

Teaching and Practicing Sight Words
Research Based Guidance
from
The Next Step in Word Study and Phonics
Richardson & Dufresne (Scholastic, 2019)
Summarized by Janet N. Mort PhD

Use books or poems or a collection of captivating sentences to teach new sight words. After children have read the book, spend two or three minutes selecting a few sight words that have not been introduced in the past. It is very important that words are introduced IN CONTEXT. By teaching the words after they have read them in context several times you are giving them a better chance to learn it instantly.

Recommended Procedures for Teaching Sight Words

Use the following four activities with the whole class for a gradual release of responsibility and to build visual memory. Use this routine daily in the following order as a part of your whole group activities so that children become familiar with the routine and it becomes predictable. (Resources Required: small whiteboards, individual magnetic letter sets, index cards)

1. What's Missing?

This activity is about looking and attending to details, letter by letter. Tell students the word and ask them to look at each letter as you slowly slide a card left to right across the word. The purpose of this brief procedure is to help students develop a system for remembering words. This includes attending to the left-to-right sequence of letters within the word.

Erase or remove a letter and ask, "What's missing"? Then the student(s) tell you the missing letter. If you present it as a game they will pay attention and look closely at the word. When you have had enough practice with all students participating, erase the entire word and ask the students to spell it. This is the only time you will have students spell the word. Spelling sight words is essential, but it is not an efficient strategy to learn sight words by itself and in fact could slow the rate at which they require them. You want students to remember say words as a complete unit but spell them correctly eventually.

2. Mix and Fix

Have students take redundant magnetic letters off their trays to make a sight word with the remaining letters. Although most students should be able to construct the word easily, they could use a model you provide. Teach students how to check the word by sliding their finger under the letters as they read it. This helps them develop synchrony, the process of coordinating and integrating auditory and visual information. Students should hear and say what they see in a word. Make sure each student is looking at the

letters as he or she says the word. Have the students mix up and remake or fix the word several times. After the final mix and fix, have each student covered the word with the index card.

3. Table Writing

Students write the word on the table with their finger as they say the word in a natural way. Do not encourage them to segment the sounds. Let them peek under the card if they forget how to write the word. This tactile activity helps them build a memory trace for the word.

4. Write and Retrieve

Students write the word on a dry erase board. Immediately intervene if the student begins to misspell a word. When a child writes a word incorrectly, the word becomes difficult for them to unlearn. If they need help, they can lift the index card and look at the magnetic letters. Do not allow students to spell or sound out the word. You want them to learn the word as a complete unit. At first you may want to just say the words slowly and in a natural way as they write it. Listening for the sounds will help them remember the letter sequence. Later when they have developed a system for remembering, they will not need to do that.

Have students erase the words and write different words, some they already know well. Have them erase them, then dictate the new word again for students to write. This step help students build a long-term memory process for depositing and retrieving words.

After students learn new sight words, it is important for them to practice the words in a variety of ways. Review the new word for several days at the beginning of each lesson by having them write the word on a dry erase board. Observe each student, checking to see if here she quickly remembers the word and record the results on the Circle Charts. If students need extra help, they can say the words slowly and listen for the sounds, but the goal is for them to write the word without having to say it.

During guided reading, expect correct spelling of the sight word. If students misspell a word you have taught, write it on a practice page in their journal and have them write it several times to build automaticity then have them write the word in their writing piece.

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Recommended Procedures for Practicing Sight Words

Now you are ready to build sight word practice into your small group activities. Some children will require multiple “doses” of practice to master the sight words as well as re-teaching in small groups as determined by the Circle Charts. This is best achieved in practice centres that are game and activity focused so children enjoy the experience. Reference *Joyful Literacy Interventions* for suggested activities. (Mort, 2014)