

## Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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### Tip #54: They Still Can't Spell?

#### ***"In Online Auctions, Misspelling in Ads Often Spells Cash"***

(The New York Times, Jan. 28)

NCTE member Sandra Wilde comments on proper spelling in settings such as the online auction service eBay, where clients have found that spelling does make a difference in selling their items.

[www.nytimes.com/2004/01/28/technology/28SPEL.html?hp=&pagewanted=print&position=](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/28/technology/28SPEL.html?hp=&pagewanted=print&position=)

Maybe approaching spelling instruction and how it relates to money will help motivate our students?

#### ***They Still Can't Spell***

I have been reading Rebecca Sipe's book called *They Still Can't Spell*. (Becky was our language arts K-12 coordinator years ago. She is currently living in Michigan where she teaches at Eastern Michigan University. She will also be back in Anchorage in August to present for two days at the Literacy Institute. Stay tuned for more information on that.) Knowing that your time is limited, I want to share some major points that I gleaned from her work with how to work with challenged spellers. Please let me know if you would like to borrow her book. You can also read an article she wrote for *Voices from the Middle*.

#### *Error Analysis Conference*

Becky believes that teachers need to help students become more reflective about their spelling. She suggests interviewing challenged spellers one-on-one with a piece of their writing [using an error analysis chart](#). The intent of these mini-conferences (5 minutes or less) is to help isolate the areas of instruction for students as well as acknowledge spelling strategies they are already using successfully. Before meeting with a student for this conference, the teacher highlights the misspelled words in the student's piece of writing. Begin by asking the student to read aloud his/her paper paying particular attention to the highlighted words. The student should begin to notice reasons for some of the errors such as carelessness, handwriting issues, difficulty with spelling patterns, etc.

#### *Spelling Goals*

At the conference, the teacher and student record notes for future reference such as: read papers aloud carefully listening to each word to be sure sounds and letters match, remember to double the final consonant in a single-syllable word ending in a consonant before adding -ing, use mnemonics like "I'll [search the sea](#) for clues," etc.



## *Personal Spelling Dictionary*

Require students to keep a personal spelling dictionary. A lot of teachers expect students to keep a section of the 3-ring binder for this. Straightforward information like the following should be recorded:

Correctly Spelled Word	Likely Misspellings
Search	Surch
Searches	Surches

## *Reflection Log*

After correcting a student assignment, the teacher lists 4-5 focus words at the bottom of the paper for the student to analyze. The student's responsibility is to record each misspelled word and its correct spelling, try to figure out why it is wrong, and then suggest a strategy for learning it. Here is an example:

Misspelled Word	Correct Spelling	Error Analysis
Write	Right	Homophones
Strategy to try: mnemonic device (if you have a will to write then spell it with a w!)		

## *BECKY'S CORE UNDERSTANDINGS*

- promote reflection about spelling within the broader context of language study
- promote word play, word awareness, and investment in literacy
- generalize to groups of words to promote a sense of logic and order in the language
- support spelling of high-frequency words that students see and use often
- support the appropriate use of resources such as dictionaries, spell checkers, and editors

- support revision and editing through multiple drafts when correctness matters

## *Practice*

Too much theory and not enough practical? Here is an idea you can try tomorrow. As students are writing rough drafts in class, encourage them to use sticky notes when they come to words they think they can't spell. We want students to remember that spelling does count, so we need to stop telling them just to write freely ignoring spelling. Instead model for students how to use a sticky note to record three possible spellings for the word. Spelling is a highly visual process, so this strategy encourages them to make several attempts of spelling the word. They can do this as they are writing or when they are finished. Students then use the sticky notes with an editing partner. The partner circles the correct spelling or adds it to the sticky. What I like about this is that it gives both partners additional spelling practice. If the editing partner is stuck, too, they should use an entirely different strategy.



Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Total words: \_\_\_\_\_

Writing Sample: \_\_\_\_\_

Total incorrect: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Total duplicates: \_\_\_\_\_

**Homophone/wrong words**

**Structural and pronunciation concerns**

**Faulty grammatical knowledge**

**Prefix/suffix errors**

**Errors in splitting or joining words**



Student Name: Josh

Total words: 295

Writing Sample: "The Injustice of It All"

Total incorrect: 15 different words

Date: 9/23/03

Total duplicates: 3

### Homophone/wrong words

*latter* (later)  
*layer* (lawyer)

### Structural and pronunciation concerns

*limet* (limit)  
*oppisit* (opposite)  
*fallows* (follows)  
*emeditly* (immediately)  
*meranda* (Miranda)  
*evean* (even)  
*surches* (searches)  
*surch* (search)  
*surch* (search)  
*surch* (search)  
*hurast* (harassed)

### Faulty grammatical knowledge

*drivers* (driver's)  
*cant* (can't)  
*a* (an)

### Prefix/suffix errors

*happend* (happened)  
*planing* (planning)

### Errors in splitting or joining words

