Discovering the Sense in English Spelling: The Foundation of Literacy for Every Student

Timothy Houge, Ph.D., Northern State University
Sue Hegland, LearningAboutSpelling.com
The English Spelling SYSTEM is Completely Logical and Predictable

• Words Make Sense in Families
• Structure is the first consideration
• Relationships are the second consideration
• We can understand the way that pronunciation is represented in the context of structure & relationships
Words Make Sense in Families

Why is there a letter <g> in sign?

*sign* + al → signal
design

Why is there an <s> in *design*?

Why are there two <s>'s in *assign*?

These are real relationships

-source: etymonline.com-

Words Make Sense in Families

Why is <sign> not just spelled <sine>?

Written English words are made up of units of meaning that are spelled consistently even when pronunciation shifts.
Our Spelling System is Logical and Predictable

If we study:
1. a word’s **morphology** (units of meaning)
   - design → de + sign
   - signal → sign + al

   **Orthography**
   1. morphology: structure and sequencing of meaning
   2. etymology: signifying relationship of meaning
   3. phonology: representing pronunciation of meaning

Source: realspelling.fr

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If we study:
1. a word’s **morphology** (units of meaning)
2. its **etymology** (relationship to other words)
   - diachronically “through time:” from Latin signum “identifying mark, sign”
   - synchronically “same time:” <signal, sign, designate>

Our Spelling System is Logical and Predictable

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If we study:
1. a word’s **morphology** (units of meaning)
2. its **etymology** (relationship to other words)
   and only then analyze
3. its **orthographic phonology**

   /z/ in <design> is spelled <s>
   /i/ in BASE <sign> can be “long, short or schwaed”

Our Spelling System is Logical and Predictable

Source: realspelling.fr

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Go to film through E convention

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**Source:** American Oxford Dictionary and etymonline.com from Latin *finis*

- **fine**
  - "end, limit"
  - **al**
  - **ish**
  - **ite**
  - **ly**

  - **fine/ + al** $\rightarrow$ **final**
  - **con + fine** $\rightarrow$ **confine**

- **finite**
  - **in + fine/ + ite** $\rightarrow$ **infinite**
  - **in + fine/ + ite/ + y** $\rightarrow$ **infinity**

- **finish**
  - **fine/ + ish** $\rightarrow$ **fin**
  - **de + fine/ + ite + ly** $\rightarrow$ **definitely**

**Source:** sinuses.com

- **sine**
  - "bend, fold, curve"
  - **u**
  - **ate**
  - **ous**
  - **ly**
  - **us**
  - **its**
  - **old**

  - **co + sine** $\rightarrow$ **cosine**
  - **sine/ + us** $\rightarrow$ **sinus**

**Source:** Oxford American Dictionary from Latin *sinus*

- **sinuous**
  - **u**
  - **ate**
  - **ous**
  - **ly**
  - **us**
  - **its**
  - **old**

  - **co + sine** $\rightarrow$ **cosine**
  - **sine/ + us** $\rightarrow$ **sinus**

  - **sine/ + u + ous** $\rightarrow$ **sinuous**
  - **in + sine/ + u + ate** $\rightarrow$ **insinuate**

**Source:** Apple dictionary

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A student was misspelling <supper> as *

*<super>
### Study words starting with something that works every time.

Start with **structure** and **relationships**.

Words that we think of as simple can actually be complex:

- sup + er → supper
- fun + y → funny
- slip + er → slipper
- hap + y → happy

### Exceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>habit</th>
<th>study</th>
<th>frolic</th>
<th>vivid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>magic</td>
<td>cabin</td>
<td>given</td>
<td>logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manor</td>
<td>finish</td>
<td>honest</td>
<td>rapid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medal</td>
<td>driven</td>
<td>civic</td>
<td>panic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metal</td>
<td>damage</td>
<td>comic</td>
<td>punish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pedal</td>
<td>dragon</td>
<td>gavel</td>
<td>seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>melon</td>
<td>edit</td>
<td>having</td>
<td>rapid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
<td>risen</td>
<td>leper</td>
<td>rebel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>novel</td>
<td>engine</td>
<td>limit</td>
<td>rigor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panel</td>
<td>robin</td>
<td>salad</td>
<td>etc, etc, etc...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*<super>

sup + er → supper
soup

The **STRUCTURES** of English words are completely consistent.
mis hap en y

ship'ing → shipping
worship'ing → worshipping

prefer'ed → preferred
prefer'ence → preference

Some consonants are not doubled in English, including ‘x, w, j’.

ad + mit → admit
e + mit → emit
o + mit → omit
per + mit → permit
sub + mit → submit
trans + mit → transmit
com + mit → commit
re + mit → remit

com + mit + ee → committee
com + mit + ment → commitment
per + mit + ed → permitted
inter + mit + ent + ly → intermittently

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Two <m>'s (not “double <m>”) from two separate elements
• Doubled <t> is result of doubling convention
• Double <e> is a vowel digraph

Rather than a series of letters to memorize, structure and conventions allow this word to make sense.

happy + er → happier
happy + ness → happiness
We want students to see structure to understand words

- fried \(\rightarrow\) fry + ed
- cried \(\rightarrow\) cry + ed
- spied \(\rightarrow\) spy + ed

- happiness \(\rightarrow\) happy + ness
- readiness \(\rightarrow\) ready + ness
- denial \(\rightarrow\) deny + al
- easier \(\rightarrow\) easy + er
- slipperiest \(\rightarrow\) slippery + est
- emptiest \(\rightarrow\) empty + est

- heavily \(\rightarrow\) heavy + ly
- steadily \(\rightarrow\) steady + ly

- colonial \(\rightarrow\) colony + al
- remedial \(\rightarrow\) remedy + al

But isn't morphology and etymology too advanced for young students?
**Week 15: Weed Is a Flower**

sooner       smaller
soonest      smallest
hotter       fatter
hottest      fattest
busier       angrier
busiest      angriest
happier      straighter
happiest     straightest

*From Scott Foresman Reading Street*

*mid 2nd grade spelling words*

happy → hap + y (happen)
instead → in + stead (steady)
question → quest + ion (request)
because → be + cause (excuse)
nothing → no + thing
animal → anim + al (animation)
today → to + day
tomorrow → to + morrow (morning)
toward → to + ward (forward, onward, inward, upward)
into → in + to
together (gather)

*From McGraw-Hill Reading Wonders*

*1st grade “high frequency” words*

**English Spelling is Completely Logical and Predictable**

Words make sense in families.
Study interrelationship of

phoneme-grapheme or “sound-symbol” associations
AND develop spelling, reading, and vocabulary.

Questions?

Timothy.Houge@northern.edu

suehegland@me.com

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Sue Hegland, LearningAboutSpelling.com
Resources

Websites:
LearningAboutSpelling.com - Informational website by Sue

umw.dyslexiaida.org - Upper Midwest Branch of IDA website
   (in particular see Recorded Webinars)

realspelling.fr - Orthographic linguistics resources & classes (Spellinars)
wordworkskingston.com - Videos and resources for classroom teaching
linguisteducatorexchange.com - Blog posts and resources about orthographic linguistics
etymonline.com - Amazing etymological reference

Teacher blogs:
Lyn Anderson’s Early Years Blog - Beyond the Word  http://wordsinbogor.blogspot.com
Scot Caldwell’s Grade 1 Blog (archived)  https://smallhumansthinkbig.wordpress.com
Mary Beth Steven’s Grade 5 Blog  http://mbsteven.edublogs.org
Dan Allen’s Grade 5 Blog (archived)  http://blogs.zis.ch/dallen/category/languagespellingword-study/
Ann Whiting’s Grade 7 Blog  https://wordinquiry.wordpress.com
Ann & Lyn’s blog: https://caughtinthespellofwords.wordpress.com/

Book:

   and see Resources page on LearningAboutSpelling.com for even more...
“Getting started” resources:
(We have no financial connection to any of these sources, but if you purchase from them, please tell them you heard about them from Sue and Tim. They are our colleagues and we would love them to know that we appreciate their ongoing work.)

Pete Bowers’ book with 10 lessons to get started:
At WordWorksKingston.com - purchase for $25 plus shipping

At this link, you can also see a YouTube video of Pete using the first lessons with a class. Pete’s practice has grown and changed since he wrote this book over 10 years ago, but this book is still a great resource for getting started. During his dissertation study, Pete coined the term Structured Word Inquiry (along with his advisor, John Kirby) to describe a process of using scientific investigation to learn about words.

Free matrices:
Many in photos section of linguisteducatorexchange Facebook page
https://www.facebook.com/pg/linguisteducatorexchange/photos/?ref=page_internal

Realspellers.org:  http://www.realspellers.org/resources/matrices

Matrices to purchase:
Purchase 70 matrices from realspelling.fr for $34 (price includes shipping)
http://realspelling.fr/Welcome_to_Real_Spelling/Store.html

Use the Mini-Matrix Maker:
The use of this mini-matrix maker is described on the Further Resources page at LearningAboutSpelling.com
https://learningaboutspelling.com/further-resources/

Facebook pages:
Structured Word Inquiry and Dyslexia—a public group run by Dyslexia Training Institute
https://www.facebook.com/groups/227619187712028/
Structured Word Inquiry in the Classroom—a closed group run by Mary Beth Steven.
https://www.facebook.com/groups/107360163171766/
Structured Word Inquiry—a private group run by Lisa Barnett. To join you can email Lisa at seethebeautyindyslexia@gmail.com. Send her this message: “Sue Hegland recommends joining the SWI group. Please add me.” and put “Add to SWI group” in the subject line. Send from your Facebook email.

Please tell administrators that you heard about the group from us if you need to ask to join, so they’ll know you are not stumbling onto their group with no idea what it is.

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Thanks for your interest in learning more. Understanding how our language actually works is so powerful and makes a difference for so many students. Whatever your role and relationship to dyslexia and learning, thanks for all you do to help others become fully literate.

-Sue Hegland

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