

Lesson at a Glance: ONE-SECOND WORDS

What to Do	What to Say	What Kids Need to Know
INTRODUCE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start off the discussion by asking kids to think of words they always spell correctly. • Then talk about words that kids are pretty sure they won't know. • Get kids thinking about words that they know but often spell incorrectly. • Allow some time for kids to volunteer their words. • Start a chart with their names and words, leaving a third column to fill in later. 	<p>"Are there some words you always spell right? How about the? And why do you always spell it right? You just know it!</p> <p>"Are there some words you know you'd have to invent? Maybe it's names of dinosaurs, states, or countries. These are the words that you just don't know. They're big, they're hard, and you just invent them."</p> <p>"There's a third group of words, and these are the ones we're going to talk about today. Can you think of a word that you use a lot but still get wrong? Maybe one that you're finding you always have to fix when you edit, or that you're always getting confused on."</p>	<p>Sometimes there are a few tricky words that you use often but just can't remember how to spell.</p>
EXPLORE		
<p>You might want to wait for the next day to carry out this part of the lesson so you'll have plenty of time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the idea of one-second words. • Use they and because as examples of one-second words. 	<p>"Would it be worth it if you could take one extra second when you're writing and always get these words right? Here's how. It might be a little different for every word, but we'll use they and because as examples." (See page 28 for examples a and b.)</p>	<p>Using little tricks and visual reminders will help you remember how to spell words you frequently get wrong.</p>
DISCOVER		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask kids to think of one-second words. Have them look in their writing for ideas. • Have them come up with a way they can remember their words. • Record their responses on the chart. 	<p>"Does anyone have a word in mind that they would really like to be able to remember? Which part of the word do you have trouble remembering? What is a good way to remember it?"</p>	<p>It's a good idea to choose a word you have trouble with and think of a way to remember it.</p>
SUMMARIZE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have kids spend a week or so with their words and discuss how it went. The goal is to have 100% correctness for that word. • Have students keep a list in their spelling journals of their one-second words. 	<p>"How did it go? Do you always get your one-second words right now?"</p> <p>"Keep a list of your one-second words in your spelling journal so you can keep track of the words you've learned."</p>	<p>By taking an extra second to think about your word, you can usually remember how to spell it correctly.</p>

ONE-SECOND WORDS



By spending one extra second, you can remember the correct spelling for words you commonly misspell. Come up with a little trick for remembering the spelling or write the word in a place you can easily see.

Who, When, and Why

Materials

- ▶ chart paper
- ▶ spelling journals

This lesson is appropriate for students who spell many if not most common words correctly, but have a few they frequently miss. Common examples (teachers tell me the same ones every time!) are *they*, *girl*, *where*, and *because*. The reason to wait to do this lesson until you see kids spelling common words correctly is that kids will pick up these high-frequency words through reading. This lesson is about “cleaning up” the few that are still persistently misspelled, typically for very understandable reasons. A good guideline for thinking about when kids are ready for this lesson is the Dolch words, the 220 most common words in English (see Sample Words). When kids are spelling the vast majority of the Dolch words correctly, they’re ready to work on the few that they’re still shaky on.

Many older students don’t misspell common words anymore, only harder words. If so, this lesson may be appropriate only for part of your class. However, older students may find it fun to learn a hard word or two every week.

Background Knowledge

This may be your favorite lesson! Once kids understand the idea behind it, you’ll be able to help them learn to spell the words they should know but are always missing.

High-frequency words are usually spelled right. In the study I did for my dissertation (Wilde, 1987), I found that the 37 words that made up 50% of six third and fourth graders’ writing were misspelled only 2% of the time. Some of these were slips of the pen, like *OT* for *to*, but the rest probably won’t surprise you.

These words are just tricky. **They** has a long **a** in it, so kids may well spell it as *THAY*. And here’s the real challenge. As Frank Smith (1982) has commented, it’s not that you can’t remember the right spelling, it’s that you can’t forget the wrong one. For me, **cantaloupe** is the word I can’t seem to remember. Is there an **a** in the middle and I think there’s an **e**, or is there an **e** and I think it’s an **a**? You can imagine kids doing the same thing with **they**. With **because**, the problem is that there’re a lot of vowels in it and it’s hard to remember which ones they’re and where they occur.

The Lesson

1. Start off the discussion by asking kids to think of words they always spell correctly.

Are there some words you always spell right, every time? How many of you always spell **the** correctly? Let me guess: everyone. And why do you always spell it right? It would be silly not to, wouldn't it? You just know it, so you get it right.

2. Then talk about words that kids are pretty sure they won't know.

Are there some words you know you'd have to invent? Maybe it's names of dinosaurs; maybe it's the names of some states or countries. These are the words that you just know you don't know. They're big, they're hard, and you don't want to take the time to go and look them up, so you just invent them.

3. To get kids thinking about words that they know but often spell incorrectly:

There's a third group of words, and these are the ones we're going to talk about today. Can you think of a word that you use a lot but still get wrong a lot? It might be a word that you're finding you always have to fix when you edit. It might be one that you think you know but you're always getting confused on.

Allow some time for kids to volunteer their words. You could start a chart with their names and words, leaving a third column to fill in later.

4. You might want to wait for the next day to carry out this part of the lesson so you'll have plenty of time.

Guess what! I have an idea so that you can always get these words right. Would it be worth it if you could take one extra second when you're writing and get them right? Here's how. It might be a little different for every word, so let's take some examples.

- a. For **they**, it's hard to remember what vowel it has. What would be an easy way to keep it straight? Here're two: it's just the word **the** plus a **y**. Or you can remember that **he** is part of **they**, so it has **he** in the middle. So if every time you go to write **they**, you can take one extra second to think of one of these, you can always get it right.
- b. What do you find hard about **because**? It's all those vowels, isn't it? Here's an idea. Write **because** somewhere that you can always see it when you're writing, maybe on a sticky note or strip of masking tape that you can stick on your desk or writing folder. That way, every time you go to write **because**, you can take that one extra second and look at it and get it right. And since you'll be looking at it so much, there's a good chance that within a week you'll be remembering it without having to look.

These are the two basic strategies for one-second words: mnemonic devices and visual reminders.

It's best if kids pick their own mnemonic devices, with you helping only if they're stuck. For instance, one second grader decided to remember that the **oo** in **book** looks like a pair of glasses, and drew some glasses on the word. It worked for him, and it was his own. One other suggestion: if you, the teacher, can come up with your own one-second word too, all the better.


- The next step is for kids to spend some time deciding how they're going to make their word into a one-second word. This will be the third column on your chart. Ask for volunteers to offer some one-second words.

Does anyone have a word in mind that they would really like to be able to remember? (Allow time for kids to think or look over their writing.) Which part of the word do you have trouble remembering? What's a good way to remember it? (Record responses on the chart.)

Then the next step is spending a week or so with their words and discussing how it went. The goal is to get to the point where they'll never get this word wrong again.

How did it go? Do you always get your one-second word right now?

- Have students keep a list in their spelling journals of the words they pick for one-second words.

 Keep a list of your one-second words in your spelling journal so you can keep track of the words you've learned.

Next Steps

Suggest that kids keep a running list of possible one-second words in their spelling journals. For example, if they find they can't remember a word while they are writing, they might jot it down on that list and spend some time on it later.

» Follow-up

In a week or so, see if the children have achieved success with their one-second words. Then institute it as a regular practice: every week the students should pick a one-second word for that week, decide how they're going to get it right, and apply it in their writing. Within a few months, you should see quite a bit of improvement in the misspelling of common words, since there aren't very many of them that are problems.

✓ Assessment

From time to time, take a look at students' lists of their one-second words. By checking their lists against their recent writing, you can see if they're successfully using the strategy. Alternatively, suggest that they do this themselves.

Sample Words

See page 268 for Dolch Word List.

DOLCH WORD LIST

about	came	gave	keep	open	so	use
after	can	get	kind	or	some	very
again	carry	give	know	our	soon	work
all	clean	go	laugh	out	start	want
always	cold	goes	let	over	stop	warm
am	come	going	light	own	take	wash
an	could	good	like	pick	tell	wish
and	cut	got	little	play	ten	we
any	did	green	two	please	thank	well
are	do	grow	long	pretty	that	went
around	does	had	look	put	the	were
as	done	has	made	out	their	what
ask	don't	have	make	ran	them	when
at	down	he	many	read	then	where
ate	draw	help	may	rid	these	which
away	drink	her	me	ride	these	white
be	eat	here	much	right	they	who
because	eight	him	must	round	think	why
been	every	his	my	run	this	will
before	fall	hold	myself	said	those	wish
best	far	hot	never	saw	three	wish
better	fast	how	new	say	to	work
big	find	hurt	no	see	today	would
black	first	I	not	seven	together	wife
blue	five	if	now	shall	er	yellow
both	fly	in	of	she	too	yes
bring	for	into	off	show	try	you
brown	found	is	old	sing	two	your
but	four	it	on	sit	under	
buy	from	its	once	six	up	
by	full	jump	one	sleep	upon	
call	funny	just	only	small	us	