

A brief description of word study instruction

Word study is an approach to spelling instruction that moves away from a focus on memorization. The approach reflects what researchers have discovered about the alphabetic, pattern, and meaning layers of English orthography.

Teachers use a variety of hands-on activities, often called word work, to help students actively explore these layers of information.

When studying the alphabetic layer, students examine the relationship between letters and sounds. They learn to match single letters and pairs of letters (e.g., ch) to specific sounds and, in doing so, to create words.

When students study the pattern layer, they look beyond single or paired letter-sounds to search for larger patterns that guide the grouping of letters (e.g., CVCe).

Studying the meaning layer helps students to understand how the English spelling system can directly reflect the semantic relationships across related words. For example, students come to understand that the second vowel in composition is spelled with an o because it is related to compose.

Examining each layer of the orthography helps students to see the regularities, patterns, and derivations in English words — how words work in our writing system. Word study also teaches students how to use this word knowledge strategically to support their spelling attempts during writing activities and to help them decode unfamiliar words while reading (Bear & Templeton, 1998).

The primary goal of word study is to support students' development of a working knowledge of the orthography — knowledge that students can apply as they are reading and writing. Here are nine tips for implementing word study.

Credit: <https://www.readingrockets.org/>

Strategies that support students' use of word study

See it, Say it, Show it - Say the word slowly and listen for the sounds you hear (initial sound, middle sound, final sound) Frayer Four Square Model

Say the word slowly and listen for any parts you know (br in brought)

Clap the syllables and write letters for each part you hear

Use words you know (fun and silly to funny)

Use names you know (William to will)

Use a rhyming word (rain to train)

Use word families to spell related words

Think about different spelling patterns that can spell the sound you hear (out vs. down)

Try it on a practice page and see if it looks right

Use a resource in the classroom (chart, word wall, book, dictionary, calendar, words you've already written)

Alphabetizing uses the phonetic principal to improve word study / manipulation and improves spelling skills.

Authentic reading and writing activities where children are encouraged to read and to compose texts on topics of their choosing.

Making and breaking words with magnetic letters, letter tiles, word searches, and word study notebooks are particularly beneficial.