

Rebecca Sitton's APPLESEED



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

What's Current?

No Carryover? Four Questions and Four Answers to Solve This Problem

I *always*—that means for the last twenty years—start my spelling presentations by asking my audience: Do you have students who spell well on their end-of-unit spelling test but cannot transfer the words spelled correctly to their everyday writing? “Yes!” cries the audience, “Why is there no carryover?”

The question is as timely today as ever. If you currently wrestle with the same challenge—no carryover of words to writing—ask yourself these questions. Then read on for a commonsense solution.

1. Do my students learn the words short-term, studying the letters of the test words the night before the test?
2. Does my grading system place greater emphasis on spelling well on the spelling test than on spelling well in everyday writing?
3. Do I teach my students the difference between the skills they use for reading a word and the skills necessary for proofreading a word?
4. Do I provide my students insights for learning to spell words other than relying on memorization?

If you answered *yes* to question 1:

Then change your testing system. Don't provide the exact words for your students to prestudy just for the test. It is not expected, nor sensible, for teachers to provide the exact test questions for a test in any subject—spelling is no different. If you do provide the test words, be prepared for students to study the words just for the test—a test, then, that only assesses students' short-term memory of the test words. Once the testing system is changed to assess long-term mastery, you and your students are instantly able to use assessment to target missed words for more study. Remember, assessment is a component of instruction, not an end in itself.

If you answered *yes* to question 2:

Then change your grading system. If students' spelling performance on a spelling test outweighs spelling well in writing, then the message students receive is that spelling well on a test is more important than

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What's Current? (continued)

spelling well in writing. Once the grading system designates spelling in writing as a priority, a dramatic change occurs in students' ability to spell well in their writing. What we grade tells students "what counts."

If you answered *yes* to question 3:

Then include in your students' instruction and practice the clear distinction between how to look at words for reading as opposed to proofreading. Good readers do not look at individual letters of words. In fact, rarely do they look at individual words—good readers look at a phrase at a glance. Once students learn the difference between reading and proofreading skills, and learn to apply their proofreading skills in their writing, their written work reflects a fresh, new look of literacy. For more on this, see *Is the Word Preview Worth the Five Minutes It Takes to Give It?*, also in this edition of the *Appleseed*.

If you answered *yes* to question 4:

Then teach students an alternative to straight memorization. Clearly, memorization does not work long-term for most learners. When students discover how words work for plurals, suffixes, prefixes, double letters, silent letters, vowel patterns, and all the consistent spelling procedures of the English language, then spelling is no longer the mystery that dooms so many writers to failure.

For more information on my Sourcebooks for Teaching Spelling and Word Skills that address these issues *head on*, and in immensely practical ways that are teacher-friendly and evidence-based—

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