

**Third Revised Edition**

**Sample pages**

# **Johnny Can Spell!**

## **Teacher's Guide**

Integrating Phonics, Penmanship,  
and Spelling Instruction

Alice Tabor Nine

**JOHNNY CAN SPELL! TEACHER'S GUIDE**

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This book is a guide used by participants in *Johnny Can Spell* Workshops.

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To Carl  
who steadfastly encourages me

## Rules for Spelling

Those monosyllables which end  
In *f*, or *s*, or *l*,  
After a single vowel, do  
With double letters spell,  
Except a dozen little words,  
And these are mentioned thus --  
To wit: *this, gas, of, his, was, yes,*  
*As, if, thus, is, has, us.*

But words with other consonants  
Than *f*, or *s*, or *l*,  
Their final letters double not  
When rightly them we spell  
Except ten words, which we may know  
Wherever they occur;  
And here they are: *add, odd, butt, err,*  
*Inn, egg, buzz, ebb, bunn, purr.*

Those monosyllables and words  
With accent on the last,  
When ending in *one* consonant  
After *one* vowel placed,  
Double this final consonant  
When suffixes are added  
Beginning with a vowel; as  
In *foggy, gunner, padded.*

But final consonants which have  
Two vowels them preceding  
(Or words not having accent last),  
Are doubled not; as, *pleading.*

All words in silent final *e*  
(But *ce* and *ge*)  
Drop *e* before suffixes whose  
Initials vowels be.

But words in silent final *e*,  
When suffixes connect,  
Beginning with a consonant,  
Do not the *e* reject--  
Except the following useful words,  
And they are but a few:  
*Awe, argue, judge, due, lodge, abridge,*  
*Acknowledge, whole, and true.*

Excerpt from: Frank Irish, *Irish's Orthography and Orthoepey*  
with *Practical Exercises*, Columbus, Ohio: 1888.

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# CHAPTER 1

## PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

### THE CLASSROOM

#### **What is the atmosphere of your classroom?**

Evaluate the atmosphere that you create in your classroom. To begin, ask the following questions. How do I use color? How do I use the lighting? Is there clutter? Is there a sense of purpose? Is there joy of accomplishment? How do I motivate? Do I use music? Is the work of each child valued? Are there smiles? Is there laughter and awe?

#### **A visually quiet room is one key to helping students stay on task.**

Consider the visual impact of your room, especially the area around your teaching station -- the overhead projector/screen and/or chalkboard used during direct instruction. Is it filled with brilliant color, moving objects, and other visually stimulating material? If it is, it will be difficult for children to focus on the material that you are presenting and they are practicing.

#### **Determine the best chair and writing surface height for each child.**

If the chair and the child “match,” with feet flat on the floor, right angles will form at ankles, knees, and hips. The best height for a writing surface is two inches above the child’s elbow. When you have obtained the best possible match, label the bottom of the chair and the desk with that child's name. This can be easily done with masking tape. Then no matter how you rearrange the room or how others might disturb the classroom furniture, you can always give a student *his* chair and desk.

#### **The best seating arrangement for direct instruction and guided practice during Johnny Can Spell writing practice allows all students to face the teacher.**

Just as we need to be flexible in our teaching strategies, so we must be flexible with the desk/seat arrangements in our classroom. Cooperative learning works best when students, working together, have face-to-face contact with each other. Therefore, for cooperative learning activities, designate a desk and chair



arrangement for team/group work. However, direct instruction works best when all students have a face-to-face position with the teacher. Therefore, the best seating arrangement for direct instruction allows all students to face the teacher in rows, in a checkerboard fashion, or in a horseshoe shape. To utilize the best of both, design two seating plans for your room and teach your children to move their desks and chairs into either one at a moment's notice. Be sure your arrangements allow you easy movement and access to every child.

Why is importance placed on the face forward seating arrangement for Johnny Can Spell?

- (1) Students who are learning how to write will have greater difficulty producing correct visual representations if they must look over their shoulders or turn sideways to see the board and then turn back to their desks to write.
- (2) Students should not face each other as they learn to write. If they do, they are placed in a position to watch each other writing upside down, a potential cause of incorrectly formed letters. When seated across from each other, students will look to other students as their models rather than the teacher.
- (3) Students need to see the teacher's mouth, and the teacher needs to see their mouths as they work to produce correct sounds. Students should depend on the teacher as a model for sounds. If seated across from each other, they become models for each other.
- (4) All students need maximum sensory input at all times.

If you do not use a face forward arrangement, you will put some students at a disadvantage and you will personally work harder as you model and monitor letter formation and sound production.

A face forward arrangement does not necessarily mean rows. It can be obtained by randomly opening small groups so desks are angled toward the front. It can be obtained by arranging desks in an open u-shape. Remember, the secret is flexibility and movement so arrangements support instructional strategies.

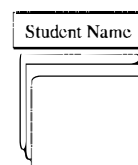
### **Develop a classroom library of magazines, books, and reference materials.**

Do not depend solely on the school library. Reading material needs to be at the fingertips of your students. Do not limit the material to the grade level you are teaching. As their skills improve, your students will move automatically into more difficult reading material if you have it available. Be sure the material is quality literature; include the classics, and include nonfiction.

I regularly visit the public library and personally check out armloads of books for use in my classroom. I also purchase books at garage sales and Friends of the Library used book sales.

**Provide a display area for student work.**

Such displays build individual and corporate pride in work well done. Allow children to help choose which work to display. Frequently change the display so it represents very current work. Some times I displayed several papers from the same student on top of each other in a stair step fashion with the most recent on top.

**Student supplies, inexpensive and minimal, are important for success.**

Each student needs a notebook that he will use to create a spelling reference book. I have found the stitched composition book with the firm cover to work best. However, some teachers use spiral notebooks, some create their own plastic spiral notebooks, and others use three-ring binders. Students will also use six-sided No. 2 pencils from which erasers have been removed, six-sided red pencils, and composition paper that is ruled for handwriting practice. A black line master for composition paper has been provided in this book (p 32) and in the Lesson Planner Series. Use these to make overhead transparencies, make charts, or copy for students as needed.

**As you teach, create phonogram and spelling charts with your class.**

The charts and instructions for creating the charts are given in detail in Chapter 7 of this book and in the Lesson Planner Series. Copies are also available at Alice's Desk, at [www.nine-enterprises.com](http://www.nine-enterprises.com).

The spelling charts are a visual representation of the phonograms, rules, and words. These charts are critical components supporting multi-sensory learning and multiple learning styles instruction. They also provide peripherals for learning that brain-based learning research so strongly recommends.

At this time, in preparation for instruction, consider the display space available in your classroom, especially the wall space close to your teaching station (chalkboard, easel, screen). You will need room for at least two charts to hang permanently. If you are in a room with high ceilings, you might be able to utilize the space above the chalkboard. Some teachers use the space beside the chalkboard. The other spelling charts may be created on chart paper that can be hung temporarily with magnets or hooks, making them easily accessible during spelling lessons and writing sessions.

Depending on the level of your students, you will need up to fifteen sheets of chart paper. Some charts are a single-page width; several are a double-page width. Some of the charts can be created as word walls. For a quick overview of the charts, see pages 169-74.

One chart that you will need to prepare immediately is the clock-face chart (after p 38). Use of the clock-face circle to support handwriting instruction is explained in Chapter 2, pages 37-41.

Ready-made spelling charts are not available for purchase because the creation of these charts is an important part of the instruction and practice. As they participate in making the charts, students will take ownership of them. Also, the words entered on these charts will be unique to your class, changing from year to year. I do not recommend laminating the charts. Frequently, lamination causes a glare which may make it difficult for some students to see the content of the chart.

## ESTABLISH HIGH EXPECTATIONS

I believe student success is greatly influenced by the teacher expectations. And so, **I challenge you to have exceedingly high expectations for every student.**

### **Guard carefully against a tendency to lower expectations.**

To help guard against low expectations, I refrain from reading student files of previous achievement until I have worked several months with the students. I also refrain from negative discussions that center on a student's low achievement, poor behavior, etc. Also, as I assess growth, I always look at the growth we have achieved. In other words, I look not only at how far we must go, but also at how far we have come.

### **Create a portfolio for each student to store work samples.**

Keep samples of each student's first papers. Also, keep sample papers throughout the year. Be sure to keep some of each type of work and of very best work. Use these samples to encourage yourself, parents, and students throughout the year. Beginning papers placed beside current papers help students see their progress at a glance. Selections of a student's best work can help him evaluate his work so that he is always striving to do his best, competing with himself. This also supports the development of a good work ethic.

### **Care enough for each child to challenge him to produce his best always.**

You need a measure of each child's best work. So, early in the year, challenge the class to give you papers showing their best work. Then hold each one to no less than that level of performance. Periodically obtain updated samples of their best work. Use these samples of their work to develop within each one an awareness of his own abilities and potential and the ability to critique his own work in a profitable manner. When a student's work does not reflect his best, place the sample paper of his best beside the current paper and challenge him to make an evaluation. As he views both papers, simply ask, "Is this your best work?" or "Do you think you can do better?" I usually do not engage the child in conversation but leave him to his own judgments.

**Refuse to accept untidy, messy papers.**

The sheets of paper that you pass out are neat and clean. Expect and require that all student work turned in to you be just as neat and clean.

Many times as students receive a new sheet of paper, I say, "Class, look how clean and smooth your paper is. **Take care as you work.** (See page 11, "Take care...") You want to be able to hand in a clean, neat paper when you finish."

Of course, quality paper and pencils will help your students produce quality work. Cheap newsprint paper, dull pencils, and poor quality erasers make the task more difficult.

**Treat each child's work as a valued item.**

The paper a child turns in is his personal creation. Often a child reveals his inner person in his art and writing. Respect that and treat it accordingly. I ask permission from the child to share or examine his work publicly. For example, when a child gives an oral sentence during a lesson, I ask him if the class and I may work with his sentence. If he hesitates, I am sensitive to his feelings.

In addition, if an assignment is worth a student's time to do, you should review it. If you do not have time to do so, the importance of the assignment needs to be re-evaluated. I do not always give grades or make corrections, but I always give some indication that I have looked at their work. I usually put my initials or a smiley face in the upper right hand corner. My "smiley face" is as unique to me as are my initials.

**Tell your students that they have "smart heads."**

Tell them you know they can do the job well. Tell them you know they can learn. They need to hear frequently that you believe in them, and you need to hear yourself say that you believe in them.

## OVERCOME PAST FAILURE

**Removal of guilt for past failure is critical to a student's future success.**

The student whose work is below grade level has experienced broken promises and much failure during his school years. He may assume a sense of guilt for this, believing that something must be wrong with him. Therefore, one of the first things I do is work to remove that guilt. I, as a teacher in the name of all teachers, verbally accept a share of the responsibility for a student's learning or his lack of learning.

**Begin by telling the student that he has not failed.**

Tell the student, “You have not experienced success (learned to read and write well) because you have not been given the whole system of language sequentially. You were given only some of the pieces and, therefore, cannot complete the puzzle in a meaningful way. So, for the next several weeks, I will give you all the pieces of the system; then I will show you how to use them, and I will help you practice for mastery.” Sometimes I use the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle to illustrate the difficulty of reading and writing when pieces are missing.

**Explain the system of our language.**

Take time to give the student some basic facts about our language.

1. The English alphabet has 26 letters.
  2. These are used to form 70 common written symbols; some use one letter, some use two or more letters.
  3. These 70 symbols represent 42 speech sounds.
  4. We will call the combination of sound with symbol a phonogram.
  5. Using these phonograms, we are able to read and write words.
- Learning the sounds and symbols combinations, or the phonograms, and the rules that govern their use in words will help the student master the first steps of reading and spelling.

Our code is complex.

- Take the letter a for example. It is used in several phonograms: a, ay, ai, au, aw, ea, oa, ar, augh.
- On the other hand, consider the long a-sound. It can be represented by seven phonograms: a, ay, ai, ea, ey, ei, eigh. Moreover, notice that the last four phonograms listed do not even use the letter a.

Instruction must clearly distinguish between letters and phonograms. The complete code, all common sound-letter combinations with rules, must be presented. Then students must learn how to use these phonograms and rules.

**SUPPORT SUCCESS****Make a promise to each student.**

I always make a commitment to each student, “If you will work very, very hard with me, I promise you that you will learn to read and write. But remember, I cannot do it for you. You must work very hard **with** me.” Each time I make this commitment my heart tightens for a moment and I think, what if it doesn’t happen? However, as the weeks go by, the student always begins to read and write. Some make outstanding progress. With others, the progress is slower. However, all move successfully forward. With such a commitment, they will work hard and so will you! Success will be your reward.

**Instill in your students that we are all winners if we are doing our very best.**

Our society often promotes a false win-lose philosophy. It says, if you do not win, you are a loser. Even though many great athletes compete, only one can win the gold. Such a philosophy says that since there can be only one winner, everyone else must be a loser.

In my classroom, everyone is a winner because everyone is learning!

Through your assurance and constant expression of your belief in their abilities, you can instill a winning philosophy in your students. Set standards by which they can realistically assess their own work. Set goals they can work to obtain. Refrain from comparisons between students. Help each one measure his own growth. Celebrate because everyone in the class can be a winner!

**Be generous and sincere with praise that is deserved!**

Give specific praise sincerely and when it is earned. I say *be generous* because sometimes we praise only the outstanding, receive the average, and reject the unacceptable. I say *sincere* because sometimes we casually praise everything. Recognition should be given for all forward progress. Do not center your praise on the product or results of a student's work, i.e., his papers, but on the student himself.

**Feedback is the king of learning!**

Feedback is a critical component of instruction. Some research studies report that to be most effective, it should be given within thirty minutes. Feedback involves recognizing what is correct and what is not correct, what is well done and what could be improved.

In my class, we report our work on the basis of what we did correctly, not on the basis of what we missed. Our scores are always reported as a plus, never as a minus. We look first at everything that we have done correctly. If something is incorrect, we then work to *fix it*. *Fix it* does not mean erasing incorrect and copying the correct. *Fix it* means understanding why it is incorrect and knowing what is necessary to make it correct.

I do not view mistakes or errors as negative. Instead, I work hard to provide positive, corrective feedback during the learning process to make a mistake or error a dynamic learning experience. In addition, I always examine my teaching to see if I contributed to the error or misunderstanding. I ask myself, "Did I assume the students understood information and, therefore, failed to give the details needed? Were my instructions really clear?"

To help provide immediate feedback, I use self-checking activities and *blab aloud* with my students. These are two major ways to assure my students of almost instant positive, corrective feedback. (Self-checking and *blab aloud* strategies are discussed later in this guide.)

**Allow the satisfaction of a job well done to be the primary reward.**

Children need to experience satisfaction and learn that it is often the best reward for a job well done. I rarely use extrinsic motivators such as stickers or candy in my classroom. Instead I use a smile and word of commendation, a sticky note with a personal message from me, a moment of public recognition through sharing and displaying work.

## MANAGEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

Years ago, an old teacher gave me a piece of advice,

**“Treat your class like a wild horse; never give it the reins.”**

Assign responsibilities and give privileges. The children will learn how to function as they assume responsibilities and enjoy privileges. However, the bottom line remains, you are the boss and you must hold the reins that direct the course of your class.

**Use your voice and body language wisely to exercise control.**

A drop in volume--to a hushed whisper, a posture of silent waiting, or a lowered pitch of your voice conveys a sense of authority and confidence. A high-pitched, loud, driving voice creates confusion and disarray and signals a lack of authority. Eye contact and a quick smile go a long way to encourage a child.

**Teach your students self-discipline.**

Make it your aim to teach students how to be self-disciplined. Your ultimate goal is not simply to have students who focus on a task at your direction because you exercise control over them, but to have students who can focus on a task because they control themselves.

**Encourage self-confidence.**

I encourage my students to try, to take a chance. I tell them that we often learn through the errors that result when we try. But at the same time, I encouraged them to recognize when they do not know and give them ways to seek the knowledge they need. I do not allow wild guessing.

I encourage students to always represent their own knowledge, especially during dictation activities. I often say, “Show me what is in your smart head. Do not look at your neighbor’s paper and then show me what is in his smart head.” Sometimes I go further, “When you put something on your paper, I assume that you have written what is in your head. If you copied from your neighbor, it is not in *your* head; it is in your *neighbor’s* head. But if you put it down, I will

think you know it. So I will not help you. You only cheat yourself!" Sometimes I elaborate, "Remember, when you leave my classroom, you will only have your smart head. Your neighbor will not give you his smart head to use."

I rarely speak of cheating. Instead, I speak of each doing his own work. I do not use carrels to prevent cheating during dictation. I tried them once but was frustrated because I could not see what the students were writing or hear what they were saying. I do not send students to corners in the room because that turns them away from me, and it is very important that they see my mouth when I dictate phonograms, words, or sentences. Under rare circumstances, I allow a student to cover his work on his paper with a blank paper.

### **Teach students how to manage their physical activity.**

When the physical is managed, it is much easier to manage the mental. I use four directives to help children learn to direct their physical activity.

#### **Stack your blocks.**

On the first day of school, I tell the students a *story* about the construction of their backbones, comparing their backbones to a stack of building blocks.

"Your head is your top block. It should not hang over with your chin on your chest. Your eyes can move to the paper, to the teacher, to the board, etc. without moving your head."

After that, the simple directive, "Stack your blocks," becomes a signal to manage their posture. It has a warm, positive ring about it.

We also discuss how the oxygen taken into our lungs as we breathe is carried to our brains by the blood so we can use our smart heads. If we slouch, it is difficult to breathe deeply enough to take a good supply of oxygen into our lungs. And we discuss how poor posture can make our bodies tired. (See pages 27-29 for more information about posture.)

#### **Fold your hands.**

On the first day of school, I tell students,

"Your eyes usually watch your hands when your hands are busy doing something." Elaborate with examples, e.g., we watch our hands as we color, cut, and paste.

"When that happens, one of the main gates into your mind is busy storing visual information about the task of your hands." If appropriate, elaborate about our eyes being gates to our minds.

"When someone is teaching you, your eyes need to be storing visual information about the lesson. However, if you are fooling around with your hands, your eye-gates are taking in other information, and the lesson material cannot enter."



"So, to keep your eye-gates open for lesson information, we will give special jobs to your hands: This hand (hold up your right hand) must take care of this one (now hold up your left hand). (Drop both hands to your sides.) And this hand (hold up your left hand) must take care of this one (now hold up your right hand). If they are both taking care of each other (fold your hands), you will be able to use your eyes to help your smart head learn."

**Focus.**

On the first day of school, discuss the pictures produced by a television or a camera that is out of focus. The point you want to make is that the picture is distorted and unclear. Tell you students:

"Your mind is receiving many kinds of "pictures." The pictures go into your mind through your senses--seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling. If you are out of focus, the pictures that go into your brain will be out of focus and have unclear connections. Then when you want to bring a picture back in your thinking, it will be unclear. When we want to be sure clear pictures are entering our minds, we will focus."

**Pencils down.**

Do not allow items of distraction on student desks during times of focused instruction and practice. Even a pencil can become an item of distraction, especially if it is in the hands of the student. Therefore, from the very beginning, students are told they will pick up their pencils and write upon instruction to do so. Otherwise, their pencils are to remain down at all times during instruction.

Some children find this restriction difficult to remember. If that is the case, I tell all students to place their pencils on their nametags. Or, I have all students place their pencils inside their desks in the pencil groves.

To obtain maximum attention, help your students manage their physical activity by using of the above directives or similar ones that you have found to be successful. By "management" I do not mean sitting stiffly at a desk. There should be lots of acceptable movement in a classroom. And under certain circumstances, a student may stand at a table or desk to write.

I use the directives singly at times and at other times, in combination. I might say, "Stack your blocks." Or, "Stack your blocks, put your pencils down, and fold your hands." Sometimes I say, "Class, I have some very important things to teach you. We need to focus." I then pause very briefly (only seconds) to give them time to bring their bodies and minds into a state of readiness for instruction. If I see the need to address posture, I add, "Stack your blocks." If I see the need to address the pencils, I add, "Pencils down." Remember, your goal is to say only what is needed to guide and train them to exercise self-control.

I do not use these four directives to address misbehaviors. They are used

strictly to bring a focus in the classroom in order to maximize a very brief moment of instruction and learning.

**Teach students how to be good listeners.**

Teach your students to be good listeners by first modeling such behavior yourself when they are talking and by requiring it when you share. I tell my students

**"Someone must listen for ideas to be exchanged.  
So, listening is just as important as sharing."**

Then I insist that we extend courtesy toward the one who is speaking by listening quietly and attentively.

Help your students cultivate the ability to listen. A simple motto says it all:

**We must learn to listen,  
so we can listen to learn.**

As you work with the instructional strategies recommended in Johnny Can Spell, you will discover that they support the development of listening skills. Teachers often comment on the drastic improvement they notice in the listening skills of their students, evidenced both in their daily work and in standardized test scores.

**Simplify your classroom set of rules.**

I do not like to manage a list of classroom rules. Therefore, I use only three rules to govern general classroom behavior. As we establish these rules during the early days of school, I ask students to contribute examples of behavior that illustrate compliance with these rules and examples that illustrate non-compliance. This discussion has a twofold importance. It clarifies the rules, and it gives the students ownership in the rules.

**1. Take care of yourself.**

Taking care of oneself means being where you should be and doing what you should be doing. It serves as an excellent prompt to help students remain on task.

**2. Take care of others.**

Taking care of others includes good social manners.

**3. Take care of our things.**

Taking care of things means exercising care and showing respect for property that belongs to oneself, others, and the class as a whole.

All three can be summed up in a challenge, **“Take care!”**

. . . Or in a question that demands self-evaluation, **“Are you (we) taking care?”**

If a student is not exhibiting personal responsibility, a word of caution and direction can be given by simply saying, **“Take care.”**

A student who is exhibiting personal responsibility can be given a word of encouragement and praise, **“You are really taking care today!”**

**Such words of caution or praise serve as signposts along the pathway of self-discipline.**

**Remember**, if you expect students to “take care of things,” you must **teach** them (model and practice) how to do their work neatly, how to take care of supplies, how to care for books, how to file their work, how to respond in difficult student relationships, how to be kind. Do not assume that they have the skills or knowledge to do so.

## ENCOURAGE THINKING

### **Build and support student self-confidence.**

Continually challenge each student to do his own learning. Students will develop independence if you build and support self-confidence in them. Self-confidence is most naturally built and supported by giving students the skills to accomplish the tasks expected of them.

### **Encourage thinking; discourage guessing.**

Let your students know that it is okay “not to know.” After all, “Isn't that why we are in school? Aren't we all here to learn things we do not know?” Of course there is a balance in this; there is a point at which they will be expected to obtain mastery.

I tell students that we are learning. An important part of learning is recognizing what you do not know or understand. I assure them that together we work to learn and understand. I make sure they know that I will never allow them to be ridiculed for not knowing or understanding something.

I begin a class practice or think aloud (p 31, *Blab Aloud*) by stressing thinking. **If you allow random guessing, you will allow the placing of incorrect information in the memory banks of your students.**

The mind is not a chalkboard that can simply be erased at will. When engrams made from incorrect information are formed in the brain, it will

take more effort and much more repetition to insure that a new engram representing correct information will be recalled rather than the engram representing incorrect information.

**Develop the skill of giving clear, precise, correctly sequenced directions.**

If a child does not know what to do or how to do something, first examine the instructions you gave. Were they precise and clear? Then examine your teaching strategies. Could the material be presented in a simpler fashion? Did you skip an important basic step because you assumed students knew it? Do some students lack a skill necessary to accomplish the task?

**Make sure your students understand the language of instruction.**

Teach them the meanings of words used in giving directions. For example, if you tell them to write “over,” are they to write above or in the same place as? Teach the meanings of terms that designate lines or areas on their composition paper, i.e., base line, margin. Do not assume that they understand the meanings of words used in spelling rules. Take time to clarify for as long as it is needed, i.e., *usually* or *may*, which are used in some of the phonogram rules.

**Model, model, model!**

We must make time to model for our students. When we model, we should talk through the processes, even those that are very basic and automatic for us. It is wise to ask students to quietly observe as you model. Then engage them in discussion of the model and guided practice as they duplicate the model.

**Long-term retention and automaticity are the results of accurate initial instruction and repeated multi-sensory practice over a long time.**

Anything taught must be reviewed and practiced over and over, the entire year. **Do not allow yourself to grow weary with repetition through practice and application.** There is no shortcut to mastery. It is recommended that four years be devoted to instruction and practice in the phonetic approach to spelling.

To encourage students to practice, I share the following:

(Name a well-known basketball player.)

“How many times do you think he has practiced dribbling the basketball up and down the court? Far more than we can count! He has practiced it so many times that the basketball is like part of his hand. He can tell where it is and where it is going without looking at it. That is very important because he doesn't have time to think about the ball in a game. His mind needs to be free to think about his teammates and the play they want to execute and about his opponents and what they might do. His mind is free to think about the whole picture--the game.”

“You must know this material so well that your mind will not be busy thinking about spelling or sounds and symbols as you read and write but about ideas and facts, about meaning.”

I also share the following to support understanding of automaticity:

“I am going to ask you a question. I want you to answer as fast as you can!”

I look at a student, making sure I have eye contact with him, and ask,  
“What's your name?”

The student answers very quickly, and I repeat the question a few more times with other students.

I then wonder aloud with students as to how they were able to answer correctly and so quickly. How do they know their names so well? We speculate about how many times they have heard their names spoken, how many times they have spoken their names, how many times they have seen their names, how many times they have written their names. We conclude that it has been over many years through much use involving all sensory input that such mastery has resulted.

I then draw a comparison to knowing the phonogram symbols and sounds and challenge my students,

“That's how quickly you must be able to give the sounds for this phonogram (hold up any phonogram card). We must practice very hard until we know each one of these as well as we know our own names!”

“Then our minds can be free to think clearly about the whole word, ...sentence, ...paragraph, ...story.”

## ASSESSMENT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR

Both informal and formal assessments should be administered during the first days of instruction. Many schools have adopted informal assessment tools for phonemic awareness, phonics, and reading. And I highly recommend conducting an informal assessment of handwriting. In addition, I recommend assessing the spelling skills of any student who is reading and writing. Use the assessment tools given here periodically throughout the year as well as at the beginning and at the end of the year.

### **Penmanship Assessment**

On the next page is a list of things to observe as you assess student handwriting habits and skills (form on p 17). These observations are best made informally as students write during regular assignments. Some teachers find it easier to target one category for a specified time and observe all students. Others find it easier to target a few students a day to observe in all categories.

**Position the writing hand below the base line.**

The writing hand should never cross the base line. Only the pencil point should cross it. Sometimes a student will arch his wrist so that the writing hand is above the base line.

I help students change this habit by laying a ruler along the top line. The ruler serves as a visual and physical reminder. When a student unconsciously slips into the habit of hooking his hand above the base line, he touches the ruler, becomes conscious of his hand position and corrects it. Constant awareness, repeated correction, and the desire to change usually prove successful.

I also teach students to be aware of the angle of their pencils. When the grip is correct—the wrist is properly extended and the writing hand is below the base line—the eraser end of the pencil will aim just off the writer's dominant shoulder. Knowing this also helps me frequently monitor wrist alignments. I simply check to see where the eraser end of their pencils is aimed.

**Use vertical surfaces for writing practice.**

No letter should begin at the base line. Yet it is very common for young writers to form letters such as l, h or even o by beginning on the base line.

Having a child write on a vertical surface instead of a horizontal surface is one way to help change this habit. Gravity works with you as it is more natural to pull a line down than to push it up when standing at a board or wall. Also, writing at a vertical surface will strengthen the wrist.

Students can write on a chalkboard, at an easel, or on paper fastened to the wall. It is best to use chalk on a chalkboard or crayons with paper. Wipe-off crayons can be used on whiteboards. Erase wipe-off crayons by rubbing with a cloth—a sock works well. It is best if students do not use markers on a whiteboard. Markers against a whiteboard do not have enough friction to give the student good control, and they do not provide optimal tactile engagement.

*First*, that the hand rests on the nails of the third and fourth fingers, these fingers being drawn back toward the palm of the hand.

*Second*, that the wrist and the side of the hand are kept clear from the desk.

*Third*, that the hand is turned well over to the left, so that the back of the hand is nearly parallel with the top of the table.

This turning of the hand brings the arm on the thickest and most muscular part of the forearm, and also points the top of the penholder in the proper direction; that is, directly over the right shoulder.

Keeping the wrist and the side of the hand free and clear from the table, and the back of the hand facing the ceiling, are two of the hardest things you will have to acquire. You should, therefore, give them very close attention.

Excerpt from an 1800s text when the writing tool was a quill.

Slanting the writing surface also helps students form letters correctly—pulling down instead of pushing off the base line. A “slant board” can be created by placing an empty 3- or 4-inch binder sideways. Lay the writing paper on it. Some teachers create a “slant board” by attaching an empty bottle, the size of a small water bottle, to the back of a clipboard with utility cloth tape.

### **Position the paper at an angle.**

The paper should be positioned at an angle so that the side edges of the paper and the writing arm form parallel lines. I tell young students they will make train tracks on their desks. (Figs. 2.14, 2.15, and Figs, 2.2, 2.3 on p 29)

Sometimes I have students form a triangle (pyramid) with their arms by placing their elbows on the edge of their desks and clasping their hands together. They slowly rotate their arms downward until they rest on their desks with elbows just off the edge. Their arms will form a triangle directly in front of them. This is the space their paper should occupy. I use this especially for students who tend to position their papers to the left or right of center.

### **Nametags on the desk serve as guides.**

To help my students remember to slant their papers, I position nametags on their desks to modeled **the correct angle of paper for writing** (Figs. 2.14 and 2.15). Nametags positioned in this manner can serve as a reminder to students and as a quick guide for your eye as you monitor the slant of paper when students are writing. Make sure the writing lines of the nametags match the lines of the practice writing paper of your choice.

Sometimes I make a **large black dot** in the margin area of the nametag to represent the holes in a sheet of notebook paper. This helps students place notebook paper with the correct side up as they begin to write. They simply line up notebook holes in the margin of their papers with the “hole” on their nametags.

I also make a **clock-face circle** on the far right end of each nametag, placing the circle between the baseline and dotted middle line. I found that tracing a dime is an easy way to make a circle on sentence strip paper. Then I add the four points—2, 10, 8, and 4.

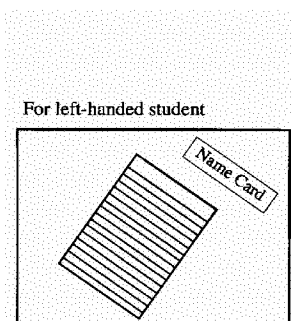


Figure 2.14

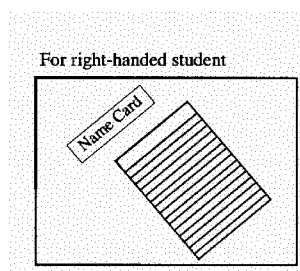


Figure 2.15

Get Ready, Get Set . . . . to Write	Get set:
<p>Supplies: Ruled paper and #2 hex pencil (yellow, six-sided) without eraser Teacher prep: Read again the text information about habits. See <i>Johnny Can Spell Teacher's Guide</i>, 27-44</p>	<p>1) Position paper! (Parallel lines!)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Paper should be positioned in the triangle</li> <li><input type="radio"/> The paper edge will make a line parallel to your writing arm</li> </ul>
<p>Students should be seated at desks/tables that are clear of everything except writing tools—a piece of paper and pencil.</p>	<p>2) Pick up pencil!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Make an A-Okay sign with your writing hand tripod (thumb, pointer, tall finger)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Pinch the pencil (about 1 inch from the point on the paint line) with the A-Okay fingers, pencil point aimed toward the palm of the hand</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Use other hand to swivel pencil into place</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Wave pointer finger</li> </ul>
<p>The importance of seating students so they can face the teacher cannot be over-emphasized.</p>	<p>3) Tripod and circle! (Check your grip!)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If at tables, student should be seated on only one side.</li> <li>• If at desks, the desks should NOT be pushed together in such as way as to cause students to face each other.</li> <li>• Students must face the teacher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Check for the tripod (three fingers touching the pencil)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Check for the circle (rounded web, arch of fingers)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Where does the eraser end of the pencil aim? (off the shoulder)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Is your wrist extended?</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Is your writing hand below the writing line?</li> </ul>
<p>When students are seated across from one another, they are place in position to watch each other rather than the teacher. Students become the models instead of the teacher. This makes everyone's job harder!</p>	<p>3) Holder hand down!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Non-dominate hand is positioned on paper above writing space in order to hold paper</li> </ul>
<p><b>Get ready:</b></p>	<p>"Get ready, Get set" can be practiced without ever actually writing.</p>
<p>1) Stack your blocks!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Sit in chair (backbone is a stack of blocks)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Face desk (table) squarely</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Hips touch back of chair</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Head is up (top block in stack)</li> </ul>	<p>Practice it over a period of days until the steps and procedures are well rehearsed. If these "get ready, get set" procedures are familiar and eventually become habits, penmanship practice times will be much easier.</p>
<p>2) Check right angles!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Feet flat on floor</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Right angles form at ankles, knees, and hips</li> </ul>	
<p>3) Triangle arms? Make a triangle with your arms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Place elbows on desk</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Fold hands</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Move arms to rest them on desk in front of you</li> </ul>	

Figure 2.16 Excerpt from *Johnny Can Spell Lesson Planner Book K*, page 116.



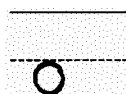
## LETTER STROKES

Six simple lines form the basis of all letter formation. **Teach these lines first, and teach them well.** In first grade, the initial instruction and practice of letter strokes should be accomplished in the first two days. Do not worry if some students cannot form the lines accurately at first, but do be certain that they are processing them correctly—beginning at the correct place, making the line in the correct direction, and ending correctly. Neatness and accurate production of the lines will come as students practice using them to form the letters.

As you teach the correct formation of these strokes, you will also be teaching the vocabulary of instruction that will be used to teach letter formation (i.e., baseline, margin, 2 on the clock, push). You will also be teaching correct posture, paper position, and pencil gripping. Do not underestimate the importance of this instruction and practice. It is foundational.

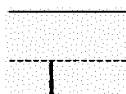
### 1. Circle stroke

Start at 2 on the clock;  
Curve to the dotted middle line;  
Curve to 10 on the clock, ... to 8;  
Curve to the baseline, ... to 4, ...to 2; stop.  
Pick up your pencil.



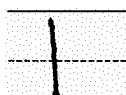
### 2. Short stroke

Start at the dotted middle line,  
Pull a straight line down  
To the base line; be careful not to  
cross the base line; stop.  
Pick up your pencil.

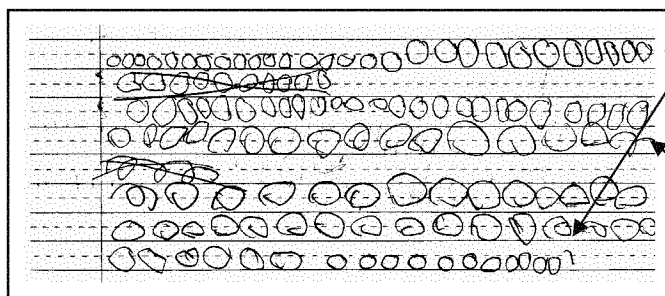


### 3. Tall stroke

Start just below the top line,  
Pull a straight line down  
Through the dotted middle line  
To the base line; be careful not  
to cross the base line; stop.  
Pick up your pencil.



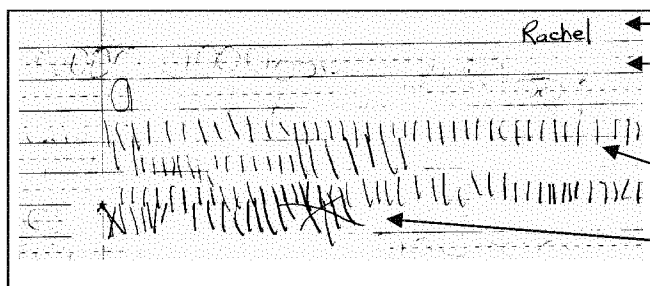
These sample papers are the work of an average kindergarten student. The lines on the original papers are the width of wide-ruled paper with a broken mid-line. A red margin line is on the left. The student wrote with a No. 2 hexagonal pencil and on paper with line width similar in width of wide-ruled notebook paper.



First circles begin at two on the clock. Last circles begin at two on the clock. Also, notice the size of the first and last circles. These were made one by one with whole class verbalizing them during a very controlled practice.

These lines were written when students were practicing independently at their own writing pace without oral prompts.

Figure 2.17 Clock stroke practice, early September



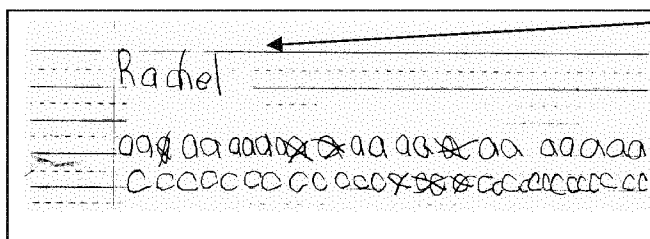
The teacher wrote student's name.

The practice began with a review of clock-face circles which you can see faintly on the first two lines.

That was followed by a practice of the short stroke.

The tall stroke was introduced on the last line.

Figure 2.18 Letter stroke practice, early September

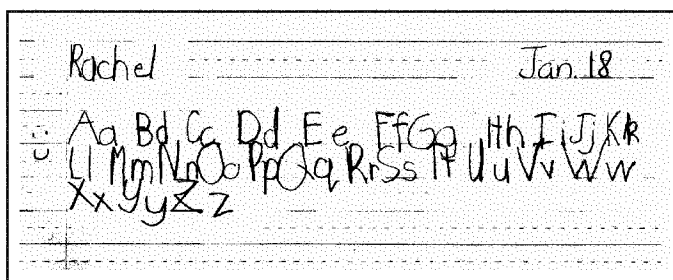


Student wrote her own name.

This paper is within a week of the papers above. Notice the improvement of size and starting point.

The X's on some letters were put there by Rachel because she realized she did not do something correctly or she did not like the final product.

Figure 2.19 Phonogram practice, mid-September



Student wrote her name; teacher wrote the date.

The alphabet, upper and lower case letters, were written from memory without oral or visual prompts. The alphabet strip was covered in the classroom.

Figure 2.20 Writing the alphabet from memory, January

**First Lesson:<sup>1</sup> Penmanship Tools & Habits and Letter Strokes**

1. Assess student skills and knowledge
2. Examine writing supplies
3. Demonstrate and practice writing habits
4. Introduce vocabulary of instruction
5. Introduce letter strokes

**Assessment**

- Checklist for penmanship
- Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale (pp 19-23)
- Individual Penmanship Inventory (p 17, one per child)
- Penmanship Assessment Record (p 18, one per child)

**Teacher supplies**

- Chart looks like student writing paper or lines on the board
- Clock or model of a clock
- Enlarged clock-face circle on chart paper
- Chalk, markers, or crayons

**Student supplies**

- Miniatures of clock-face circle charts or nametags on desks (p 44)
- Writing paper and pencils
- Pencil gripping aids as needed

**Instructional Objectives**

Students will be able to

- Follow posture directives and other handwriting directives
- Explain the margins and lines on writing paper
- Demonstrate correct pencil grip
- Demonstrate proper posture
- Demonstrate correct position of paper on desk for writing
- Use the holder hand to anchor the paper
- Explain the clock-face circle and its four points
- Explain the formation of each letter stroke
- Form letter strokes correctly

**Teacher resources by level***Lesson Planner* **Book K**

Introduction to Lesson Planner, pp 1-2; Lessons 1-10, pp 3-12  
(see activity pages as recommended in these lessons)

*Lesson Planner* **Book 1:1**

Introduction to Lesson Planner, pp ix-xii; Lessons 1-2, pp 1-5

*Lesson Planner* **Book 2:1**

Introduction to Lesson Planner, pp ix-xii; Lesson 1, pp 1-5

*Lesson Planner* **Book 3:1**

Introduction to Lesson Planner, pp ix-xii; Lesson 1, pp 1-5

**Reading**, optional but highly recommended

*The Writing Road to Reading* (Spalding)

4th edition, pp 9-30, 58-82.

5th edition, pp 3-8, 10-19, 22, 148-70

<sup>1</sup>This first lesson may take a week in kindergarten and two days in first grade.

# VOICELESS / VOICED CONSONANT SOUNDS

Manner of Articulation	VOICELESS	(Descriptor)	VOICED	(Descriptor)
Stops	/p/	(lip popping)	/b/	/m/
	/t/	(tongue tapping)	/d/	/n/
	/k/	(tongue scraping)	/g/	/ng/
Affricates	/ch/	(tongue pushing)	/j/	
Fricatives	/s/	(hissing)	/z/	
	/sh/	(hushing)	/zh/	
	/th/	(tongue tickling)	/th/	
	/f/	(lip tickling)	/v/	
Glides	/hw/	(blowing)	/w/	
			/y/	(tongue gliding)
Liquids			/l/	(tongue lifting)
			/r/	
	/h/	(sighing)		

## Use sound descriptors to support kinesthetic awareness.

The descriptors given in the above table are simple ways of identifying placement and use of oral organs in formation of consonant sounds. Use them to help students become conscious of the placement and movement in their mouths to identify sounds.

This information is valuable in developing a kinesthetic awareness which connects with an auditory and visual awareness for accurate identification and production of sounds with their symbols.

These descriptors are also given on the phonogram cards.

If you have students who are serviced by a speech pathologist for sound articulation, become familiar with the descriptors and vocabulary of therapy and strategies that are being using. Incorporate these into your phonogram presentation and practice. Such alignment will enable these students to make greater gains more quickly.

## Spelling Chart Six

hope	hop ing	hoped
<p>(words from spelling are entered in the first column; inflected forms and derivatives are formed by applying rule as a suffix is added and entered in the second column)</p>		
<p>Before adding a vowel suffix to a silent final e word, drop the e.</p>		

## Rule 16

Figure 7.5

Vowel Suffixes	
-ed	past tense ending
-ing	forms present participle
-er	the one who ...
-or	
-ar	

Figure 7.6

**Drop the e Chart:** Practice applying the spelling rule governing the changes made to a silent final e word when adding a suffix that begins with a vowel. This is on the left side of the spelling notebook. See pp 200-203.

**Vowel Suffix Chart:** Chart of common suffixes that begin with a vowel. Start this side with one or two suffixes, and then begin to build the left side by adding one of these suffixes to a spelling word. See pp 200-203.

## Spelling Chart Five

hop	hop ping	hopped
<p>(words from spelling are entered in the first column; inflected forms and derivatives are formed by applying rule as a suffix is added and entered in the second column)</p>		
<p>Before adding a vowel suffix to a one-syllable word that ends with one short vowel followed by one consonant, double the consonant.</p>		

## Rule 14

Figure 7.7

**1-1-1 Chart:** Practice applying the spelling rule governing changes made to a one-syllable word when adding a suffix that begins with a vowel. This chart is on the left side of the spelling notebook. See pp 204-205, 208.

be gin	be gin ning
<p>(words from spelling are entered in the first column; inflected forms and derivatives are formed by applying rule as a suffix is added and entered in the second column)</p>	
<p>Before adding a vowel suffix to a two-syllable word that ends with a single vowel followed by a single consonant, double the consonant if the accent is on the last syllable.</p>	

Accented syllables:  
*Lesson Planners*,  
 Book 1:2, 48  
 Book 2:2, 33  
 Book 3:1, 7

## Rule 15

Figure 7.8

**2-1-1 Chart:** Practice applying the spelling rule governing changes made to a two-syllable word when adding a suffix that begins with a vowel. See pp 206-207, 209.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Studies show that the three spelling rules on Charts Six and Five are the most frequently missed spelling applications on standardized tests. See p 212.

### The silent final e has five jobs

This chart can be presented at any time as a single lesson or as five mini-lessons. It should be taught prior to analyzing any words with silent final e's. For reference to it in the Lesson Planners:

Book K, page 71  
 Book 1:1, page 125  
 Book 2:1, page 46  
 Book 3:1, page 43

### Presenting the chart

**Job 1:** The silent final e jumps over a consonant to let a single vowel say its name.

Encode (sound out as you write) the word *time* on the board ; write only phonograms that carry sounds: *tim*

1. Ask students if all the sounds of the word *time* are represented (yes)
2. Tell students this is not the spelling of the word *time*
3. Tell them that vowel i cannot say ī in the middle of a syllable; it says its first sound
4. Tell them we must add a silent final e
  - Silent -- it does not make a sound
  - Final -- it is at the end
5. The silent final e will jump over the consonant and let the vowel in *time* say ī
6. Use red to note silent final e markings and explain
  - Underline silent final e twice because it is silent
  - Underline the m because the e jumps over it
  - Underline i because it says ī

**Note:** I mark the silent final e with a double underline at all times, even for the first job.

**Note:** We mark first job only with single long vowels. Most of the time, the silent final e will jump one consonant, occasionally it jumps two consonants, e.g., *paste*, *change*, *bathe*.

**Job 2:** English words do not end with v or u. (*v - u; job 2*)

Encode the word *have* on the board; write only phonograms that carry sound: *hav*

1. Ask students if all the sounds of the word *have* are represented (yes)
2. Tell students this is not the spelling of the word *have*
3. Tell them that English words do not end with the letter v
4. Ask them what they think we could do. We must add silent final e
  - Silent -- it does not make a sound
  - Final -- it is at the end
5. Use red to note silent final e markings and explain
  - Underline silent final e twice because it is silent
  - Put small 2 on the right side of the double underline for the second job
  - Underline v (u), English words do not end with v (u)

Repeat the above procedure for the word *blue*. English words do not end with the letter u.

**Job 3:** The letters c and g need a silent final e to say their second sound. (*c - g; job 3*)

Encode the word *chance* on the board, writing only phonograms that carry sound: *chanc* (tell them we must use c to say /s/)

1. Ask students if there is a phonogram for each of the sounds in the word *chance* (yes)
2. But there is a problem; ask students what the word would say if it were spelled this way (*chank*)
3. Direct attention to the rule for c on Spelling Chart One
4. Ask them how we should solve our problem
5. Add a silent final e
  - Silent -- it does not make a sound
  - Final -- it is at the end
6. Review the rule for letter c (Chart One) and say the word *chance*
7. Use red to note silent final e markings and explain
  - Underline silent final e twice because it is silent
  - Put a small 3 on the right side of the double underline for the third job
  - Underline c because it needs the silent final e to say its second sound (soft sound)
8. Mark multi-letter phonogram ch with an underline in black

Repeat the above procedure for the word *charge* for the letter g.

**Note:** English words do not end with the letter j. We use the letter g when we hear /j/ at the end of the word *charge*.

## SPELLING CHART THREE

Both sides of Chart Three, like Charts Two, Seven, and Four must be treated as inseparable. The two sides of Charts One, Six, and Five can be separated and treated as individual charts.

A common misspelling occurs by the confusion of phonograms ie and ei in common words. This chart is designed to help students determine whether to use ie or ei in a word as they learn spelling rule 9.

### Knowing when to use ie or ei

Instructional Procedures

#### Presenting the chart

1. Enter the titles in each column and the rule at the bottom to set-up the chart.
  - Center the phonogram ie on the first base line in the first column. With red, underline it.
  - Center the letters cei on the first base line in the second column. With red, underline only ei.
  - Center the phonogram ei on the first base line of the third column. With red, underline it and put a small red 2 over it.
  - The fourth column does not have a title.
2. Count up two base lines from the bottom of the page and in the **second column** next to the fold, write: *Use ei after c,*. In the third column on the same base line next to the red margin line write, *if we say a, and*. In the fourth column on the same base line next to the fold write, *in these words*. (Do not write any part of the rule in the first column.) With red, underline ei in the second column and a in the third column.
3. Students, grade 3 and above, may enter the words in **column four** by dictation. These words form two nonsense sentences: (1) *Neither foreign sovereign seized (the) counterfeit (and) forfeited leisure*. (2) *Either weird heifer (eats) protein (and) caffeine*. These are words which use ei when it is not after the letter c and it does not say long a-sound. Underline ei with red in each word. In *heifer* it will be underlined twice. Put a small red 3 over it in *foreign*, *sovereign*, *counterfeit*, *forfeited* (for the short i-sound, 3rd sound).

It is best to enter about three words a day, completing this column in one week. Grade 2 may enter these words as they are encountered in spelling, reading, and writing. Enter each word on its appropriate line so that the word order will be correct as the two nonsense sentences begin to form on the chart.

Figure 7.16 shows columns three and four of Spelling Chart Three as they appear in a student notebook.



ie

cei

Use ei after c,

ei

Neith erfor eignsov er eignseize<sup>2</sup>d(the) coun ter feit(and) for feit edlei sure.Eith er

weird

heif er(eats) protein(and) caf feine<sub>=5</sub>.

if we say a, and in these words.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SPELLING CHARTS

“Learning involves both focused attention and peripheral perception.”

This is one of the twelve principles of brain-based learning reported by Renate Nummela Caine and Geoffrey Caine in their book *Making Connections, Teaching and the Human Brain* (1991).

That which the brain absorbs when directly aware and paying attention is referred to as focused attention learning. Whereas, peripheral perception is that which it absorbs that lies beyond the field of focused attention. Peripherals in a classroom include

- the condition of the room (temperature, organization of furniture, noise)
- teacher and student enthusiasm
- body language (location of teacher, raised finger, facial expressions)
- visuals (charts, illustrations).

Spelling charts support focused attention learning during a lesson: we apply a rule to a word and add it to the chart.

The displayed spelling charts support peripheral perception: they serve as a reminders to support the recall of learning that occurred during the focused attention.

Spelling charts also support the visual learner. And they provide a very systematic, organized presentation of material that appeals to the logical, mathematical learner.

Spelling charts also continually beckon the teacher and student to consider again the information on them. It is not uncommon to hear a student ask, “When are we going to add another word to this chart?” The charts call upon us to revisit key knowledge, concepts, and procedures.

And lastly, they provide a visual record of student learning.

**The spelling charts are powerful learning tools!** Use them as such.