On Monday, the teacher administers a pretest using the master list of words, and students spell as many of the words as they can. Students correct their own pretests, and from the words they misspell they create individual spelling lists. They make two copies of their study list, using the numbers on the master list to make it easier to take the final test on Friday. Students use one copy of the list for study activities, and the teacher keeps the second copy.

Students spend approximately 5 to 10 minutes studying the words on their study lists each day during the week. Research shows that instead of “busy-work” activities such as using their spelling words in sentences or gluing yarn in the shape of the words, it’s more effective for students to use a study strategy. The **studying spelling words** procedure focuses on the whole word rather than on breaking the word apart into sounds or syllables. Teachers explain how to use the procedure during a minilesson at the beginning of the school year and then post a copy of it in the classroom. In addition, students often trade word lists on Wednesday to give each other a practice test.

A final test is administered on Friday. The teacher reads the master list, and students write only those words they’ve practiced during the week. To make the test easier to administer, students first list the numbers of the words they’ve practiced from their study lists on their test papers. Any words that students misspell should be included on their lists the following week.

### **ASSESSMENT TOOLS**

**How to Determine a Student’s Stage of Spelling Development**

1. **Choose a Writing Sample**  
   Teachers choose a student’s writing sample to analyze. In the primary grades, the sample should total at least 50 words, in the middle grades 100 words, and in the upper grades 200 words. Teachers must be able to decipher most words in the sample to analyze it.

2. **Identify Spelling Errors**  
   Teachers read the writing sample to note the errors and identify the words the student was trying to spell. If necessary, teachers check with the writer to determine the intended word.

3. **Make a Spelling Analysis Chart**  
   Teachers draw a chart with five columns, one for each stage of spelling development.

4. **Categorize the Spelling Errors**  
   Teachers classify the student’s spelling errors according to the stage of development. They list each error in one of the stages, ignoring proper nouns, capitalization errors, and grammar errors. Teachers ignore poorly formed letters or reversed letterforms in kindergarten and first grade, but these are significant errors when older students make them. To simplify the analysis, teachers write both the student’s error and the correct spelling in parentheses.

5. **Tally the Errors**  
   Teachers count the errors in each column, and the one with the most errors indicates the student’s current stage of development.

6. **Identify Topics for Instruction**  
   Teachers examine the student’s errors to identify topics for instruction.
Cragging the Alphabetic Code

**ASSESSMENT Snapshot**

**Spelling Analysis**

I worked hard as a researcher. I took my time on pickers and handwriting. I read books too. After that I wrote the facks down on indecks cards. I laid them owt and then numberd them. My favorit owt was when I figred owt I was stdying my first choyce.

**Classification of Errors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Name- Alphabetic</th>
<th>Within-Word Patterns</th>
<th>Syllables and Affixes</th>
<th>Derivational Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pickers</td>
<td>reaseacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facks</td>
<td>numberd</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>indecks</td>
<td>favorit</td>
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<td>owt</td>
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<tr>
<td>stdying</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choyce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TEACHER’S NOTE**

Tatum spelled 88% of the words correctly, and most errors were representative of the Within-Word Patterns stage. These errors indicate that she’s investigating ways to spell complex consonant and vowel sounds. She also wrote 10 two- and three-syllable words, and spelled three correctly. Tatum’s moving into the Syllables and Affixes stage; her spelling development meets grade-level standards.

**GO DIGITAL! Spelling Games.** Students play spelling games at these websites, and at several sites, teachers and students can create their own games to practice the words on the weekly spelling lists:

- **Houghton Mifflin’s Spelling Games (http://eduplace.com).** Go to the website’s homepage, and click on the “Students” tab and then on the “Games” button to locate spelling games coordinated with Houghton Mifflin’s spelling program. The games reinforce phonics and root words; they’re useful for all students, not just those using this spelling program.

- **Kids Spell (http://www.kidsspell.com).** This website offers a variety of spelling games for K–8 students, including Spellasaurus, Cast a Spell, and Defender.
Puzzle Maker (http://www.puzzle-maker.com). Teachers and students can turn spelling lists into a variety of games at this free site.

Spelling City (http://www.spellingcity.com). This website allows teachers and students to type in spelling lists and use them to make spelling tests, flash cards, and word-search games. A variety of other spelling games are also available.

Spelling Wizard (http://www.scholastic.com). At the Homework Hub section, students type in their spelling words and the website turns them into spelling-scramble and word-search games.

Assessing Students’ Spelling

The choices students make as they spell words are important indicators of their knowledge of both phonics and spelling. For example, a student who spells phonetically might spell *money* as *mune*, and others who are experimenting with long
vowels might spell the word as monye or monie. Teachers classify and analyze the words students misspell in their writing to gauge their level of spelling development and to plan for instruction. The steps in determining a student’s stage of spelling development are explained in the Assessment Tools: How to Determine a Student’s Stage of Spelling Development. An analysis of a first grader’s spelling development is shown in the Assessment Snapshot: Spelling Analysis.

Teachers analyze the errors in students’ compositions and on weekly spelling tests, and administer diagnostic tests. The Assessment Tools: Spelling lists tests that teachers use to determine their students’ stage of spelling development.

**What’s the Controversy About Spelling Instruction?**

The press and concerned parent groups periodically raise questions about invented spelling and the importance of weekly spelling tests. There’s a misplaced public perception that today’s children can’t spell: Researchers who have examined the types of errors students make have noted that the number of misspellings increases in grades 1 through 4, as students write longer compositions, but that the percentage of errors decreases. The percentage continues to decline in the upper grades, although some students continue to make errors.

**Accountability Check!**

**Assisting Students in Cracking the Alphabetic Code**

Effective teachers teach their students to use phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling to decode and spell words. They ensure that their students are successful in “cracking the code” when they use the guidelines presented in this chapter, these points in particular:

- Teachers teach students to “crack the code” through phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling instruction.
- Teachers build on students’ phonemic awareness to teach phonics and spelling.
- Teachers develop students’ ability to use phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling strategies.
- Teachers teach high-utility phonics concepts, rules, phonograms, and spelling patterns.
- Teachers recognize that students’ spelling errors are a measure of their understanding of phonics.


