

Writing Road to Reading (5th Edition)

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Chapter One

The Spelling Lesson

Chapter Overview

- Preparation for Reading and Writing
- Aligning instruction to language development
- Teaching Handwriting with Phonograms
- Establishing the connection between sound and print
- Teaching Spelling Using Phonograms and Rules
- From speaking to writing through spelling
- Teaching Language Rule Application
- Applying rules to most frequently used words
- Preparation for Reading and Writing

Historically, every phonetic language has developed from speech, to letters that represent speech sounds, and then to words and sentences. A successful reading method follows this pattern. Preschool children love to listen to rhymes and participate in word play. Four-year-olds can learn to say the sounds correctly, and five-year-olds can learn to say and write the sounds. This section provides some suggestions for parents who wish to start literacy instruction before formal schooling.

Language Development

Reading to children and discussing with them what is read expands their oral vocabulary, background knowledge, and communication skills. Introducing them to the alphabet by using the alphabet song, blocks, or magnetic letters is an appropriate preparation activity.

Phonemic Awareness

Beginners, and older students who are having difficulty, need to understand that spoken words and syllables consist of sequences of speech sounds (phonemes). This understanding is essential for learning to read an alphabetic language because alphabet letters and letter combinations represent basic speech sounds. Young children love to play with words. Through informal activities such as listening and responding to rhymes, children develop awareness that words consist of individual sounds. Additionally, the teacher or parent can say a word like me, hold up two fingers and say /m/ /é/ while pointing to each finger, and have students say the sounds. (Use the high-frequency words that children will later write in their spelling/vocabulary notebook.) Teachers need to make sure each child hears the individual sounds in each word.

Phonograms

A phonogram is a single letter, or a fixed combination of two, three, or four letters, that is the symbol for one sound in a given word. English has seventy common phonograms (twenty-six letters and forty-four fixed combinations of two, three, and four letters) that represent the forty-five basic sounds used in speaking. The fixed combinations absorb most of the silent letters (e.g., igh says /i/).

Forty-seven phonograms have only one sound, making them easy to learn. Eleven phonograms have two sounds, ten have three sounds, one has four sounds, and one has six sounds. Phonograms are identified by their sound or sounds, whenever practical, and not by their letter names.

The seventy phonograms, which were carefully worked out many years ago, are still the best for teaching English. They have stood the test of more than four decades of use because they simplify English spelling by avoiding the teaching of nearly all silent letters, except the final e's. The latter are easily taught in this method by showing reasons for most of them. The preschool teacher or parent uses cards that show the phonograms. The cards have words printed on the back that are only for the teacher's information. Do not teach the sounds by having children learn these words. Before teaching the sounds, it is advisable for teachers to check and correct their pronunciation of the phonograms. For example, the sound of /l/ is not el, the sound /k/ is not kuh, and the sound /b/ is not buh. We say rob, not robuh. Preschoolers learn only the sounds and when in kindergarten, will learn how to write them. Demonstrate to children that the words they say are made up of separate sounds by using Ayres words (see page 252). Segment the phonogram sounds in the words as a check on pronunciation.

Young children learn to recognize and say the sounds of the single-letter phonograms in any order. The teacher shows the printed cards, says the sounds precisely, and then listens while students say all the sounds for each phonogram.

Prewriting

Many young children want to write. Appropriate prewriting activities include providing multiple opportunities to develop fine-motor control (stringing beads, cutting, gluing, coloring); teaching the positions on an analog clock (see page 17); and using a sand tray, carpet, velvet, or board to teach drawing circles starting at 2 on the clock. Use a star or other symbol at the top of the tray or material to indicate the "up" position.

Children also need to learn the concept of halfway (midpoint), which is essential for understanding the size relationship between tall and short letters. Demonstrate this concept by putting one block on top of another and pointing to the midpoint between the blocks. Have children practice by pointing to the midpoint between blocks. Demonstrate rolling clay to form a tall line, marking the midpoint, and then dividing it into two equal parts. Have children follow the same procedure. Next, demonstrate rolling clay to represent a tall and a short line. Finally, demonstrate this concept using vertical lines

drawn on the board. Have children practice drawing tall and short lines on the board and at their desks.

The correct method of holding a pencil is vitally important to prevent fatigue and to develop correct letter formation. When children have developed correct directionality and some fine-motor control, teach them the pencil grip (see pages 13–15). On paper or individual chalk boards, have them form large circles beginning at 2 on the clock and going up and around (counterclockwise). When children are ready to practice spelling the phonograms by writing them on lined paper, follow the procedures described in the next section.

Teaching Handwriting with Phonograms

Teaching handwriting and written spelling should precede reading from books. This is fundamental. The title of this book, *The Writing Road to Reading*, means exactly that: Writing and the phonograms create a wide-open road to knowing and using the written language. All children want to do well in speech, writing (spelling), and reading. These skills are basic to our culture, and writing is the one that does most to unite and reinforce the others. Getting a child to understand and follow the mechanics of each of these processes is vital.

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