

Writing, Spelling, and Grammar

Writing, spelling, and grammar are interrelated components of the language arts. Writing, spelling, and reading are highly related, especially in the beginning stages of learning to read.

First, writing is a process of composing and expressing ideas. Second, writing is a support process for reading, word recognition, and spelling. In the beginning stages of reading, writing plays an important role in developing concepts of print, phonemic awareness, and letter-sound associations. Writing is also related to teaching children to spell and use the grammar of the English language.

Given the strength of the relationships between reading, writing, and spelling, spelling should be taught as an integrated part of the literacy program. Most children need systematic, direct spelling instruction. The more closely connected this instruction is to the teaching of letter-sound associations that are used in reading, the better it is likely to be for the learner.

At the beginning stages of learning to deal with letter-sound associations, children use a process known as invented spelling; this is the process of trying to spell a word using the letter-sound knowledge an individual has when the correct spelling is not known. Use of invented spelling is a normal and productive stage for a beginning reader and writer to go through. In fact, use of invented spelling is very effective in helping children refine and extend phonemic awareness and letter-sound associations. However, as children develop in reading and writing, they must also be taught to spell words correctly.

Grammar refers to the guidelines, rules, or statements that explain how a language works. Usage refers to the way in which a language is actually used. Many times teachers talk about teaching grammar, usage, and mechanics. When they do so, they are usually referring to the teaching of such things as parts of speech, punctuation rules, noun-verb agreement, and so forth.

Research reports strongly discourage the teaching of grammar as an isolated subject. Grammar, however, should be taught. This instruction should be provided in close connection with students' writing.

Well-developed, research-based instructional materials must include specific instruction in writing, spelling, and grammar. All aspects of this instruction must be related to each other and to reading. The following quotes support the conclusions drawn in this section:

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- **1985 - Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson**

“Instruction in grammar is often justified on the grounds that it improves students’ writing. In the long run, knowledge of grammar undoubtedly helps people become better writers as well as better readers and better speakers. However, it is a mistake to suppose that instruction in grammar transfers readily to the actual uses of language. This may be the explanation for the fact that experiments over the last fifty years have shown negligible improvement in the quality of student writing as a result of grammar instruction. Research suggests that the finer points of writing, such as punctuation and subject-verb agreement, may be learned best while students are engaged in extended writing that has the purpose of communicating a message to an audience. Notice that no communicative purpose is served when children are asked to identify on a worksheet the parts of speech or the proper use of *shall* and *will*.” (p. 80)

A key to teaching all children to read and write is engagement in an exciting literate atmosphere that promotes and supports reading and writing.

- **1990 - Adams**

“...Children’s writing is strongly influenced by their reading... better writers tend to read more than poorer writers... in studies specifically designed to improve writing, the reading experiences... were more beneficial than either grammar study or extra writing practice...” (pp. 84-85)

“The evidence that invented spelling activity simultaneously develops phonemic awareness and promotes understanding of the alphabetic principle is extremely promising... Equally inspiring are the reports that early writing activities promote children’s interest in learning about what words say and how they are spelled. Yet these are only starting points. Exercise in writing and invented spelling may significantly enhance children’s attitudinal and linguistic readiness for reading. As such, it may invaluablely complement instruction in reading...” (p. 387)

“The arguments for including spelling instruction as a major component of the reading and language program are strong. As learning about spelling serves to elaborate and reinforce knowledge in the Orthographic processor, it enhances reading proficiency. As it articulates with knowledge in the Phonological processor, it enhances children’s ability not just to induce spellings and to render correct spellings of unknown words but to hear and pronounce words correctly in their oral language activities. Finally, learning about correct

spelling may also be a key factor in children's development of morphemic awareness." (p. 404)

- **1998 - Learning First Alliance**

"Creative and expository writing instruction should begin in kindergarten and continue during first grade and beyond... Research shows invented spelling to be a powerful means of leading students to internalize phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle... conventionally correct spelling [should] be developed through 'focused instruction and practice' at the same time students use invented spelling." (p. 14)

"...Language mechanics skills, such as capitalization, usage, and grammar, can be directly taught and integrated into students' own writing through editing. For example, students might study proper use of adjectives and adverbs and then write descriptive comparisons. An editing checklist would add 'correct use of adjectives and adverbs' as a criterion for review in a peer-editing process." (p. 17)

- **1998 - Snow, Burns, & Griffin**

Recommendations on writing:

"Once children learn to write letters, they should be encouraged to write them, to use them to begin writing words or parts of words, and to use words to begin writing sentences. Instruction should be designed with the understanding that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning writing with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of phoneme identity, phoneme segmentation, and sound-spelling relationships. Conventionally correct spelling should be developed through focused instruction and practice. Primary-grade children should be expected to spell previously studied words and spelling patterns correctly in their final writing products. Writing should take place on a daily basis to encourage children to become more comfortable and familiar with it [sic]." (pp. 323-324)

"[Spelling]... Instruction should be designed with the understanding that using invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning writing with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of phoneme identity, phoneme segmentation, and sound spelling relationships. Conventionally correct

spelling should be developed through focused instruction and practice. Primary-grade children should be expected to spell previously studied words and spelling patterns correctly in their final writing products.” (pp. 323-324)

- **1998 - Hiebert, Pearson, Taylor, Richardson, & Paris**

“Writers’ Workshop is a popular context for combining lessons in composition and writing conventions (spelling, grammar, and usage such as quotation marks)...” (Topic 6, p. 4)

“A complete writing program attends equally to conventions of writing and to the process of writing.” (Topic 6, p. 2)

“Phonetic spelling—where children produce the letters for sounds that they hear—is the first step on the pathway of good spelling. Teachers use phonetic spellings as springboards to extend children’s knowledge of spelling-sound patterns.” (Topic 6, p. 3)

“As children progress and begin to master the fundamentals of spelling and text organization, nothing improves writing faster than providing lots of opportunities to write.” (Topic 6, p. 4)

“Children go through a series of stages as they progress from idiosyncratic to conventional spelling. **Phonetic or invented spelling** (where children select common letter[s] to represent sounds) is an important step toward conventional spelling... Later, we expect very sophisticated knowledge about the spelling of sounds...” (Topic 6, pp. 1-2) (See also Writing.)