



How to help your child... spell

I have always been slightly unsure how to spell the word ~~accomodate~~, ~~acomodate~~, ~~accommodate~~, accommodate !!! It has been one of those words that for years has eluded my long term spelling memory. Each time I needed to write it, I got that slightly uneasy, unconfident feeling that I wasn't 100% sure that I would get it right. I'm sure I tried to commit the correct spelling to memory but each time I ended up having to check it by looking it up in the dictionary or on the computer. It just never stuck! A Teflon spelling!

I'm sure we've all got words like that...and, sometimes, we might even get a guilty feeling when we get stuck on such a word - *"I should have learnt that by now—I really should."* And yet, some time after having tried, once again, to memorise it, we are back with the same lack of confidence when faced with writing the word again.

Sometimes, we might even resort to 'cheating' in our writing by changing the word to one whose spelling we know...

Spelling is
~~diffecolt~~
~~challenging~~
hard.

There are many lists on the internet of words that are commonly misspelt. Test yourself. How are you on these words:

apparently, argument, business, cemetery, disappoint, embarrass, fluorescent, glamorous, harass, independent, liaise, occasion, pavilion, persistent, receive, supersede, unforeseen ?

100% confident?

But, at last, I can say, with 100% confidence that I will always spell 'accommodate' correctly in future. Hurrah!

How have I achieved this magical feat? By changing my memorisation strategy. When I need to spell this word now, I visualise a double garage which accommodates 2 **C**ars and 2 **M**otorcycles. And on the front of each garage door is a round handle in the shape of an '**O**': 2Cs, 2Ms and 2Os.

There are many different spelling strategies that I could have used for this word, but this one worked for me, for this word.

What I find more interesting, is what didn't work for me and why not. I like to think I'm quite a good 'speller' but this word, and others like it, clearly showed up the limits of my spelling knowledge. Why had it proven such a pain?

Previously, I had looked up the word, stared at its correct spelling, noticed the tricky bits, copied it out, told myself that it had 2 Cs, Ms and Os, written it out and checked it. Good. Sorted. Learnt. And yet, some time later, I found it just hadn't stuck. Grrr!

It transpires that all I had done was put the correct spelling in my short term memory - my working memory—as it is sometimes called. This memory is great for remembering things for a short time such as the 4 digit pass code to get my car out of the gym car park. The code changes each week and the new code is displayed in the gym for members to remember. I can happily remember these 4 digits for long enough to get my car and then enter them at the barrier. If you asked me 20 minutes later, I might even still remember them. Ask me the next day and I wouldn't bet on it. Two or three days later and they've definitely gone.

I haven't made any effort to get them in my long term memory - why would I? I know I could if I wanted to. I can, for reasons

which elude me now, happily recite my 9 character NI number made up of 3 letters and 6 digits. Many years ago, I made the effort. I broke it down into small chunks, chanted them, and repeated them, and tested myself, repeatedly, every day, until they were stuck fast. Still there many years later, whenever I need them, almost like a party trick.

What this tells me is that there are many ways of successfully memorising spellings. Different ways will work for different people and for different words.

What won't work is fairly common to all of us... looking at a word, testing yourself on it until correct and then leaving it alone. That will only get it into short term memory - maybe long enough to pass a Friday morning class spelling test, but not to be stored away for correct use in the next week's writing task. How many times do teachers say, *"They get good marks in their spelling tests, but their writing is full of mistakes."*

If we really want to help our children to improve their spelling then we need to think about how we teach them at home and at school.

Many teachers are now making much more use of visualisation techniques. Asking their pupils to draw a word. To associate it somehow with a picture. A picture of their own making that they have had to make some effort to construct themselves. A picture they then share with others and explain to them. They are also revisiting these words more regularly - little and often, not once per week. And, unsurprisingly, these words are starting to lose their Teflon coating for the children.

A note of caution however. This isn't as easy as simply copying a word out 10 times (and, sometimes, just to make things worse, miscopying a word out 10 times!). It requires a more conscious effort. So we shouldn't try to move too fast. Today, I've learnt the word 'accommodate' for good. For ever! Tomorrow, maybe I'll try 'indispensable' ...



Spelling tips

1. Does reading improve your spelling?

Reading's very important but it won't improve your spelling.

Different skills are involved. Spelling is much more difficult than reading.

According to David Crystal: *Teachers assume that reading, once taught, automatically means that spelling will be 'caught'. But there is no correlation between reading ability and spelling ability.* (David Crystal: The English Language)

Spelling won't happen because we read. A word must be consciously and deliberately learnt.

Spelling uses a set of active, productive, conscious processes that are not required for reading. (David Crystal: The English Language)

We don't read to learn spelling, we read for information or entertainment etc. We skim over the words when we read whereas spelling is an active letter-by-letter activity.

Spelling is a visuo-motor skill. This means that visual and physical skills are crucial. You must see the patterns of English and feel the writing of them. Learning to visualise the whole word can also improve spelling.

Reading a word is easy but try to spell it and there could be a number of ways to spell it, like in homophones: buy/bye/by, you/you're, its/it's, there/their/there, stationary/stationery

Look at the following words. They have the same long vowel sound 'e' + s but have 7 possible spellings:

breeze, knees, these, fleas, seize/sees/seas, cheese,

tease/teas.

Easy to read not so easy to spell!

TOP TIP number 1: Just because you've seen a word, read it, and copied it down once, doesn't mean you'll be able to spell it.

Spelling Tip 2 - using the spelling strategy - syllable breakdown.

Syllable breakdown is a strategy to help you spell long words. It's great because it helps you identify bits of the word that cause problems or helps you remember those pesky silent letters.

2 syllables: paper - pa/per
3 syllables: computer - com/pu/ter
4 syllables: application - ap/plic/a/tion
5 syllables: examination - ex/am/in/a/tion

Syllable breakdown also helps you identify prefixes and suffixes - remember those?
prefix - small words added at the beginning of a root word
suffix - small words added to the end of words

dissatisfied = dis /sat / is / fied
uncomfortable = un/com/fort/able
irregularly = ir/ reg/u/lar/ly or ir/re/gu/lar/ly

***It's up to you how you break a word down - as long as it helps you. There's no right or wrong way.**

Syllable breakdown is even better once you notice common spelling patterns. For example; the 'qua' in qualification is spelt with an 'a' not 'o' just like the other 'qua' words: quarter, quart, quantity, quaint, quality. The suffix endings that sounds like "shun" is either tion/sion/cian.

You can develop this skill by practicing spelling, noticing the patterns and rules.

Using syllable breakdown is a strategy to help you, especially with long words and it's up to you how you break the word down - as long as it helps you. There's no right or wrong way.

Exaggerate the sound, use it in combination with memory tricks. Use anything to help you remember the spelling of words that are important.

Let's look at **suffixes** (the endings of words). When you break a word down it helps to know the common endings.

-tion, -ment, -ly, -ture, -ing

-ture

ad/ven/ture fu/ture tem/pe/ra/ture

-ly faith/ful/ly grate/ful/ly

-ment

com/part/ment a/part/ment

-tion

de/te/ri/or/a/tion, dec/or/a/tion
mul/ti/pli/ca/tion

-sion

ex/ten/sion, ap/pre/hen/sion

Spelling tip number 3 - using memory tricks

Memory tricks are great to help you remember difficult spellings, or the bits of spelling you keep getting wrong.

You can also use tricks for deciding which homophone is right - *peace or piece, stationery or stationary* (e.g. 'e' for envelopes), *here or hear?*

Or use rhymes to remember spellings like rhythm and diarrhoea.

There are various memory tricks you could use. One is *seeing words within words*. This is good for homophones. What are homophones?

Homophones = words with the same sound but different spelling & meaning - *peace or piece? here or hear? there, their, they're?*

Can you see a word within these words - *piece, hear, there*.

piece - a **piece** of **pie**.



hear - You **hear** with your **ear** and you **learn**.

there - **here**, **there**, **where**, **everywhere**.

This really helps you remember the correct usage.

We can use a word within words for any word.

add an **address** - add res**s**
separate a rat - sep a rat e

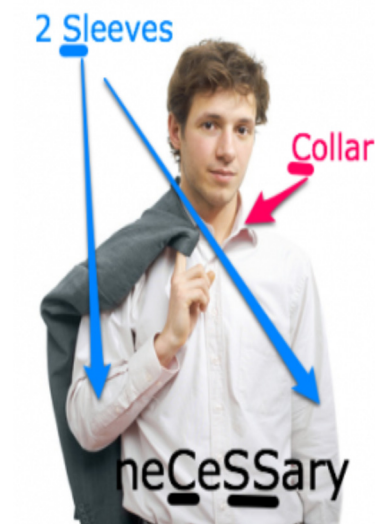
Use tricks to help you remember how many letters are in words, which is useful for those tricky words *embarrass*, *necessary*.

embarrass. Can you see how many r's and s's there are?

embarrass = 2 x **R**ed cheeks
because I'm 2 **S**hy **S**hy
emba**R**Ra**S**S
or I get Really Red And Smile
Shyly
embarrassed
embarrassing
embarrassment



necessary (the tricky bit is remembering the C and 2 x S).
It's necessary to have 1 **C**ollar
and 2 x **S**leeves (ne**C**e**S**Sary)



Memumonics can help:

rhythm:
rhythm **has** your **two hips** moving

because
or **big elephants** can't always use
small exits.

By coming up with your own tricks it helps you remember them and the word.

Look out for word families: e.g.
Which, What, Why, Who

Look for root words and connections between words: e.g.
'medicine' is related to 'medical'
so the 's' sound is made with a 'c'

Spelling Tip Number 4 - The Do's & Don'ts of Spelling

Do learn about spelling - If you really want to spell well, then learn the rules, the conventions, notice spelling patterns and letter patterns and understand why spelling is the way it is.

Do write as often as you can. Also write in lower case, small letters, with capitals in the right places for proper nouns such as Joanne, Britain, Canada. This means you can see the shape of the word. Also use the capital I for I and I'm.

Don't write in **BLOCK CAPITALS** unless it's on a form because it's hard to write in and to read.

Do use the words you like even if you're not sure of the spelling, ask someone or try to use a dictionary, or spell checker.

Do try to find your own errors.

Do make a correct copy of the words you need to learn – make a little dictionary for yourself

Do practise the words you want to use and test yourself regularly.



Don't look at / concentrate on the wrong spelling (remember visual memory is strong). Figure out what your mistakes are and then concentrate on the correct spelling and how to remember it.

Don't learn words you'll never use. Concentrate on those you need.

Don't try to learn too many words at once. Pick the most important key words.

Don't rely on the sound of the word for its spelling. Think about it in as many ways as you can – the look, meaning, sound, feel...

Do use memory tricks.

Do enjoy spelling in all its quirky ways.

Do speak it out loud (you are 50% more likely to remember)

Do move about if you feel it helps

Do—reward yourself regularly

