

### **Helping with Spelling series. – Stop the guessing.**

Our clinic sees children whom have trouble learning to read and spell and because of this we have the opportunity to see trends and patterns. I shall share with you how to recognize when children “guess” in their spelling, why it is a problem and how to correct it.

A child who is taught to spell using the ‘look - say - cover - write - check’ spelling method may misinterpret the intention of the method and develop a bad habit of guessing the spelling of a word in the early stages of learning it. The problem with this lies in the initial imprinting of the word into the brain memory, as it can be often imprinted in a complicated, untidy and often misspelled form. Struggling students in general don’t have any time or effort to waste. They need to learn things in the quickest and simplest manner just to keep up.

When learning to spell a new word, the initial imprinting will occur in the ‘look’ phase of LSCWC. That is the child needs to ‘look’ carefully at each letter as they ‘say’ it. For our poor spelling students, problems commonly occur with their visual perception and working memory and this means that they struggle to see letters in sequence and retain them from the ‘look and say’ to the ‘write’ phase of the LSCWC method. Simply ‘looking and saying’ is not good enough. To overcome this problem, teachers will sometimes add other steps to improve the imprinting such as ‘segmenting’ the word, but for the challenged child this step is generally still too large or confusing. This is the case if the visual perception problems are occurring concurrently with phonological awareness problems, and/or auditory processing problems– an extremely common occurrence for the lower 30% of most classroom groups.

To see if your child has these problems that I am describing, have your child spell a word in front of you and watch what they do. You are looking to see if they will take a cursory glance at the word – the ‘look’ phase and then begin to spell the word out loud whilst looking around the room, at the walls, the ceiling and anywhere but at the word. When they spell the word incorrectly and you ask them to try again, they will take another glance at the word, look quickly away and stumble through a second attempt.

How I see this, is that the child has incorrectly interpreted what their teacher was saying at school. We know that the LSCWC method is about having the child imprint the word via the first steps of ‘look and say’ and then attempt to further embed the word during the ‘write’ step when it is being recalled, but the reality for the struggling child in any class, is that these steps are too large and their working memory breaks down before they can write the word down correctly.

Solution: The child must correctly imprint the word into their brain by ‘copy writing’ the word in the following fashion:

e.g. Spelling Word *important*

1. The child copies the word in 2, 3, or 4 letter clusters and write them in their book: eg *imp ort ant* or *im por tant* or *im port ant*. It does not really matter what the letter clusters are even though some make more sense than others, but copying the word correctly is essential.

2. At step 1 the child must speak out loud by saying *imp ort ant* as it is written and also actively listen to the sounds of the word. This step helps imprint it into the aural and oral parts of the brain as well as the visual and motor by the action of writing and seeing. Remember, the brain loves having things stored in lots of different places and in lots of different ways, so be creative!



3. The child must then write / copy it out as many times as needed. Somewhere between 3 and 10 will be needed depending on the word and child.

Have fun with this trick... Close your eyes and spell the word backwards – believe it or not, this will even help with your comprehension when reading later on!

Now that the word is stored in the brain correctly from the start, hopefully further learning of the word will be a little easier.

For further help please feel welcome to call our clinic at Tyquin Group Speech Pathology and Reading Clinic - 33998028 [www.tyquin.com.au](http://www.tyquin.com.au) [www.behavioralreading.com](http://www.behavioralreading.com)