximal development at which instruction is most helpful.
3. What is absent in students' spelling – a frustration level in which concepts are too difficult.

### Emergent Stage

- Encompasses the writing efforts of children who are not yet reading conventionally and in most cases have not been exposed to formal reading instruction.
- Emergent writing may range from random marks to legitimate letters that bear a relationship to sound.
- Moving from this stage to the next stage hinges on learning the **alphabetic principle**: letters represent sounds in a systematic way, and words can be segmented into sequences of sound from left to right.

### Letter Name – Alphabetic Stage

- Encompasses that period during which students are first formally taught to read, typically during kindergarten and early first grade.
- Early in this stage, “letter name” is students' dominant approach to spelling; that is; they use the *names* of the letters as cues to the sounds they want to represent.

### Within Word Pattern Stage

- Can read and spell many words correctly because of their automatic knowledge of letter sounds and short-vowel patterns.
- The within pattern stage begins when students move away from linear, sound-by-sound approach of the letter name-alphabetic spellers and begin to include patterns or chunks of letters sequences and silent vowels markers like final *e*.

### Syllable and Affixes Stage

- When students are expected to spell many words of more than one syllable.
- Students consider spelling patterns where syllables meet, and meaning units such as affixes (prefixes and suffixes)

### Derivational Relations Stage

- Students examine how many words may be derived from base words and word roots.
- Build on and expand knowledge of a wide vocabulary, including thousands of words of Greek and Latin origin.
- Words that are related in meaning are often related in spelling as well, despite changes in sound.



## The Synchrony of Literacy Development (Harmony in the timing of development)

### Emergent Readers

- These students' may "read" familiar books from memory using the pictures on each page to cue their recitation of the text.
- Children lack an understanding of the alphabetic principle or show only the beginning of this understanding as they start to learn some letters.

### Beginning Readers

- These students have a concept of word in text, which is demonstrated by a child's ability to point accurately to a few lines or familiar text – a demonstration of the one-to-one correspondence between what they read and say.
- Readers in this stage require support in the form of predictable, memorable texts or books that limit the number and nature of words.

### Transitional Readers

- Students' reading becomes fluent because it is supported by a store of words that can be identified automatically "at first sight".
- They "use but confuse" the various long-vowel patterns of English.

### Intermediate and Advanced Readers

- Students in these stages have relatively automatic word recognition, leaving their minds free to think as rapidly as they can read.
- Intermediate students read most texts with good accuracy and speed, both orally and silently.
- Students learn to become *flexible, strategic readers* and ultimately become *proficient adult readers*.
- Vocabulary and word use play a central role in the connections that intermediate and advanced readers forge between reading and writing.
- Studying spelling-meaning connections is central to maximizing this vocabulary growth.
- Child spelling level corresponds to the characteristics of her reading level, as well as the types of writing we may expect from a child at that particular developmental level.

### Set Goals and Monitor Student Growth over Time

- Ongoing assessment alerts us to the need for adjusting the content and pacing of our instruction to meet student needs, and arranging additional instruction for students who may need extra help meeting long-term goal.
- **Weekly spelling tests and unit tests:** Weekly tests at most grade levels as a way to monitor mastery of the studied features, and to send a message to students and parents alike that students are accountable for learning to spell the words they have sorted and worked with in various activities all week.
- **Spelling Inventories:** Students may be given the same spelling inventory up to 3 times a year to assess progress and to determine whether changes need to be made in groups or instructional focus.
- **Spell checks:** Serve several purposes:
  - To fine tune placement
  - As a pretest for a feature or unit of study
  - As a posttest after instruction to determine what students have learned.
  - As a delayed posttest administered several weeks after instruction to determine what the students have retained over time.

## The Role of Word Sorting

- Categorizing is a fundamental way that humans make sense of the world.
- Word sorts help students organize what they know about words and form generalizations that they then can apply to new words they encounter in their reading or spell in their writing.

### Types of Sorts:

- **Sound Sorts:**
  - Students sort words by rhyme, initial sounds, consonant blends or digraphs, rhyming word families, or vowel sounds.
  - Advanced spellers may sort by unaccented syllables, the number of syllables, and syllable stress.
  - **Pictures** are naturally suited for sound sorts: the picture begs to be named, yet there is no printed form of the word for reference.
- **Pattern Sorts**
  - Students use the printed form of the word to sort by visual patterns or letter patterns.
  - Because certain patterns go with certain sound categories, students must be taught first to listen for the sound and then to consider alternative ways to spell that sound.
- **Meaning Sorts**
  1. **Concept Sorts**
    - Sorting objects, pictures, or words by concepts or meaning is a good way to link vocabulary instruction to students' conceptual understanding.
  2. **Spelling-Meaning Sorts**
    - Students see that meaning influences the spelling of words when they first encounter sound-alike homophone pairs.

## Extension and Follow-Up Routines for Sorts

- After an introductory sort, assign students a variety of follow-up activities designed to reinforce generalizations and their memory of words, build speed and accuracy, and connect to reading and writing.

### Repeated Sorts

- To become fluent readers and writers, students must achieve automaticity in reading, the fast and accurate recognition of words in context, and automaticity in writing to produce fast and accurate spellings.

### Buddy Sorts

- Students work together to read the words or name the pictures in each column place the words into categories, check the sort, and then talk to each other about the generalization covered by the sort.

### Blind Sorts

- Headers or key words are used to establish categories, but then the teacher or a partner shuffles the word cards and calls each word aloud without showing it.

### Writing Sorts

- Writing words into categories demands that students attend to the sounds or patterns of letters and think about how those characteristics correspond with the key word or header.

### Blind Writing Sorts

- Students must rely on the sounds they hear in the word as well as their memory for the letters associated with them, cued by the key word at the top of the column.

## Speed Sorts

- Students set up their headers, shuffle their words. As they finish, students record their times. To encourage accurate sorting, seconds may be added on for incorrectly placed words.

## Word Hunts

- Students hunt through their reading and writing for words that are additional examples of the sound, pattern, or meaning unit they are studying and can develop an understanding of how many other words have the same feature.

## Principles for Word Study Instruction

### LOOK FOR WHAT STUDENTS USE BUT CONFUSE

- Students cannot learn something they do not already know something about.

### A STEP BACKWARD IS A STEP FORWARD

- It is important to begin word study activities where students will experience success.

### USE WORDS STUDENTS CAN READ

- It is much easier to analyze words students can already pronounce.

### COMPARE WORDS THAT “DO” WITH WORDS THAT “DON’T”

- What something *is*, is also defined by what it is *not*; contrasts are essential to students’ building of categories.

### BEGIN WITH OBVIOUS CONTRASTS

- When students start studying a new feature, choose key words or pictures that are distinctive.

### SORT BY SOUND AND PATTERN

- Students examine words by how they sound and how they are spelled. Too often, students focus on visual patterns at the expense of how words are alike in sound.

### DON’T HIDE EXCEPTIONS

- Expectations arise when students make generalizations. Do not hide these exceptions.

### AVOID RULES

- Students discover consistencies and make generalizations for themselves.
- Memorizing rules is not the way students make sense of how words work. Rules are no substitute for experience.

### WORK FOR AUTOMATICITY

- Accuracy in sorting is not enough - accuracy *and* ease are the ultimate indicators of mastery.

### RETURN TO MEANINGFUL TEXTS

- After sorting, students need to return to meaningful texts to hunt for other examples to add to the sorts. These hunts extend their analysis to more words and more difficult vocabulary.

