



The Secret of Good Spellers Revealed

Welcome to this special report on how to see
bad spellers become good spellers.
(A Transcript)

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Now, I don't know what your experience is, but I tend to be a pretty good speller. But, I also miss things all the time. Never mind that Facebook and email, etc., has really invited us to have even greater problems with our spelling.

I'm reminded of a friend of mine who worked in a certain government office. One day he complained about his boss a good bit, not being too smart, but he especially had a lot of spelling errors. He went into his boss one day and said, "Hey boss, do you know in that program on your computer, in that Word program, it has a spell checker." And the fellow looked at him and says, "Yeah, but you have to be close."

Well, that actually is bit of an insight on what goes on with spelling. What the culture (and many of our teachers) tends to tell us is that people are just naturally bad spellers or good spellers. That would be about the same as saying people are bad pronouncers or good pronouncers. Some people say "bread" and Keats and "Happy New Year," and others say, "bray-ud" and "Kee-uts" and "Happee Noo Yee-are." Well, growing up in Alabama, I actually recognize some of that dialect, but that's not the point. You can learn to pronounce words. You can also learn how to spell them.

What I want to do is share a discovery I had, a 'how to do it', and a couple of other tricks.

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In a few moments you can begin with your students immediately on healing their spelling woes. What we tend to think about with spelling is that people just have to learn how to spell (each word). And so the more words we teach them, the more they practice, the more spelling tests, the better they get. That's actually not the trick because we're not diagnosing what the issue is. There are people who attend the same classes as all of us. But some people don't turn out well, even though they practice, even though they passed the test on spelling... they still wind up not being good spellers. And there's a very simple reason, if you'll observe and stop ask good spellers and bad spellers what they're up to. Do your own survey. What you'll find in the course of time is that good spellers do one thing that bad spellers won't do. No, it's not 'misspell', it's this--- **a good speller will not guess while a bad speller will guess often. That's the issue.**

Bad spellers are comfortable saying, "Oh, close enough. I'm not sure if that's right or not." Good spellers are not comfortable saying "close enough." They either mark it so they can see it later -- going back to look it up and see what the word is, or they look it up in that moment. And here's the trick with good spellers; they either look it up or use a word they know how to spell. Yes, they'll just substitute a word they CAN spell. This kind of thing happens all the time, but it's happening on such a subtle level we don't realize it.

So the trick in training a child is just to teach him or her how to quit guessing.

The goal is not to teach them how to be a good speller, but to teach them to quit guessing; once a person refuses to guess on spelling, he or she will become a good speller because they are going to either look up the words and learn them, or they're going to use words they know how to spell. That's the whole game.

So how do you do that? How do you encourage them to learn to quit guessing?

Well, in **The Writing Course**, we teach people exactly how to quit guessing. Now, realize our children write every day at home (we homeschool). They write -- it varies with their age, but let's say a page up to maybe three pages when they're older. The writing is double spaced so we can mark it up to help them--- we give them a variety of kinds of feedback. In the writing course, we show you exactly how to do that, but for spelling, the deal is simple. We say, "If you mark your own words your not sure how to spell (like put an 'SP' by it) then I, or your mother, will spell it correctly for you." In other words, if you're not

sure, you write a word, you write 'constable' and you're not sure or 'exactly' you're not sure or 'sincerely' you're not sure or 'scary' you're not sure. Is it an EY or just a Y? Well, we will look it up or we will spell it correctly. And, yes, we know most of them. And so, in that way, it's nice because we as parents get to keep working on our spelling and in particular, the child is not guessing. So if they mark a word as they're unsure, it's teaching them to discern whether they know how to spell or don't know how to spell. They make it a habit NOT TO GUESS!

Now you might ask, "Fred, what if they actually don't mark a word and misspell it?" Those are the ones I circled or marked and then they get to go look that word up and spell it correctly. Now, there are a couple other tricks inside the discovery and this basic how to approach. The basic 'how to' again is if they mark they're not sure about a word, then we spell it for them. If they don't mark it and we catch a spelling problem, they have to look up the misspelled word and spell it correctly.

So here's the trick. Special misspelling notebooks exist out there--- the most common misspelled words and they're fine. But, if you want to, if you have a child that has trouble spelling, take the words every day that they consistently misspell and have them build a notebook of correct spelling. It's pretty much in the direction of just writing down what the word is, how they misspelled it, and what the correct spelling is. If you do this, then they are really on target with what they need to learn. I will give Jody a credit because I don't think I came up with this at all, but we also do something else with our kids in addition to the idea of a notebook (which we don't do that often because they've gotten pretty good at spelling). Now when they misspell a word that they didn't mark, we simply have them write the correct spelling 10 times that day as part of their corrections , kind of like the old, "I will not pull Peggy's hair in class."

Well, this is just the word spelled correctly, but it can also be the wrong word. So, here's a common one. They'll say, your, Y-O-U-R when they mean to write YOU'RE, a contraction. And so, they have to write 'you're' with the apostrophe 10 times. Now, look, that's not fun, but that reminds them to quit guessing, and it teaches them how to spell the word.

So, there it is. It's really simple. All you want to do is build a skill in your child of learning

how to quit guessing about spelling. And let me tell you, I have two children who are borderline dyslexic and they were not very good at spelling, but this process worked like a charm. It's not just my own kids, it's all over the nation, all over the world---I get feedback weekly. When parents help their home students to quit guessing on words, everything changes. The natural feedback process develops a good speller. This works for kids in mass-education as well...hope we can change the world!

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