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Learning to Write and Loving It!.

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<i>Stages of Spelling Development</i>	<i>Mini-lessons during writing workshop and across the day should focus on . . .</i>
<i>Stage 1: Precommunicative</i>	
<p>Precommunicative spellers are at the babbling stage of spelling. They use scribbling, numbers, mock letters, and real letters to write words, but the letters are strung together randomly. They often repeat the same letter over and over. The letters do not correspond to the sounds (for example, they may write <i>OPSPS</i> for <i>eagle</i>). Uppercase letters are used more often than lowercase letters, but both are used indiscriminately. Generally, only the child can read his or her own writing and only sometimes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alphabet letter knowledge • letter–sound correspondence • phonological awareness • concepts of print, including the concepts of words and left–right directionality • many authentic reasons to write
<i>Stage 2: Semiphonetic</i>	
<p>Semiphonetic spellers know that letters represent sounds and letter sounds can be used to make words. Spellings are often abbreviated and reflect initial and/or final sounds (for example, <i>E</i> for <i>eagle</i> or <i>MR</i> for <i>monster</i>). These spellers may also use the literal name of a letter to represent a word (<i>u</i> for <i>you</i> or <i>r</i> for <i>are</i>). Generally, the child can read her or his own writing more often than at Stage 1, and teachers can sometimes read the writing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concepts of print, including the concept of words • alphabet letter knowledge • letter–sound correspondence • beginning work with word families • lots of work with phonological awareness, including phonemic awareness • many authentic reasons to write
<i>Stage 3: Phonetic</i>	
<p>Phonetic spellers spell words the way they sound. All the phonemes in a word are represented although not necessarily conventionally (for example, <i>EGL</i> for <i>eagle</i>, <i>BOTM</i> for <i>bottom</i>, and <i>STOPT</i> for <i>stopped</i>). Short vowels are often problematic. Generally, the child and teachers can read what has been written.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more word families and short vowels • spelling patterns, phonics, and word structures (word parts, base words, and little words) • more segmenting and blending of phonemes • many authentic reasons to write

Stage 4: Transitional	
<p>Transitional spellers think about how words appear visually (a visual memory of spelling patterns is apparent). Spellings exhibit conventions of English orthography, such as vowels in every syllable, e-marker (for example, <i>made, like</i>) and vowel digraph patterns (for example, <i>boat, each</i>), and correctly spelled inflectional endings (for example, <i>EGUL</i> for <i>eagle</i> and <i>BOTTUM</i> for <i>bottom</i>). To distinguish between phonetic spellings (influenced by sound) and transitional spellings (influenced by visual conventions), ask yourself, “Is this word spelled like it sounds (phonetic), or is its spelling more representative of a visually recalled spelling (for example, <i>BOTTUM</i> with the double <i>tt</i>)?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commonly misspelled words, including homonyms and contractions • many authentic reasons to write
Stage 5: Conventional (Standard)	
<p>Conventional or standard spellers continue to improve their spelling accuracy, spell a large body of words correctly, and know how to proofread (and hopefully do!). Typically, conventional spelling is most evident in Grade 3 and beyond.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prefixes and suffixes • homonyms • contractions • possessives • irregular spelling patterns • many authentic reasons to write

Source: Adapted from Richard Gentry and Jean Wallace Gillet, *Teaching Kids to Spell* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993), 26–37.

Underwriting: Should Teachers Do It?

The term *underwriting* refers to transcribing writing in standard form using conventional spelling (Feldgus and Cardonick 1999). Typically, the teacher writes directly under or sometimes above what the child has written, or at the bottom of the page. The teacher may write a whole sentence or more typically just a word. The word may be a high-frequency word that the child should eventually learn to write correctly. The teacher may pick one word that is so far from conventional spelling that rereading it by anyone would likely be impossible. Or the word may be very close to conventional spelling and the underwriting highlights how close the child came.