Progression in Primary English

Linda Saunders

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CHAPTER 9

SPELLING AND HANDWRITING

Objectives

1. To identify key features of progression in spelling and handwriting
2. To examine key models of the process of spelling and handwriting
3. To relate progression in spelling and handwriting to daily classroom practice
4. To evaluate common forms of assessment for spelling and handwriting

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Introduction

The penultimate chapter of this book concludes the three writing chapters by looking at two transcriptional skills, spelling and handwriting. Spelling can present particular difficulties for a number of pupils, some of whom will require specialist diagnostic assessment and teaching. For this reason, understanding progression in spelling means that class teachers must have a thorough knowledge of the processes of spelling development and be able to recognise what irregular spelling development looks like. With this knowledge teachers are able to tailor the spelling curriculum for maximum impact.

Like spelling, handwriting can also present difficulties and challenges for primary pupils. These can have significant effects on pupils' writing composition and motivation to write. Handwriting fluency is also an aspect of spelling development (Medwell and Wray, 2010). In addition to this, the relationship between keyboarding skills and handwriting needs consideration. Research suggests that handwriting uses knowledge of letter patterns or common strings of letters, while spelling also uses knowledge of phonics (Berninger and Amtmann, 2004).

Despite the convenience of word processing tools such as spellcheckers, auto-correct, predictive text and typed text, both spelling and handwriting are important features of writing progression. Traditionally both of these skills were taught separately from the compositional aspects of writing. Weekly spelling lists and daily handwriting practice exercises typify this approach. However, attention to spelling and handwriting are part of pupils' awareness of writing for an audience and a purpose, integrated into the writing process. In addition, learning to spell successfully is about teaching pupils to use consistent self-correction strategies that build on their personal spelling strengths and preferred methods of learning to spell. Learning to handwrite is about developing a fluent, legible and personal style that enables the pupil to write at speed. Older pupils develop handwriting stamina in preparation for secondary school and beyond.

There is an interconnection between spelling and reading. At its most basic level this is the link between encoding and decoding. Spelling is the ability to encode. Encoding print is the opposite of decoding print, which is part of the reading process. While decoding print, pupils may decipher phonemes, letter strings and whole words to read each word. Reading print also provides contextual clues which independent spelling does not use (Dombey, 2013). Independent spelling asks pupils to read, recall and write each word from memory. This is why spellings are best tested by placing the words in context. A number of different skills may be used to spell such as using mnemonics, rehearsing syllables, onsets and rimes, recalling whole words, blending phonemes and building up parts of words as in compound words or the use of suffixes and prefixes. As well as reading, spelling is also linked to writing fluency (O'Sullivan and Thomas, 2007). The glossary at the end of this book is one reference point for the spelling terminology used here and in the remainder of this chapter.

Activity

Spelling test

Take a spelling test using the following list of words. Use the table to analyse your answers. Use the final column to note the difficult aspects of spelling in each word.

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Table 9.1

Words for dictation	Spelling attempt	Order of letters confused/ missing/ reversed/added	Phonemically plausible/ implausible	Random spelling	Other	Analysis
Anaesthetic Diarrhoea Definitely Grammar Independent Jewellery Unnecessary Occurrence Receipt Underrate						

This activity will have caused you to consider your own spelling strategies. You may have used favoured spelling techniques and aspects of the spelling process such as using spelling 'rules', recalling a mnemonic, recognising familiar letter patterns, sounding out phonemes and syllables and writing out different versions to see if it 'looks right'. These strategies are amongst a range of approaches underpinned by visual, auditory and kinaesthetic skills. Learning to spell using a range of approaches like this is called multisensory learning. This approach lies at the heart of learning to spell. Multisensory approaches underlie the importance of equipping pupils with personalised spelling strategies. In the classroom this means that spelling is taught as part of writing composition, rather than always separately from it. In this way it becomes part of a natural editing and proof reading process.

Spelling processes

The processes of learning to spell in an alphabetic system are part of the body of knowledge that deals with phonological, phonemic, orthographic and morphemic knowledge. Each of these can be further subdivided into six areas, which are listed below, adapted from a resource document produced by the Irish National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Kennedy et al., 2012).

1. Alphabetic knowledge: this is knowledge of letter names and the sequence of the alphabet. In addition to phonemic awareness, it is also essential for later skills such as indexing and dictionary use.

2. Phonemic awareness: this is the ability to discriminate phonemes, aurally and visually, and to be able to pronounce them. It includes the reversible processes of segmenting and blending phonemes.
3. Common English letter patterns or strings of letters in English: this includes being able to discount phoneme sequences not found in English. It is called orthographic knowledge.
4. Phonological awareness: this is the ability to discriminate sounds. It includes knowledge of rhyme, rhythm, onset, rime and syllables.
5. Modifying root words: this is the ability to use morphemic knowledge as a basis for building words. It includes inflections. It may include etymology.
6. **High frequency sight words** are used most often in written text and can include common phonically irregular words. They are often divided into progressive lists for whole word memorisation.

Like writing composition, spelling processes can be viewed from three main angles: cognitive, socio-cultural or linguistic. Like composition, learning to spell also takes place in the context of multimodal texts and digital literacy. Similarly, an investigative approach to learning to spell is a meta-cognitive process.

Cognitive approaches to spellings include the concept of developmental spelling. In general these cognitive approaches suggested that pupils progress from phonological to orthographic and morphological spelling.

✎   Research focus

Staged models of reading and spelling development

Building on earlier staged theories of reading development, the psychologist Uta Frith proposed three stages of spelling and reading (Frith, 1985). In the logographic stage pupils may recognise a small number of whole words by sight. To do this the young child may use the word's shape, colour, font and its context. In the alphabetic stage pupils may use onsets and rimes to find patterns within words and match graphemes to phoneme correspondences (GPCs). In the orthographic stage pupils may use spelling patterns and units of words that are common to written English. There is researched evidence for aspects of Frith's model. For example, exposure to print appears to be related to knowledge of orthographic letter patterns in young primary children (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1991).

Frith's model compares to the well-cited sequence of spelling acquisition developed by J. Richard Gentry (Gentry, 1982). He classifies five stages of spelling development, summarised below.

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1. The pre-communicative stage: pupils record random single letters and strings of letters that do not relate to GPCs. Some random numbers may appear.
2. The semi-phonetic stage: pupils record some examples of correct GPCs plus random letters.
3. The phonetic stage: pupils spell phonetically.
4. The transitional stage: pupils use a mix of phonetic spelling and common English orthography.
5. The correct stage: pupils spell correctly.

Critics of staged approaches to spelling express similar arguments to those of staged theories of reading acquisition, discussed in Chapter 4. Not all pupils necessarily pass through each stage because children learn in different ways, have different social and cultural circumstances and have different levels of language acquisition. Instead of learning to spell in a sequential manner it is suggested that pupils use a series of skills that overlap according to circumstance. Older pupils, for example, may revert to phonetic spelling with unfamiliar or foreign words. Research suggests that certain young children use orthographic patterns before their phonemic knowledge is fully formed (summarised in Bourassa and Treiman, 2010). For others, a solid language base combined with frequent reading and writing does not automatically result in good spelling. Some good readers who are poor spellers, for example, fail to use their orthographic reading skills and appear to rely on inconsistent visual cues and phonetic strategies (O'Sullivan and Thomas, 2007). The teachers' role is therefore to distinguish between persistent or fleeting misspellings and early 'invented' or exploratory spelling and to identify potential barriers to spelling development.

Research focus

Socio-cultural and constructivist approaches to spelling

In the 1980s the work of educationalists such as Donald Graves emphasised the importance of creative written composition as part of pupils' socio-cultural development (Graves, 1983). His whole language approach to writing composition has already been discussed in Chapter 7. Graves outlined the importance of pupils' invented spelling as part of other writing processes. Using pupils' written work as evidence, he noted five stages of invention, showing pupils' progressive use of consonants and vowels. For Graves, the content of pupils' work was of paramount importance. Spelling was part of

pupils' editing and proof reading process, best addressed with the class teacher's individual help. More recently the work of Gunther Kress describes spelling as a cultural act, as a code learnt and taught as part of the writing process (Kress, 2000). He argues for the place of meaning in the process of learning to spell as part of writing composition, alongside linguistic and cognitive routes. As a consequence teachers need to credit pupils' spelling attempts as well as their accuracy. The work of Graves and Kress reflects socio-cultural and constructivist approaches to learning. Pupils play an active and investigative role in their own learning, enhanced by their use of the meaning and context of words. Developing a progressive and systematic approach to proof reading skills is part of this approach.

Linguistic approaches to spelling incorporate pupils' development in relation to language. In order to spell, pupils must obviously have an oral vocabulary. It is hard to spell if you do not know the words or their meaning. In addition, spelling requires auditory, visual and kinaesthetic skills. These include an ability to pronounce phonemes, syllables, onsets and rimes and to detect analogy (Goswami and Bryant, 1990). Some of this work has particular significance in understanding phonological deficits in dyslexic pupils.

Activity

Associated spelling skills

Decide whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. Rank them in order of importance for lower, middle and upper primary school aged pupils.

1. Pupils who read well will automatically be able to spell correctly by default.
2. Cursive handwriting contributes to orthographic spelling skills.
3. Both printing and cursive handwriting assist phonemic development.
4. Frequent independent writing practise develops writing stamina, writing fluency and independent spelling.
5. Spelling should be taught as a cumulative set of rules alongside proof-reading skills.
6. Pupils should be encouraged to 'have a go' at spelling the words they need.
7. All pupils need to know how to use a dictionary.
8. Spelling must be correct in all final writing drafts.
9. All spelling errors should be corrected by the teacher and re-learnt by the pupil.
10. An interest in words will assist spelling development.

This activity will have caused you to consider the relationships between spelling and the four modes of English, including handwriting. You may have begun to plot the progression of spelling skills across the primary years. You may have looked at the statutory requirements of prescribed curricula and begun to match each of the six aspects of spelling progression noted above. For example, the primary national curriculum in England provides statutory spelling requirements for each year group. Using similar documents it is useful to isolate spelling skills that bridge year groups and those which characterise them individually.

The elements of handwriting

Although there is a good deal of research into the nature of handwriting it has not recently received as much attention in primary schools. Part of the reason for this may be due to a persistent separation between composition and transcription. While the process and emergent models of writing have encouraged the development of pupils' writing composition and owner-ship, the place of handwriting has received less emphasis (Medwell and Wray, 2010).

In order to control the formation of print pupils need to be stable in their upper bodies. They need to have a stable pencil grip to facilitate a fluent writ-ing style. In order to write, pupils must coordinate their eyes, arms and hands. In order to write, pupils must know their grapheme-phoneme correspond-ences and the conventions of writing in English, such as the flow of print from left to right and the sequence of letter formations.

Children come to school at different stages of readiness for handwriting. Early stages of mark making and letter formation have been discussed in Chapter 7. A key point of progression is when pupils know the difference between draw-ing and writing and that print has meaning (Clay, 1999).

The early work of Rosemary Sassoon is of relevance here. She recommends six areas for attention: direction, movement, letter height, capital and lower case letters, spacing and letters with mirror images, reversals or inversions (Sassoon, 2003: 70). Each is significant in developing a fluent and individual writing style from the early years of schooling. Sassoon notes the primary importance of developing correct letter formation alongside pupils' early attempts at writing. 'Once children can write as much as the letters of their own names, they need to be taught the correct movement of each letter. If this is not done, incor-rect movements become habits that are progressively more difficult to alter' (Sassoon, 2003: 2). As handwriting develops, Sassoon observes the balance between correct letter formation and neatness. Correct letter formation comes before letters are joined. Sometimes neatness, as in the production of an ele-gant, copperplate handwriting style, is not conducive to the legible and speedy handwriting skills required at secondary-level schooling. More recently the

need for automaticity in handwriting has been linked to orthographic spelling patterns and to composition at the lower and upper ends of primary schooling (Medwell et al., 2007, 2009; Wray and Medwell, 2013).

✎ Research focus

Handwriting and keyboard skills

Findings from a study of three hundred primary school children suggested that there were links between handwriting and keyboarding skills (Connelly et al., 2007). None of the sample had been referred for handwriting difficulties. The children did not receive specific touch-typing instruction but children who were fast handwriters were generally fast keyboarders. Some older pupils had better keyboarding than handwriting skills. In the second part of the study the quality of handwritten and typed compositions were compared. Pupils who received higher composition scores were generally those who had the most fluent handwriting. The authors argue for the need for touch-typing instruction in order to maximise word processing skills for written composition.

Table 9.2 presents summaries of the spelling and handwriting skills of our vignette pupils. The table allows us to track some of the features and next steps for progression that can occur across the primary years of schooling. The summaries show different patterns of spelling and handwriting skills.

The progression of spelling and handwriting in the primary classroom

Progression in spelling content incorporates alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, common English letter patterns or strings of letters in English, phonological awareness, modifying root word and high frequency words. An analysis of pupils' spelling errors can reveal pupils' spelling strategies as well as providing insights into the six aspects of spelling progression noted above. Such strategies include visual approaches that focus on recognising common letter patterns. One of the most common visual spelling strategies is summarised in the look-cover-write-check routine (Peters and Smith, 1993). Variations of this routine, such as look-say-cover-write-check or look-say-cover-picture-it-in-your-head-write-check have added visualisation and speaking and listening cues. Other strategies include segmentation and blending, use of syllables, phonemic selection, use of suffixes and prefixes, analogy, and selecting words based on their meaning. The latter can be practised by building words from root words or looking for smaller words within larger ones.

Table 9.2 Summary of spelling and handwriting in the pupil vignettes

Pupil	Age	Attainment level	Key strategies for spelling	Key points in handwriting	Features of progression	Suggested next steps for progression
Japonica	10	Within expected levels	Uses dictionary after writing Uses spell check during word processing Uses mix of root words and morphemes to spell, resorts to phonemes for unfamiliar words	Uses nylon tipped handwriting pen Uses cursive style with some letters abutted rather than joined Letters correctly formed and sized Writes at speed, notes and from dictation Can write for up to 45 minutes independently	Corrects spelling at point of composition and in editing process Evidence of Gentry's transitional and correct stages of spelling	Use thesaurus, and etymology cues Further investigate root words Use own reading interests as part of investigative approach to building orthographic knowledge
Analyn	9	EAL pupil at the earlier stages of English language acquisition	Uses high frequency words from the first 200 word lists Uses suffixes, ed, s, ing, es, ly Some tense confusions	Uses nylon tipped handwriting pen Copperplate handwriting style Slow handwriting speed	Evidence of Gentry's transitional stage of spelling Polysyllabic spelling attempts	Link spelling skills to vocabulary development Dictation to link spelling to word meaning, underlining own errors

Pupil	Age	Attainment level	Key strategies for spelling	Key points in handwriting	Features of progression	Suggested next steps for progression
John	7	Below expected levels	Requests unknown words for personal dictionary before writing Some transfer from taught phonic sessions into own writing High frequency words Weak self-correction	Uses triangular pencil to promote tripod grip, prints, heights inconsistent tailed letters, others correctly formed, and sizes vary Some b/d p/q reversals and inversions Does not form capitals Q, R, H, G Slow handwriting and keyboarding	Spells at point of composition Segments and blends, marks phonemes manually on 'have a go' notepad Evidence of Gentry's phonetic stage of spelling Mainly CVCC, CCVC and CVC patterns	Assess spelling through written sentences to develop word meaning Handwriting patterns to develop fluency plus letter formation through regular phonics teaching
Peter	5	Above expected levels	During some composition, uses 'have a go' notepad Uses word banks found in the classroom, during composition	Uses pencil, tripod grip Print script with entry and exit joins attached but letters are not joined Letter size inconsistent, not on line, formation is mostly correct	Evidence of Gentry's phonetic and transitional stage of spelling	Develop word processing skills alongside handwritten work Monitor letter formation

As with all forms of primary English it is useful to look at a number of different examples from different contexts in order to build a picture of pupils' knowledge and skills. Contexts for spelling and handwriting include independent writing samples, observations of handwriting, sentence dictation, testing spelling in a context, single word spelling tests and the monitoring of pupils' use of spelling aids. These include dictionaries, rough spelling practice notepads to try out unknown spellings, and the use of classroom aids, for example word walls and word banks. Electronic aids such as handheld spellcheckers can assist pupils who have sufficient phonemic skills to input approximations and sufficient vocabulary and visual spelling skills to select from the similar examples that spellcheckers produce.

Analysing spelling errors

Analysing pupils' spelling enables you to detect patterns of error and provides insights into pupils' favoured spelling strategies. These may be phonological, phonemic, orthographic, morphemic, a weak set of high frequency words or visual errors such as where pupils confuse the order and number of letters in a word (Ott, 2007).

〰️ **Reflection questions**

- What evidence is there for Analyn's ability to experiment with her spelling? How would you rate her spelling confidence?
- How would you address Japonica's difficulty with **homophones**?
- How and why would you encourage polysyllabic spelling?
- Which pupils have confused the morpheme *ed?*

Classroom application   A classroom where pupils are afraid to make spelling errors can upset pupils' confidence to tackle new written vocabulary and reduce their fluent writing (Bearne, 2002). However, this does not mean that pupils should ignore correct spelling in the process of writing composition. In the classroom, pupils learn to be independent spellers gradually, by making spelling mistakes, recognising them and developing strategies to address spelling correction that work for them. These strategies are pupils' spelling strengths. They may use a combination of kinaesthetic, aural, oral and visual strategies and cues. These are part of a multi-sensory approach. Word meaning is part of this. For some pupils a single route dominates, which teachers may exploit. For example, pupils with weaker visual memories may benefit from more opportunities to segment and blend aurally. As reading develops pupils are exposed to a wider written vocabulary.

Activity

Look at the examples of independent writing from the pupil vignettes. Record the evidence of spelling content and suggested next steps and add to the evidence of possible spelling strategies for each pupil. The second section has been completed for you.

Table 9.3

Pupil	Sample of independent writing	Evidence of spelling content	Evidence of spelling strategies	Suggested next steps in spelling progression
Japonica	*My street is full of rubbish. It is not nice because it smells in the summer and it is blon all over the place in the winter. Their are people who drop litter, there not thinking of others. But we also need less packging to throw away in the first place. Another nasty thing is dog muck on the pavement. Wreckless owners do not clean up after there dogs. It's distgusting! They're should be a program to show them that dog muck is dangrous.*		She learns weekly spellings using look, say, cover, write and check She corrects spelling after composition	
John	*I tok the tost for my brekfst and got into my tente on the campsit in the forist.*	43 words, 14 spelled incorrectly	Relies mainly on phonic strategies with some visual strategies	Develop polysyllabic words, introduce long vowels,

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Pupil	Sample of independent writing	Evidence of spelling content	Evidence of spelling strategies	Suggested next steps in spelling progression
	It rand and there saw thunder. Mum brot me a picnic with litle sanwchs. I slep in the tent and wockd up in the moning	His vocabulary choice is not restricted to familiar spelling Some short vowel errors Does not use ai, ea, oa, oo Order of letters is sometimes mixed (was/saw) Inconsistent use of 'magic e' (split vowel digraph) High frequency words mostly correct	Uses blends and consonant digraphs correctly Sounds out phonemes, matching to his fingers as he counts, writes and says them together	consolidate consonant vowel digraphs
Analyn	*It was a windi day. The lade has a red hat on. She is a prette lady but she is sad and cring She has lost a dog. The dog is gon. She walked home sadly.*		Learns spellings orally by rote, reciting phonemes	
Peter	*One day there was a hen who wanted to plant some seed in the midel of a feld. Who will help me. Not i said the dog, not i sed the cat, not i sed the mouse. I will do it mysef sed the hen. Who will help me cut the whet sed the hen. The dog, the mouse and cat sed no. The hen made new bred. The dog, cat and mouse wantd to eat it but the hen sed no. I will do it mysef.*		Visual and auditory memory for whole words, confident to have a go at spelling the words he wishes to use Uses peer marking to circle incorrect words	

Spelling aids

This section is designed to present a range of practical spelling aids and resources for pupils' day-to-day classroom use. Some of these resources are designed to exploit particular spelling strategies; others employ a multi-sensory approach. The range includes materials to develop phonological, phonemic, orthographic and morphemic spelling, plus high frequency words. More generic activities to promote an interest in words have not been included. These are part of a regular spelling curriculum.

〰 **Reflection questions**

- Why does Peter appear to use the fewest physical examples of spelling aids?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of using dictionaries for each pupil?
- In terms of a multi-sensory approach to spelling, how would you describe Japonica's and Analyn's preferred spelling strategies?
- Which pupils also use word meanings to aid their spelling?

Classroom application   In the classroom, exploiting pupils' use of spelling aids begins by building an interest in words and by encouraging pupils' spelling attempts. Self-regulation is central. This may be developed by individual usage but also through peer marking and partnered spelling testing. For older pupils, some selection for their own list of misspellings for testing can contribute to pupils' awareness of patterns of spelling errors, as well as patterns of spelling strength. Spelling aids include:

- personal, alphabetised word books for collecting unknown spellings;
- customised spelling dictionaries, including those for phonics or subject terminology;
- various commercial dictionaries and thesauruses;
- 'have a go' practice notepads;
- computer spelling packages for reinforcement, speech recognition software and talking word processors;
- handheld spellcheckers;
- classroom word walls or word banks;
- misspelling reminder posters;
- generic spelling strategy tips;
- key word displays such as days of the week, months and numbers;
- topic specific word displays;
- interactive word displays;

Look at the examples of the use of spelling aids from the pupil vignettes. Record suggested next steps for progression and add to the evidence for spelling strategies possible for each pupil. The fourth section has been completed for you.

Table 9.4

Pupil	Examples of the use of spelling aids	Evidence of spelling strategies	Suggested next steps in spelling progression
Japonica	*Uses standard dictionary, Spellchecker, edits work after completion but not always thoroughly. Collects examples of derivations from root words in rough book planning. Rough book drafts show crossings out and multiple spelling attempts during composition. Enjoys crosswords and word searches.*	She learns weekly spellings using look, say, cover, write and check Refers to common misspellings wall chart	
John	*Personal phonic dictionary, classroom word walls, 'have a go' notepads, blends and segments using magnetic letters.* *Some written words have marked phonemes. Order of letters can be mixed up when he copies out given spellings.*	Sounds out phonemes, matching to his fingers as he counts, and then writes and says the phonemes before blending to say the whole word	
Analyn	*Dual language picture dictionary. Classroom dual language signage.* *Copies correct spelling from captioned visual prompt cards for individual lessons.*	Learns spellings orally by rote, reciting phonemes	
Peter	*Uses and contributes to the word walls in the classroom. Draws a blank 'magic' line if attempting adventurous words with some unknown phonemes. Words are clearly spaced. Uses rhyme to write words that sound the same: make, take, cake, ball, small, tall etc. Enjoys age appropriate word searches.*	Visual and auditory memory for words, confident to have a go at spelling the words he wishes to use	Confident use of simple dictionaries

- classroom labels;
- alphabet and phoneme charts.

Observing and analysing handwriting

The purpose of observing and analysing pupils' handwriting is to measure the progress of letter formation and handwriting fluency. Examining a range of hand-writing samples in context can also alert teachers to specific issues that may require additional intervention. These include physical coordination and visual problems. Areas for observation and analysis include letter formation, posture, pencil grip, letter size and proportion and letters on the line, spacing, consistent joins in cursive script and the consistency of hooks on letters in pre-cursive script.

Activity

Look at the observations and descriptions of handwriting from the pupil vignettes. Record suggested next steps for handwriting progression and their links to spelling for each pupil. The first section has been completed for you.

Table 9.5

Pupil	Observation of handwriting behaviour	Description of independent handwriting	Suggested next steps in handwriting progression	Links to spelling progression
Japonica	*Japonica can take legible notes from speech and film. She can write legibly for up to 45 minutes, without strain, using nylon tipped handwriting pens. She is right handed with a tripod grip. She tilts the page to the left to suit her slightly slanted cursive script. She lifts her pen in the middle of words to form un-joined letters.*	Japonica uses cursive script with some letters partially joined. Her words are evenly spaced and of equal sizing. There is evidence of developing personal style; she draws small circles above the letter i, shorter joins help her to write faster.	Use different handwriting implements. Monitor written work for consistent presentation across the curriculum.	Observe the speed and fluency of written spelling test dictations.

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Pupil	Observation of handwriting behaviour	Description of independent handwriting	Suggested next steps in handwriting progression	Links to spelling progression
John	*John is right handed. He can copy and trace print. He uses a tripod grip but it is not stable. He uses a triangular pencil to develop his tripod grip. He does not write fluently and avoids handwriting if the keyboard is available. He tends to rest his head on his non-writing arm. He does not enjoy drawing or colouring.*	John writes an uneven print. K is inconsistently formed. Round letters are mostly correct but irregular in size. John has most difficulty writing fluent zigzag strokes as part of handwriting stroke practice. His words are not evenly spaced.		
Analyn	*Analyn is right handed. She uses a nylon tipped handwriting pen but is capable of using a cartridge pen. She takes extreme care to produce very neat work. She writes slowly and carefully.*	Analyn uses an upright copperplate style.		
Peter	*Peter is left handed. He uses a pencil. He enjoys drawing, colouring and manipulative tasks. Although he tilts his book to write, Peter finds it difficult to write on lines. He writes fluently but slowly in his work books but more freely elsewhere.*	The sample shows print with attached entry and exit hooks on round letters as part of pre-cursive handwriting preparation.		

> ### 〰 Reflection questions
>
> - How can John's writing fluency be developed through his phonics programme?
> - What playful handwriting and drawing exercises would increase Peter's writing speed?
> - What are the benefits and possible drawbacks of Analyn's copperplate writing as part of a multisensory approach to spelling?

Classroom application   In the classroom, handwriting can be taught as part of the spelling process. Handwriting is a kinaesthetic route as part of a multisensory spelling approach. The second aspect for classroom teaching is handwriting fluency, leading to the ability to handwrite automatically. Short, sustained and extended writing provides daily writing opportunities. Pupils also benefit from discrete teaching of letter strokes and oval letter formations. A number of commercial schemes are available for this or individual schools may develop their own teaching package. Teachers need to consider the benefits and drawbacks of whole class handwriting teaching as opposed to small guided writing groups.

The assessment of spelling and handwriting

Summative assessment of spelling includes standardised spelling tests that give a spelling age for comparison with pupils' reading and chronological ages. Typically, summative spelling assessments ask pupils to insert missing words into sentences or to write words read aloud by the tester. The meaning of the word is made specific.

Diagnostic spelling assessment aims to uncover areas of weakness and strength across phonological, phonemic, orthographic and morphological areas of spelling. They identify pupils' visual and auditory spelling processes. Sensory impairment such as intermittent hearing loss can affect the progression of spelling in the primary years. Particular physical impairment such as dyspraxia or cerebral palsy can affect the progression of handwriting. Teachers need to be alert to the implications of physical and sensory impairment and to be proactive in addressing potential barriers to progression.

The activity may have caused you to summarise spelling errors into broad phonemic and visual categories. You may have noted missing and additional letters. Generally, errors are considered by looking at spelling across a number of pieces of pupils' written text in order to see patterns of spelling strategies

✍ **Activity**

Analysing spelling errors

Complete the table to indicate possible spelling strategies. One entry has been added.

Table 9.6

Example	Actual word	Possible phonemic strategy	Possible orthographic strategy	Possible morphological strategy	High frequency word or homophone error	Notes
they're	there				✓	Possible incomplete visual recall of high frequency word and/or confusion with sounding nt
wet	went	✓				
playn	plane					
Yor	your					
begining	beginning					
Spshll	special					

as well as errors. Some pupils use random spellings that do not approximate to English spelling (Peters and Smith, 1993). If pupils in receipt of structured spelling and phonics programmes continue to use a majority of random spellings in independent writing, further specialist teaching advice may be necessary.

Spelling tests

Spelling tests are both summative and formative methods of assessment. Although they have a traditional place in primary classrooms, both the quality and purpose of spelling tests needs consideration. The purposes of spelling tests are to assess understanding of the taught spelling curriculum and see the transference of knowledge and skills into pupils' everyday writing. Summative test results may also be required by external bodies to judge pupils' ability against national or chronological benchmarks. Summative assessments are also a measure of the effectiveness of teaching and the rigour of the spelling curriculum itself.

Activity

Look at the examples of spelling tests from the pupil vignettes. Record suggested next steps and spelling content for each pupil. The third section three has been completed for you.

Table 9.7

Pupil	Examples of single word spelling tests	Evidence of spelling content	Suggested next steps in spelling progression
Japonica	Act, react, activity, actor, action, sign, signature, signal, significant		
John	staem (steam), red (read) grass, spot, ship, shed, tent, tree		
Analyn	Things (think), going, agian (again), everyone (everywhere), hoped (hopped), Plaid (played), said, pip(pipe)	Uses high frequency words Some evidence of whole word and phoneme substitutions. Phonetic spelling with transitional elements	Develop common word endings Consolidate split vowel digraph and range of alternative spellings for phonemes

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Pupil	Examples of single word spelling tests	Evidence of spelling content	Suggested next steps in spelling progression
Peter	Playground, football, playtime, handbag, farmhouse, hairgrip, eggcup		

〜〜 Reflection questions

- Characteristically, Japonica achieves 100 per cent for most of her spelling tests but continues to misspell some tested words. She does not use them in her regular writing. How would you address this issue?
- Analyn spells 'think' as 'things', why?
- What aspects of spelling are assessed in the lists for Japonica and Peter?

Formative assessment of spelling concerns the development of pupils' spelling strategies and their ability to apply these strategies to their own writing. For the class teacher this will also include careful records of taught spelling and its assessment through pupils' reading and writing. Useful approaches include short, cumulative spelling lessons that culminate in weekly spelling tests, pupil self- and peer testing, differentiated spelling groups, activities to promote an interest in words and allocated proof reading and editing time. Establishing routines for monitoring spelling is a key part of formative spelling assessment. A consistent, relevant and manageable marking policy, for instance, allows pupils to address their spelling errors and to be praised for their spelling attempts.

The assessment of handwriting has tended to focus on two descriptors: style and speed. Style is assessed through general descriptors of letter formation and the legibility of the script. These are often part of commercial handwriting schemes. Handwriting speed is often assessed when pupils have particular difficulties. Sometimes a separate commercial assessment of handwriting speed is required to fulfil criteria for additional support in formal examinations. It is important to remember the kinaesthetic aspects of handwriting assessment since these will affect written outcomes and writing speed.

Table 9.8 Observing progression in spelling and handwriting

	Alphabetic knowledge	Phonological awareness and spelling strategies	Phonemic awareness	Orthography and high frequency words	Morphology and mnemonics	Handwriting letter formation and fluency
Lower primary years	Recites alphabet Distinguishes upper and lower case letters, reorders letters of the alphabet Simple dictionary and word bank use	Confidence to attempt exploratory spelling Generates, recognises, discriminates rhyme and rhythm patterns, onset and rime, use of analogy	Know common GPCs Segments and blends phonemes orally, visually and aurally, phonemically feasible spelling attempts	High frequency words Uses single, double and polysyllabic words Find difficult spelling elements in given words	Beginning to use prefixing and suffixing in spelling Beginning to use compound words, and to recognise simple homophones	Secure handwriting grip Uses pencil Developing letter formation of print script or early cursive, spaced words Early keyboard and word processing skills
Middle primary years	Dictionary, word bank and indexing skills	Continue use of analogy plus syllables, developing own spelling strategies	Segments and blends phonemes orally, visually and aurally, confident use of polysyllabic words	High frequency words Find difficult spelling elements in words Reading repertoire builds written vocabulary	Suffix and prefix rules become established May use mnemonics, and simple spelling rules, extends homophones	Secure handwriting grip Fluent handwriting with developing stamina Developing cursive script, correct formation
Upper primary years	Confident use of a range of dictionaries, thesaurus and indexing skills	Established use of syllables, phonemes and analogy, describes own spelling strategies	Segments and blends phonemes orally, visually and aurally May use phonemes as primary strategy with unknown words out of context	Recognises irregular spelling patterns for the English language, visual strategies Wider reading repertoire builds written vocabulary	Established strategies for own proof reading routines e.g. spelling rules, mnemonics and building words from root words, secure homophones	Fluent, speedy and sustained cursive script contains elements of personal style Uses pen Established keyboard and word processing

Table 9.8 presents a matrix of primary English progression observing broad areas of progression in spelling and handwriting. Use this grid as a guide for classroom observations, initial marking, shared and guided writing.

Summary of chapter

This chapter has summarised the elements of handwriting and the processes of spelling. Multisensory approaches to spelling have been emphasised along with the development of a fluent handwriting style. Spelling and handwriting have been considered as an essential part of the process of writing composition in order that the pupil may transfer discrete spelling and handwriting skills to their independent writing. Pupil vignettes illustrated individual examples of progression in the use of spelling aids, the spelling curriculum and individual spelling strategies. Observations and descriptions of handwriting were included.

? **Self-assessment**

1. List and justify three items that you consider important features or next steps for progression in spelling or handwriting. Choose items for the oldest, mid-range and youngest pupils in the primary school.
2. Relate linguistic, socio-cultural or cognitive research perspectives to common examples of classroom practice in the teaching of handwriting or spelling.
3. List evidence for the importance of monitoring handwriting and spelling as part of writing composition; include digital and multimodal texts.

Annotated further reading

Wyse, D. Andrews, R. and Hoffman, J. (Eds) (2010) *The Routledge International Handbook of English Language and Literacy Teaching.* Abingdon: Routledge.
Read Chapter 16, Bourassa, D. and Treiman, R., Linguistic foundations of spelling development. Also useful is Chapter 17, Medwell, J. and Wray, D., Handwriting and writing. Both chapters provide succinct overviews of key issues in spelling and handwriting.

Sassoon, R. (2003) *Handwriting* (2nd edn). London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
This classic handwriting textbook provides classroom materials and guidance.

Further resources

Bearne, E. (2002) *Making Progress in Writing*. London: Routledge.

Ott, P. (2007) *How to Manage Spelling Successfully*. London: Routledge.
Both texts present a wealth of practical classroom resources and guidance for monitoring progression.

Allcock, J. (2009) *The English Spelling Dictionary*. New Zealand: MJA Publishing (ISBN 9780958293099).
This notebook dictionary is useful for developing pupils' familiarity with spelling classifications. It contains space for pupils to record their own spelling. Available at: www.papakuraeducation.co.nz/index.php/teachers/english-spelling-dictionary-by-joy-allcock.html

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Wray, D. and Medwell, J. (2013) Handwriting automaticity: the search for performance thresholds. *Language and Education*, 28, 34–51.