

## Spelling Strategies

Good spellers generally have a sense of whether a word looks correct or not which is something dyslexic learners struggle with, due to difficulties with visual memory.

Children are taught to write using phonics: breaking a word into sounds, and then writing a letter or groups of letters for each sound. However, as most sounds can be spelled multiple ways in English, this method leads to 'phonetically correct' spelling, not accurate spelling. This method can be tricky for dyslexic learners because they often find it hard to distinguish all of the individual sounds within a word so that they might miss out or add some sounds.

Many dyslexic learners report they can learn spellings for a weekly spelling test, but find it difficult to retain those spellings. They need to 'overlearn' spellings which might mean practising a little each day for as long as month, because it takes longer for a dyslexic learner to transfer those spellings into their long-term memory.

People with dyslexia learn better through multi-sensory approaches which means simultaneously using as many senses as possible, for example, saying, seeing, touching and hearing letter names **at the same time**.

Attached are some strategies to help learn spellings in a way that is memorable. It is not intended that a child should use all of these strategies at once. Instead, try an activity that appeals to their learning style and move onto others over time. Ensure the learner is always linking what they are doing to the word they are spelling. Some children learn a series of tricky words but mix them up because they have not attached that written representation to the word they are learning.

## Simultaneous Oral Spelling (SOS)

Fold a piece of paper in 4 and ensure the word being learned has been correctly written in **cursive (joined) handwriting** (by an adult) with a highlighter pen (see box 1 below). The child then does the following steps in the boxes with the corresponding numbers:

1. TRACE the word over the highlighted words, each time saying the letter names out loud and then the word ("s-a-i-d said" x 4)
2. COPY the word four times into this box, each time saying the letter names out loud and then the word ("s-a-i-d said" x 4)
3. FOLD the paper along the dotted line so that boxes 1 and 2 can no longer be seen. WRITE the word again from memory 4 times each time saying the letter names out loud and then the word ("s-a-i-d said")
4. EYES CLOSED, write the word 4 more times in box 4 so that the child is making a strong mental image of what the word looks like, each time saying the letter names out loud and then the word ("s-a-i-d said")

1.  said said said said	2.
3.	4.

NOTE: It is important to say the **letter names**, not the phonemes (meaning 'sounds') because this will ensure the word is spelt consistently.

NOTE: Using cursive (joined) handwriting will help make spelling automatic which helps build muscle memory for the spelling.

## Clap syllables and use colour

When first analysing a spelling, clapping the word into syllables and writing those syllables in different colours can help children to see words in a new way

('computer') They might come up with a way to remember the hard bit (e.g. 'I put it inside the computer').

Colours can help learners to visualise the tricky part of a spelling, (e.g. in 'friend') or it could be a chunk of the word that is over pronounced when learned to make it memorable (e.g. in 'Wednesday').

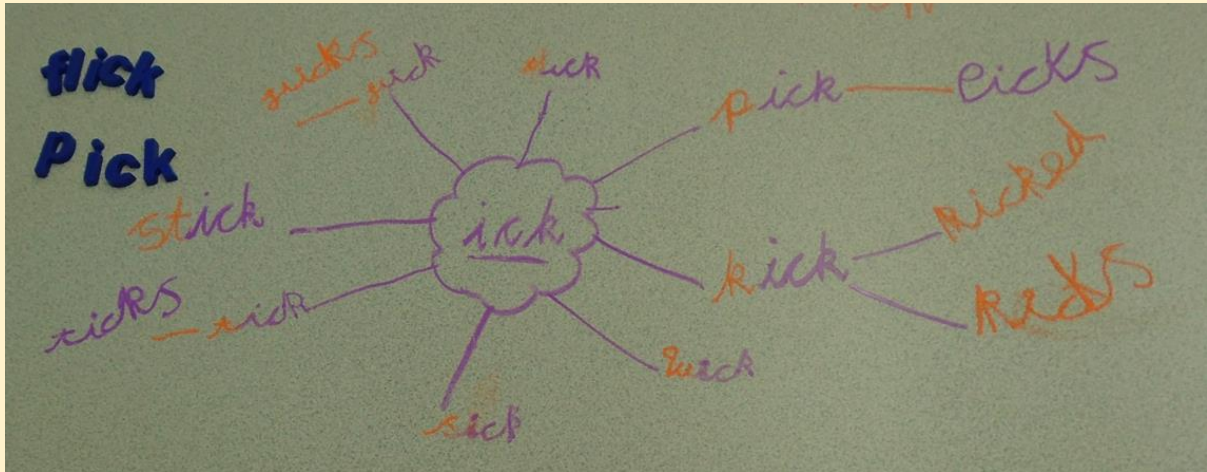
## Picture representations

Thinking of a way to remember the tricky bit of a word by using pictures can help make some spellings memorable. The first two pictures below are from [www.Sirlinkalot.org](http://www.Sirlinkalot.org) which families could subscribe to, but this is something children can learn to do for themselves. Take some time to analyse which bit of the word the child is struggling with and find a way to make that more memorable, by making it into a picture.



## Word Maps

Learning groups of words that share a common letter string helps children to generate knowledge of more words, to notice patterns and make links to rules about our complex language.



A common string of letters is chosen and placed in the middle of the map. With support, the child generates words which have this common ending, starting simply at first (by adding a letter or two at the start) and then extending those words, for example, 'kick' is extended to make 'kicks' 'kicked' 'kicking' 'kicker' 'sidekick' etc.

When children do this with a number of words, there are opportunities to talk about common suffixes, prefixes (the chunks of words that go after/before words) and to talk about rules for spelling, for example that '-ed' on the end of a word can sound like /d/ /t/ or /id/. It also gives children knowledge about root words, rather than tackling every word as a sequence of sounds they have to identify and match to a phoneme - something which dyslexic learners find hard.

There is a book full of word map examples which families can borrow if this is something your child finds useful.

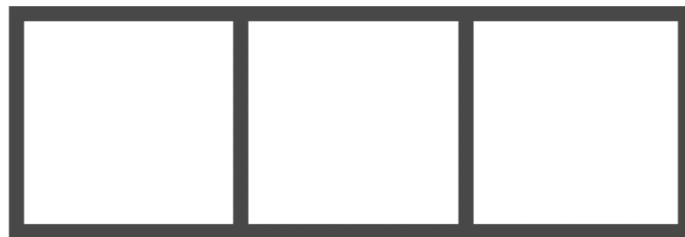
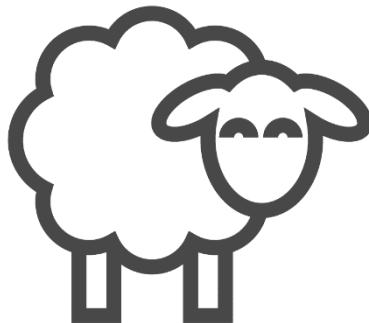
## Elkonin Boxes

Elkonin boxes build phonological awareness skills by segmenting words into individual sounds, or phonemes. To use Elkonin boxes, a child listens to a word and moves a counter or finger into a box for each sound or phoneme.

### How to use Elkonin Boxes

1. Pronounce a target word slowly, stretching it out by sound.
2. Ask the child to repeat the word.
3. Draw 'boxes' or squares on a piece of paper, chalkboard, or dry erase board with one box for each syllable or phoneme.
4. Have the child count the number of phonemes in the word, not necessarily the number of letters. For example, *wish* has three phonemes and will use three boxes. /w/, /i/, /sh/
5. Direct the child to slide a coloured counter, unifix cube, or finger in each cell of the Elkonin box as she repeats the sounds for the word.

**The example below** shows an Elkonin Box for the word "sheep," which consists of three phonemes (sounds): /sh/ /ee/ /p/



Watch <https://youtu.be/tLbWh309S1k> to see this method modelled.

## Mnemonics

A mnemonic is a phrase where each word starts with the letter that spells a word. This method can help children to remember a particularly difficult word. Try to make sure the phrase is very memorable by drawing a picture to illustrate it (getting them to draw it is even better). Common examples of this are:

