

The Blackboard in Your Mind

This teaching strategy gives students a method of remembering how words look, and it works best for students who are good at getting a picture in their minds.

After students are used to working with you in this way, you could ask them to work in pairs on their spelling, giving them a copy of the questions to use.

For any word they are working on:

1. Write it where they can see it.
2. Ask them to look at the word, and spell it out loud. Cover the word.
3. Ask them to visualize a blackboard (or whiteboard) in their minds. They can choose to close their eyes or to look at the ceiling. For some students, closing their eyes will produce anxiety, so offering a choice makes your room a safer space.
4. Ask them to look at the board they have visualized. Notice its size. Look at the frame around it. Notice the size and colour and shape of the frame.
5. Ask them to choose a colour that the word will appear in.
6. Ask them to see the word written on the board, and read it off the board for you. If they can't do it, or do it wrong, uncover the word, let them look at it, then re-focus on their visualization and read the word to you. Repeat until firm.
7. Ask them to continue to focus on the board in their mind, and ask them the following questions. If need be, they can look again at the correct version.
 - Spell the word (read it off the board).
 - How many letters in the word?
 - Spell the word (read it off the board).
 - How many vowels? What are they (from left to right)?
 - Spell the word (read it off the board).
 - What letters hang below the line? (g, y, etc.)
 - What letters stand up above the line? (h, l, t, etc.)
 - Are there any capital letters?
 - Are there any little words inside the word? Spell the little words (e.g., "eat," "the," and "her" inside of "weather").
 - Spell the target word (read it off the board).
 - What are the first 2 (or three) letters?
 - What are the last 2 (or three) letters?
 - What are the middle letters?
 - What are the consonants (from left to right)?
 - Spell the word (read it off the board).
6. Remind the student that the word will always be written on their mental blackboard. Whenever they want to write the word, they can call it up on their mental blackboard and copy it onto their paper.
7. Later in the day, ask them to spell the word for you, either aloud or in writing, by calling up the image on the board in their mind.