

Let's Help Our Students Become Great Spellers!

The American Literacy Council estimates that 23% of American adults (over 43 million) are functioning at the lowest level of spelling, an additional 28% (over 52 million) are functioning just above that level. This means that over half of all adults in America struggle with spelling. The figures are not much better for school-aged children. In short, America has a serious problem with spelling, and it is time for Christian educators to turn the tide and help our students become great spellers. We can no longer ignore or excuse bad spelling as parents or educators. Thus, we need to understand some of the causes and viable solutions to this serious educational epidemic in our nation.

Some may say it is really not that important in our computer age... what is the big deal? Well, first of all misspellings are quite distracting to the reader and can lead to serious misunderstandings and miscommunication. Second, misspellings harm one's credibility as it implies that one does not care enough to ensure accuracy in his communication, causing a negative and unflattering light on the entire written message. Third, and more importantly, misspellings can hinder and distract from the work of our outreach ministries and our effectiveness for Christ!

Seven Common Internal Causes of Poor Spelling

1. Poor phonetic awareness
2. Students do not read out of school
3. Lack of effective study strategies
4. Language deficiencies such as dyslexia
5. Issues with hearing
6. Vision challenges
7. Lack of self-discipline

Four Common External Causes of Poor Spelling

1. Texting lingo "UR" for "You Are," etc.
2. Email abbreviations, etc.
3. Corporate America "Krispy Kreme," etc.
4. Lack of support at school and/or home

Ten Ideas to Help Make Great Spellers

1. **Phonetic awareness:** give students a solid foundation with intensive phonics. Also cover special sounds and words.
2. **Proper practice:** say words, split words into syllables, write words a few times, and say them again. Do this several times a day.
3. **Read more out of class:** encourage reading out of class for enjoyment. When students read more they become better spellers.
4. **Provide kinesthetic lessons:** teach spelling lessons which include audio, visual, and hands on elements. Include as many of the senses as possible.
5. **Develop good proofreading habits:** lead students to check and re-check their written work, using proper resources. Only use spell checkers as a final check, limit their use as much as possible until students learn how to properly proofread and/or are in higher grades.
6. **Rhyming and spelling games:** teach students how to group words with the same ending such as cat, bat, hat, mat, etc. Play fun and effective spelling review games at school and at home.
7. **Teach dictionary and study skills:** lead students to develop dictionary skills, including how to look up words they do not know how to spell or define. Once they learn, have them write the word in a sentence.
8. **Employ useful spelling helps:** teach students to use easily remembered helps such as: "I before e, except after c, or when sounded like a, as in neighbor and weigh."
9. **Consistency:** emphasize the importance of good spelling and handwriting in every subject. Have a study place, stocked with a dictionary and supplies for homework.
10. **Reward:** provide incentives and rewards for excellent spelling.

It takes solid effort from students, parents, and teachers to develop great spellers!