



How Do You Give a Sentence Dictation Test?

In the January 2007 *Appleseed* e-Newsletter, we discussed how to administer the Cloze Story Word Test. In this edition of *Appleseed*, we'll explore the procedure for administering the Sentence Dictation Test.

The Sentence Dictation Test is one of two tests found in your Sourcebook at the end of each spelling unit. The Sentence Dictation Test, like its counterpart, the Cloze Story Word Test, is designed to be used as a diagnostic tool. Both tests identify previously occurring Core Words that have not yet been mastered by a student. All Core Words, beginning with the first word *the* and including the current unit's Core Words, form the bank of words from which test words are drawn. The missed words then become the student's Spelling Words and are targeted for study. The words are retested on subsequent tests, ensuring further learning opportunities.

Just as in the Cloze Story Word Test, students do not know which words will be tested on the Sentence Dictation Test because the goal of this test is to assess long-term mastery, not short-term memory. The Sentence Dictation Test is the more challenging of the two tests because it tests more words, requires careful listening and more writing, evaluates the mechanics of writing such as capitalization and punctuation, and includes Extra Words (words beyond the Core Words). Extra Words help to create complete, meaningful sentences in the early levels, and in the upper levels, to form a short story. Extra Words can also provide a spelling challenge for more capable students.

To test spelling knowledge using the Sentence Dictation Test, read the sentences aloud at a normal reading pace. Then read them again at a slower, more comfortable pace to allow students time to write the sentences. You may want to read the sentences a third time, especially for primary grade students or students with spelling challenges. (An alternate method of giving this test is explained in the Sourcebook Teaching Notes, under Sentence Dictation Test, in the sidebar titled, *How is the Sentence Dictation Test administered?*) After the test is finished, ask students to proofread each sentence for capitalization, punctuation, and spelling errors before collecting their papers. You may choose to correct each student's individual test, or to guide students through the correction process using a colored pencil and a copy of the Core Words list. Remember that either way, feedback is crucial! Then instruct students to write the incorrect words in a Spelling Notebook. Spelling Notebooks can be student made, or the ready-made Spelling Notebook found in each level of the Practice Books may be also used. The Spelling Notebook includes the student's individual list of Spelling Words for at-school studying. It also serves as a running record of errors. Be sure you regularly check each student's Spelling Notebook to ensure the words have been written correctly and to note any words that appear more than once. Students can then focus their study time on these recurring misspelled words. Students should also record misspelled words on a Words to Learn sheet. This sheet provides students with a personal study list of Spelling Words to take home and practice with their parents. Teachers have the option of copying Ideas for Word Study on the back of students' Words to Learn sheets.

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To grade the test, record the number of right and/or wrong words. You also have the option to grade grammatical and mechanical errors, such as capitalization and punctuation in the Sentence Dictation Test. The number of Core Words spelled incorrectly can be recorded in your grade book, or combined with other errors to yield a broader language score. At the end of the grading period, each student's total is calculated. The Sentence Dictation grade can be added to the Cloze Story Word Test and the Skill Test grades to form a final spelling grade. There is no need for teachers to keep a separate record of each student's spelling errors. The Spelling Notebook keeps track of words each student needs to master.

The Sentence Dictation Test can be adapted to meet every student's needs with slight modifications. However, if students are experiencing significant difficulty with the Cloze Story Word Test, you should not administer the Sentence Dictation Test as an assessment of spelling achievement. Instead, you may want to administer the test to provide additional proofreading practice. Students can be given a copy of the Core Word list (this is on a blackline master in your Sourcebook, as well as in each Practice Book) to use as a reference. This practice will encourage good proofreading skill development. The additional exposure to any words students need to learn can also be quite beneficial. Students who are challenged by the Sentence Dictation Test can also take the test with the class with these two following adaptations: Draw lines on the test paper to represent each word in a sentence. Use a highlighter and write in the blank the most difficult words. This allows the challenged student(s) to trace the more difficult words as you administer the test.

* Don't forget to have the students do the follow-up writing activities that follow each test!