

Developing a Written Productivity Profile: **Conducting a Developmental Spelling Analysis**

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Introduction

Analyzing spelling errors provides information on the extent to which spelling is interfering with a student's written productivity. Spelling assessment provides insight into written communication problems caused by poor graphophonic and automatic spelling skills. Spelling tests can be administered using a list of words that when analyzed will indicate developmental spelling patterns and orthographic knowledge. The following pages provide a full narrative description of the process. For additional data on spelling ability, the spelling errors in an unedited writing sample can also be analyzed.

Administer a spelling test

- ❑ Select an appropriate spelling list from those listed below. The word lists selected for analysis should be within the student's expected ability level, but provide sufficient challenge that will allow you to gauge spelling strengths and weaknesses.
- ❑ Ask the student to spell each word that you present verbally. Words should be presented at a normal rate of speech. Tell the student you will repeat the word if he wants to hear it again. *Do not parse out or over accentuate sounds within the word.* A student at an emergent literacy level should be encouraged to write as many of the letters that he can hear within the word.

Early Emergent Word List

| | |
|--------|--------|
| coat | hammer |
| cheese | game |
| ship | butter |
| bath | jump |
| feel | stick |
| dive | when |

Higher Level Word List

| | |
|---------|----------|
| silk | thermos |
| snail | uniform |
| napping | solution |
| battle | screech |
| awhile | joining |
| saving | crutch |
| weave | bright |
| marched | flavor |
| caught | toast |
| shower | happen |

Developmental Stages of Spelling:

Spelling develops in a logical progression (Gentry, 1987; Temple, Nathan, Temple & Burris, 1993; Templeton, 2002). Initially, when children pretend to write (protowriting), they use letters to represent words and ideas; however, there is no letters-sound correspondence. This can be referred to as the preliterate or the prephonetic stage. According to Ferroli and Shanahan (1987) (Figure 1), as children come to understand the alphabetic principle, they begin to discriminate or decode initial letters that say their names, mostly consonants and long vowel sounds—the *initial consonant* stage. Over time, children begin to discriminate initial plus final consonant sounds in words—the *consonant frame* stage. Children at the *phonetic* stage write words using letters to represent each phoneme. They begin to include long vowels in their inventive spellings, while short vowels tend to be place holders as they have not yet mastered short vowel decoding. At the *transitional* stage, children write words that follow the rules of English orthography, however over-generalized. Templeton (2002) further subdivides the transitional stage to include 3 substages: *within-word patterns*, *syllable juncture*, and *derivational constancy* (Figure 2). Eventually, as children read and write more, they retain the conventional spellings of words. At first, they more often retain the spellings of high frequency words, but gradually they are able to spell more novel words automatically.

Use the following tables to analyze the student’s spelling errors. Table 1 helps you generally analyze the level of development. Table 2 will help you further analyze various stages of transitional spelling.

| Spelling stage | Characteristics of this stage | Examples |
|----------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Prephonemic or Preliterate | Random letter strings or mock letters. | zxcv = team |
| Early Phonemic | One consonant sound or equivalent consonant that is prominent in the word. | t or m = team |
| Consonant Frame | 2-3 of the prominent consonants or equivalent consonants. Students are generally at this stage in the kindergarten, early first grade level. | tm = team |
| Phonetic | Each sound in the word is represented with a letter. Students are generally at this stage in the 1 st grade. | tem, tim = team |
| Transitional | Incorrect spellings that apply standard English spelling conventions. Students enter this stage generally around the 2 nd grade. | teem, teme = team |
| Conventional | Correct spellings | coat |

Table 1. Developmental spelling stages, Ferroli and Shanahan (1987)

| Spelling stage | Characteristics of this stage | Examples |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Within-word pattern | Students spell short vowel sounds correctly and some long vowel combination. Students are generally at this stage between the 2 nd and 4 th grades. | teme, teem = team |
| Syllable juncture | Students reach this stage between grades 3 and 8. Single syllable words are spelled with correct vowel patterns. Students are working on the unstressed syllables in words with more than one syllable (prefixes and suffixes). | hoping = hoping sampil = sample squirle = squirrel |
| Derivational constancy | This stage can begin around 5 th grade for some and not until 8 th grade for others and extends into adulthood. Students understand that words are derived from the same root. | compositio = compose/composition confedence = confide/confidence |

Table 2. Developmental spelling stages, Templeton (2002)

Spelling Effectiveness

Spelling is not a significant problem if the student's spelling level is sufficient to meet in-class writing needs and is commensurate with his or her abilities. Spelling is also not as significant a problem when the student's spelling is good enough to be picked up by a software spell checker.

Spelling is a factor affecting writing when the student cannot quickly spell high frequency words and cannot automatically spell words typical to other students at his or her level of ability. Students who struggle with the ability to recall the conventional spellings of words tend to over rely on sounding out words and their spelling often appears to be arrested at phonetic and/or transitional levels.

References

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