

Teaching Spelling Using the Learner's Personal Word List

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When your students say they want to learn to spell, have some conversations to find out what kinds of words are important to them. They may want to focus on family names or work related jargon or academic words or something that will surprise you. The key is to have the student identify some categories of words that are important to learn.

Each week ask each student to bring in 5-10 words he would like to learn to spell. Assure him that it is not cheating to look at the word as he copies it, letter for letter. He can bring in a book with the word or an advertisement or work or school document that includes the word. The key is to expect the student to generate the word list of words from the identified category. Here's an example:

Your student wants to write the names of his step-children, so his wife, Edwina, has helped him list the names.

Anthony Merrie Harriet Keisha Tiffany Jordan Rashid

1. Using manuscript, write the chosen words in a numbered column for the student or verify that the list the student has is accurate.
2. Fold a piece of lined paper in half lengthwise and crease. Fold the left edge to the center and crease.
3. Print, or have the student print, the words on the left side of the page between the left edge and the first fold, skipping several lines between words.
4. Read the first word to the student. Ask him to tell you something about the family member by that name. Repeat the sentence the student has expressed and ask if that is what he said.
5. Write the sentence to the right of the mid-page crease on the same line as the spelling word.
6. Ask the student if he'd like to read the sentence or if he prefers that you read it. Wait for the sentence to be read.
7. Fold the right edge of the paper over the sentence and show only the spelling word. Ask the student to read the spelling word.
8. Now fold the left edge of the paper toward the back side of the sheet and crease.

9. Ask the student to tell you something that sets that person apart from the other siblings whose names are being learned such as 'She is the oldest girl in the family.' or 'This sister is the one with red hair and blue eyes.' Write the sentence on the back of the paper across from the spelling word. (Normally this would be the place where the student and tutor would put a definition of the word being studied.)
10. For each of the words in this week's personal word list, follow the same procedure for writing a sentence that includes the key word on the front of the paper and a definition of the word on the back.
11. Now the student has a study tool. Begin to learn the word with LITSTART Strategy 40 - Close Your Eyes, steps 1-6. This will help the learner visualize the word.
12. Follow with Strategy 41. Ask the student to trace over the letters of the word while saying the word. Repeat. Some students will benefit from looking at the word and tracing its outline in a sand or salt tray.
13. Next, ask the student to read the word in a sentence. Then read the sentence that defines the word.
14. To study, the student can read the defining sentence and name the person it identifies. Then he can spell that person's name aloud or in writing. The next step is to check and see if he is correct.
15. If correct, go on to the next word. If incorrect go again through steps 12 and 13.
16. Encourage the student to take 10 minutes a day to practice the chosen spelling words.
17. At the next session find out how spelling practice went during the week. If the student didn't have time to practice, make time in the lesson for him to practice before you continue.
18. Review by reading and then asking the learner to read each sentence on the front.
19. Let the student tell you how he'd like to be tested on the words. Would he like to print them when you say each word? Would he like to print the word when you give the definition?
20. Celebrate success and review how much additional study will be needed for 90% accuracy on this list.
21. Ask the learner to begin to collect the next group of personal words for spelling mastery.