

Rebecca Sitton's APPLESEED



PLANT THE SEEDS TO GROW SPELLING AND WORD-SKILL LITERACY.

What's Current?

Best Practices Instruction—Teaching Students How

“Proofread your papers! Hand them in! Line up!” calls out the teacher. The class clamors to get their papers to the teacher’s desk, they form a disheveled line at the door, and prepare for a respite. Recess is about to start!

As soon as the students exit, a cursory glance at the students’ papers confirms that the “proofread” directive went unheeded. Ryan’s paper, on top of the pile, has proofreading errors that would make anyone think that spelling is not a concern in this class!

It happens all too frequently. Words students never misspell on a test become routine errors in their everyday writing. These are often easy words. Teachers might call them careless mistakes—not to worry, students really know these words. Not so fast! Students only know those words they can consistently spell and use correctly in their everyday writing. A careless error is an error.

So, is there a solution to this dilemma? Yes!

It begins with realizing that *telling students to proofread* is not a substitute for *teaching them how to proofread*. Across the curriculum the current “buzz” is providing students “how to” skills, a foundation for their growth toward proficiency.

What, then, is “how to” instruction for proofreading? Will it eliminate students’ careless errors? Following are two considerations for a *best practices* plan for teaching students to proofread that will do away with the troublesome spelling inaccuracies that Ryan exhibited.

1. Teach and practice visual skills.

You’re already doing this, probably robustly, throughout your reading instruction. It’s been confirmed that visualizing is a key factor for comprehension. Every conscientious reading program provides suggestions for helping students “see” their way through a story. Without visualization skills, comprehension suffers and students are unable to follow the events as the action takes place in a narrative, nor can they sequence the information in expository material. Students, then, are not really readers if they can decode words but fail to understand them in context.

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What's Current? (continued)

Likewise, if students can encode, or spell, words on tests but cannot proofread for words in their everyday writing, they are not really spellers. To be a good speller, a writer must be able to proofread.

Able proofreading requires visual skills, too. Visual skills are critical to eliminate Ryan's careless errors. The Sourcebook methodology includes a plan for the development of two essential visual skills.

- ☞ *First*, students need to develop the ability to see a known word in their mind's eye—each sequential letter in its proper order. This can be taught and learned.
- ☞ *Second*, students must learn to see each sequential letter of a word they've written—a skill different from looking at a word for reading in which individual letters of a word are not seen. This, too, can be taught and learned.

According to the research, the most productive procedure for teaching and learning these visual skills is each Sourcebook unit's Word Preview procedure. Although this is no more than a five-minute exercise that initiates each unit, it is significant.

First, students learn to visualize each sequential letter in a known word. When a word is said by the teacher during the Word Preview, students call the word up in their mind's eye and learn to “see” each letter, and then print the word. Then, during the correction of the word, the teacher spells and writes the word for students to self-check. Now, students follow along letter by letter, touching each one with the point of their pencil, a practice that develops the ability to “see” each sequential letter in the written word—a skill necessary for proofreading success.

Revisiting the Word Preview in every unit provides for ongoing instruction and practice to ensure visual skill acquisition. It is the “how to” step for proofreading accomplishment. But that's not all that is necessary for proofreading success and the elimination of the careless errors. Read on.

2. Apply visual skills.

Paired with the development of a solid visual-skill foundation for proofreading, the application of these skills must be put into action. This takes place when students proofread in their everyday writing. Yet, just reminding students to proofread is not enough. It is likely that careful proofreading will be skipped over by students, like Ryan, unless a *best practices* plan is developed to ensure that students learn to accept the responsibility for careful proofreading.

Your Sourcebook has this plan for you, which includes expectations and inspections of students' proofreading in their everyday writing. We might call this “accountability” for spelling in everyday writing. It is an essential element—it brings the real world of spelling and proofreading to the classroom.

Your Sourcebook Teaching Notes outline expectations for students to proofread an increasing number

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of high-use writing words—called Priority Words—correctly in everyday writing. Ideas for routine inspections are suggested, and the results of the inspections figure into students' grades. Exactly how to do this in a positive, constructive, time-effective manner is all included in your Sourcebook, yet if you have questions, I'll help you.

How can I help? Contact me. Together we can ensure that the Sourcebook methodology for teaching, practicing, and applying visual skills for proofreading becomes a successful routine to complement your writing curriculum. Let's substitute worn-out reminders to proofread with a *best practices* "how to" plan for proofreading.



If you have a question, please call me at home or toll free at the office, send me an email, or set up a complimentary conference call for a group of colleagues who have questions.

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