

Pattern Spelling

(A video about pattern spelling is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDuePtrZ6U0>)

What skills does it build?

Spelling; building words from their parts; word pattern recognition; decoding skills; word processing skills; cooperation and teamwork.

Who is it useful for?

Very beginning readers and spellers through to competent spellers working on Latin and Greek roots.

Early readers and writers: use the method as outlined below. Adjust the speed with which you go through the word families to suit the reading/writing/vocabulary levels of your learners, and repeat families as necessary.

Learners who are competent with basic spelling rules: use the method as outlined, but go directly to the Latin and Greek roots, to teach the formation and spelling of multi-syllabic words. The roots: port, press, ject, spect, dict, tend, pend, fuse, etc.

Pattern Spelling is a simple method for helping learners build up their ability to recognize and spell the many word families and to learn many common affixes such as *-ing*, *-ed*, *-less*, *-able*, and *un-*, *re-*, *mis-*, etc. Although the method is simplicity itself, it quickly builds up learners' abilities to spell longer words by adding affixes correctly and completely, increases their confidence in their ability to spell, and lets them have fun. This is not a spelling test—this is spelling practice—so asking for help from the teacher, checking with a neighbour, using the spellchecker—all are fair game. The success of the method is due to the fun, the repetition that is varied each time, the success, the increased confidence, the teamwork and co-operation, and the allowance for differences.

Another side benefit is increased skill and confidence in using a computer, laptop, tablet or other device. It is described here for use when the learners are each working on a screen, but if a screen for everyone is not available, learners can write the words on the board or on paper.

Note: Sometimes the learners know the word “morphograph” and I use it to describe the base words and affixes. Sometimes I use the term “morph” and define it as “a part of a word that has meaning.” Sometimes I use the terms “base word,” “prefix,” and “suffix.”

The Shape of the Lesson

Each session starts by learners helping each other open up the computers, opening the word processing program and increasing the font size so that the instructor can read their screens easily as s/he moves around the classroom, and any learner can easily see nearby screens

and compare answers. Learners can also choose any font they like, and experimentation is encouraged. Asking learners to help each other builds confidence in the helpers, gets things moving quickly and builds a sense of community and teamwork in the class.

Make it clear that learners can look at the screens around them; this exercise is not a spelling test, but a spelling practice. If someone cannot spell “crank” the first time it is dictated, they should get it right by checking with the teacher or with a neighbour, and then practice it while writing the next words, which will be cranks, cranked, cranking, and cranky, with maybe crankier and crankiest added, if the learners know the “y to i” rule.

Every session has two parts: in the first, main, part learners spell many words that follow a single pattern, and in the second part they write a few sentences with words from the pattern. The second part is optional.

Part 1: Spelling by Word Families

For the main part of the lesson, the instructor dictates a series of words based on a particular spelling pattern, which the learners type. The instructor circulates to check every word as it is written. This checking goes really quickly, since nearly everyone spells nearly every word correctly. Learners can have their spell checkers on, which means they will correct many errors before the instructor gets to them.

First, pick a spelling pattern to work on for the day. Write that pattern on the board, with a blank line in front. For example, if the pattern for the day is words ending in *-ank*, write *ank* and announce that all the base words dictated today will end in *-ank*. Start at the beginning of the alphabet with the first word in the pattern for the day, and dictate in order the possible words that can be made by adding affixes to this base word. In this example, start with “bank.” As the learners write “bank,” go around to check the work. Then write “+ *s*” on the board and ask learners to write “banks,” checking for the spelling on the board if they need to. Go on to “banking,” and write “+ *ing*” on the board, and then on to “banked,” “banker,” and “bankers,” writing the affixes on the board for reference, and going around to check learners’ work after each word. Give a short sentence to go with each word as it is dictated.

As you are circulating to check the words, you may ask a learner to say the word or ask a learner to name all the parts she has written (base words plus affixes).

Again using this example, you can go on to “dank” if you think they know the word or might like to know it. If this is a word that is not familiar to your learners, and you do not want to confuse matters, skip “dank” entirely and go on to “hank.” Then on to “hanks,” and “hanky.” Next comes “lank.” When you are finished with “lank,” dictate “blank,” “blanks” “blankly,” “blanket,” “blankets,” “blanker,” “blankest,” then “clank,” “clanks,” “clanked,” “clanking,” “flank,” “flanks,” “flanking,” “flanked,” and so on.

Thus, the blends are introduced at the place in the alphabet where learners are already dealing with the second sound in the blend. Learners are asked to write “blank” when they

have already written “lank,” because it is easier to add an initial sound to a word than to insert a sound into the second place in a word. That is, it is harder to write “blank” after “bank” than after “lank.” Similarly, learners are asked to write “crank” after they have written “rank.” To give another example, we would ask them to write “train” “training,” “trainer,” “trainers,” etc. when they have finished writing “rain,” “rained,” “raining,” “rainy,” etc. Then go on to “brain,” “brains,” “brained,” and “brainy.”

Affixes Have Meanings

Affixes

-s
-ing
-ed
-er
-est
-en
-y
-ly
-ful
-less
-ness
un-
re-
de-
con-
pre-
in-
inter-
ex-
trans-

For the first few lessons keep the affixes relatively simple, and few in number, i.e., *-ed*, *-s*, *ing*, and *er*, so you can check that learners can correctly add the consonants and the blends at the front of the pattern you are presenting. This is the time to introduce the idea that the affixes have meanings. *-ed* means “in the past,” *-ing* means that an action is ongoing, and *-s* means either “more than one” or that the person doing the action is he, she or it. Just give the meaning as you write the affix on the board.

Also, in those early lessons you can get learners used to you going around and asking them to say the words, and to count the parts. “Bankers” has three parts, although it has only two syllables.

After you are sure everyone can add consonants and blends to the beginning of the pattern, you can add affixes quite quickly, because learners don’t have to remember how to spell them. Write the affix on the board as you use it, so they can check the spelling if they need to. Soon learners memorize the spelling of the common affixes. In the examples that follow, I have given many possible affixes; judge your learners’ stamina, and don’t overload them; however, keep adding the number of affixes you introduce as long as they are still finding it easy and enjoyable.

Build up each word carefully, starting from the simple form that follows the word pattern you are using. For example, “thank,” “thanks,” “thankning,” “thankd” “thankful,” “thankfully,” or “fresh,” “fresher,” “refresh,” “refreshed,” “refreshing,” “refreshingly,” or “fill,” “fills,” “filling,” “filled,” “refill,” “refilled,” “refilling,” “refillable.” You may or may not be ready then to have the conversation about “unrefillable,” vs. “non-refillable.”

By following the pattern and adding the affixes, learners can write some long words, and may want to keep track of the longest word made so far, and the largest number of affixes added to a base word so far.

After a few days some learners will start to predict the words that you dictate, another very useful skill to be encouraged. They may predict other words in the pattern, so if you start with “ash,” they will give you “cash” and “rash,” or they may give you other endings for a base word, for example, “cashing” and “cashed” and “cashable.” You can sometimes prompt them to predict by asking, “What words are still to come in this pattern?” or

occasionally ask them to type all the words they can think of using a given base word from the pattern. Learners who are more able will soon produce many of the words themselves, while learners who are less able will wait for you to dictate them. The most advanced students will try to type the whole sentence you dictate. All good.

If learners are typing with the spell checker on, they soon begin to use it as a tool to see if a particular ending will make a real word. For example, they might add *-est* to a word just to see if it is a real word; this use of the spell checker is a “real-life” use of technology. Again, good.

Part 2 (Optional): Writing Sentences

I often end the session with writing sentences. I give two words, often a subordinate conjunction and a word from the pattern we have been using, and ask learners to write a sentence using both words, in any order, and adding any affixes they want/need for their sentence. This sentence needs to be perfect in spelling and punctuation, because they are doing both the first draft and the final proofread. I offer to spell any words they need, and I go around asking them to read it out loud to me, so they can find any words or affixes that are missing, and I help them put in periods and commas as needed. (Giving them a subordinate conjunction nearly always requires a comma.) When the sentence is correct, I ask them to stand and trade computers with any other learner who is standing. (At the board, I ask them to read their sentences in turn.) At their new computer, they begin to work on another sentence, using the next pair of words I’ve written on the board. I encourage them to read the sentences written by the previous learner(s) and I encourage them to write sentences that others will find interesting.

A variation is to give them two words and ask them to write a question. For example, we might be working on words that end in “-ool” and I would ask them to write a question using the words “when” and “school.” After they have written the question, they change computers and answer the question they find on their new computer.

At the end of the lesson, back at their own computer, learners can, if they want, select all the words they have written, change the font back to a reasonable size and print out the list of all the words they spelled today. It’s a big list of words they successfully wrote today and can probably read tonight.

Order of Patterns to Teach

First pattern: Words that don’t change when affixes are added

Begin with base words that don’t change when you add affixes. That is, start with words with two vowels in the middle, or two consonants at the end, and which don’t take “es” to make the plural. Keep on with those patterns until learners are familiar with the techniques for adding affixes, can count the number of parts in a word they have strung together, can

write most of the affixes without looking at the board, and feel confident about their ability to spell long words simply by adding affixes to the base word. The order you introduce

Patterns to start with (v c, v c c)

—ail
—ain
—oat
—eat
—eet
—een
—ink
—all
—act
—ink
—ump, etc.

these words in can vary, depending on your class. If you are following a phonics program, work with examples of the patterns you are teaching in your program; if you are using a spelling program, use words from the current lesson as your patterns for the week; if there are particular words you want to teach from other content areas, use their patterns, or if there are some sight words that people are having trouble spelling (e.g., “sight,”) use them. Writing “unsightly” and “rightfully” makes a more interesting lesson than just dictating the base words, and concentrating on keeping track of the affixes makes it possible for learners to practice “ight” and make it automatic.

This is where learners begin to see the force of the agglutination that is a strength of the English language. When they start with “-esh” and get to “refreshingly” they are very pleased with themselves.

Second Pattern: Words ending in silent “e”

Next, work with words that follow a rule when an affix is added, beginning with words that end in silent “e.” Teach the rule, “Drop the “e” when the part you are adding starts with a vowel.” There are various ways to formulate this rule, so use the one you want learners to use.

Choose a word family you want to work with, for example, “—ake” and dictate your way through the alphabet as usual. Again, remind people that it is okay to check with their neighbour. Teach the rule and review it every day, using a different word family. When you are going around to check the spelling, if you find that someone has made a mistake, say the rule and ask the learner to correct the word. If they have spelled the word correctly, say so, and ask them to state the rule: “You’ve got it spelled right. How did you know to drop the ‘e’ when you wrote ‘taking?’”

When people are automatic with a rule, it is time to go on to the next one but keep coming back to that one for review.

Third Pattern: The doubling rule

There are many ways to formulate this rule, so use the one that learners are familiar with, if any. Work on the doubling rule for several days, until learners are firm with it, without reviewing the silent “e” rule. Then you might alternate, on succeeding days, silent “e” base words with doubling base words until learners are firm on both rules.

tap	tape
taps	tapes
tapped	taped
tapper	taper
tapping	taping

When they know both rules well, teach them how to make a table using the word processing program, and ask them to make a table with two columns and six rows. Then dictate two words that differ only by a silent “e” and ask them to write one at the head of each column. For the first few days, dictate the words down one column and then down the other. Ask learners to read the words across the rows. Later you can dictate words across the rows and ask them to read down each column. You may go on to other patterns or other rules, but ask them to make one such table for review every day, and later less frequently.

Fourth pattern: Words that take “es” when you add “s”

Words ending in *-s*, *-z*, *-x*, *-sh*, *-ch* take *-es* instead of *-s*. This rule is not so difficult for learners because they can hear the difference between “box” and “boxes” that requires the *-es*. Because it is relatively easy, you could teach it as the third pattern, between the “silent *e*” rule and the doubling rule.

Fifth pattern: Changing “y” to “i”

This rule is complicated, so start by making sure everyone knows the difference between a vowel and a consonant. Then the rule is: “When the word ends with a consonant + *y*, and you want to add something that starts with a vowel, change the *y* to *i*. EXCEPT: no English word has two “i’s.” (EXCEPT: *skiing*, which comes from Norwegian) AND it is also common when you are adding “er” not to change the *y* to *i*, which explains why you will see “whole fryers” for sale on so many grocery flyers.

Sixth pattern: Greek and Latin roots

Some Latin roots

dent (tooth)	rupt (break)
dict (say)	script (write)
duct (lead)	spect (see)
fer (carry)	struct (build)
ject (throw)	tend (stretch)
pend (hang)	vent (come)
port (carry)	

Finally, many weeks or months later, you come to words that have Greek and Latin roots where the root is not a word on its own. Explain the meaning of each root, and dictate words that contain the root. To start with “spect,” for example, explain that the Latin word means “see” and all the words will have something to do with seeing: inspect, inspection, inspector, respect, disrespect, respective, respectively, respectable, respectably, irrespective, introspection, introspective, introspectively, spectator, spectacle.