

Lesson at a Glance: HOW TO SPELL THE /s/ SOUND

What to Do	What to Say	What Kids Need to Know
INTRODUCE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write the words sad, send, cent, sit, city, sock, and sun on the board or on chart paper. Discuss as a class what sound the words start with. Have students work in pairs to create a list of words that start with the /s/ sound. 	<p>"Let's read these words together. What do you notice about what sound they start with? What do you notice about what letter they start with?"</p> <p>"Work with a partner and see how many words you can write that start with the /s/ sound. Write them in your spelling journals in two groups, depending on which letter they start with. If you aren't sure, make your best guess."</p>	<p>Lots of words start with the /s/ sound, but sometimes they start with an s and sometimes they start with a c.</p>
EXPLORE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to share their word lists. Say the words sit and city aloud. Discuss how to know whether the words start with c or s. Repeat with celery and secretary. Write the words sit, city, celery, and secretary on the board or on chart paper. Ask students to think about how to spell those words. Have them discuss with a partner whether there is a way to tell if the words start with an s or a c. 	<p>"Let's share the words you've written. Now, close your eyes and listen to me say these two words: sit, city. Is there any way that you can tell just from listening to them which one starts with c and which one starts with s? If you do know which one starts with each letter, how do you know? Let's try it with another two words. Close your eyes and listen again: celery, secretary. Can you tell what letter they start with?"</p> <p>"Here's something to think about with a partner: when you listen to the words sit, city, celery, and secretary, you can't tell whether they start with an s or a c. So then how do you know which letter to use when you write them?"</p>	<p>Just from listening to a word with the /s/ sound, you can't tell whether it starts with an s or a c.</p>
DISCOVER		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a class, share what partners discussed. Distribute copies of page 274. Review initial word lists and, as a class, sort them under the headings sa, ca, se, and ce. Have students work with a partner to fill in /s/ words that start with the remaining patterns. (See Sample Words for examples.) 	<p>"Let's share what you came up with. Is there any way—besides just knowing the word—to tell whether to use s or c? Let's try something. Look back at the lists you did with your partner, and let's list all the /s/ words that start with sa. Okay, now let's list all the /s/ words that start with ca. Let's try another pattern. What are your se words? What are your ce words?"</p> <p>"Try working with your partner and see where you can fill in words with the other patterns."</p>	<p>Some /s/ words start with sa, but not ca (unless students have mistakenly included some words that start with the /k/ sound). There are words that start with both se and ce. The only patterns that have words in the c column are ce, ci, and cy.</p>
SUMMARIZE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the sorting results. Invite children to offer a rule for writing words that start with the /s/ sound. 	<p>"What did you notice? Any ideas about why this happens?"</p> <p>"So what's a good rule to use if you're writing a word that starts with the /s/ sound?"</p>	<p>If the second letter is e, i, or y, the word could start with either s or c, so you have to know the word to be sure it's right. The rest of the time it has to start with s.</p>

HOW TO SPELL THE /S/ SOUND



The most common way to spell the /s/ sound is, of course, with the letter **s**, but sometimes it's spelled with **c** before **e**, **i**, and **y**.

Who, When, and Why

Materials

- ▶ spelling journals
- ▶ copies of page 274

Since there are so many words using the letter **s**, and since you can hear the sound in the name of the letter (*ess*), children make the connection very early in their spelling. But the letter **c** can also represent the /s/ sound, and you can also hear the sound in its letter name (*cee*), even though **c** can represent the /k/ sound too. Therefore, particularly as children become familiar with words like **cent** and **city**, you'll see them sometimes using **c** to spell the /s/ sound. When kids have this awareness—that there's more than one way to spell /s/—they're ready to do some exploration of it. Younger students might not be able to grasp and apply the rule very well; in their case, the lesson is more about developing some awareness of the pattern than applying it consistently.

Background Knowledge

The /s/ sound is usually spelled with **s**, and sometimes with **c**. The **c** spelling occurs only before **e**, **i**, or **y**, and the **s** spelling is more common. Beyond that, it's a matter of knowing the specific word. For Spanish speakers, the same rule applies in Spanish. Other English spellings of /s/, as in **scissors** and **psalm**, are rare.

The Lesson

**sad, send,
cent, sit, city,
sock, sun**

1. To get kids thinking about different spellings for the /s/ sound, write **sad, send, cent, sit, city, sock,** and **sun** on the board or on chart paper.

Let's read these words together. What do you notice about what sound they start with? What do you notice about what letter they start with?



- Work with a partner and see how many words you can write that start with the /s/ sound. Write them in your spelling journal in two groups, depending on which letter they start with. If you aren't sure, make your best guess.



2. After they've done this:

Let's share the words you've written.

Then:

Close your eyes and listen to me say these two words: **sit, city**. Is there any way that you can tell just from listening to them which one starts with **c** and which one starts with **s**? If you *do* know which one starts with each letter, how do you know? (*Probably just from knowing that specific word.*) Let's try it with another two words. Close your eyes and listen again: **celery, secretary**. Can you tell from listening what letter they start with?

sit celery
city secretary

3. Write the words **sit, city, celery**, and **secretary** on the board or on chart paper.

 Here's something to think about with a partner: when you listen to the words **sit, city, celery**, and **secretary**, you can't tell whether they start with an **s** or a **c**. So then how do you know which letter to use when you write them?

4. After they've finished their discussion:

Let's share what you came up with. Is there any way—besides just knowing the word—to tell whether to use **s** or **c**? Let's try something. Look back at the lists you did with your partner, and let's list all the /s/ words that start with **sa**. (*Record the **sa** words they offer in the correct section of the chart.*) Okay, now let's list all the /s/ words that start with **ca**. (*There won't be any, unless they've mistakenly included some words that start with the /k/ sound.*) Let's try another pattern. What are your **se** words? What are your **ce** words? (*There will be some of each; include them on the chart.*)

5. Handout copies of page 274 to each student. Invite kids to record the lists you just generated for **sa** and **ca**.

 Try working with your partner and see where you can fill in words with the other patterns. (*The only patterns that will have /s/ words in the **c** column are **ce, ci, and cy**. You can refer to my list of /s/ sound words for more examples.*)

6. After kids have had a chance to talk again with their partners, ask:

What did you notice? (*Move them toward realizing that unless the second letter is an **e, i, or y**, the first letter has to be **s**. If the second letter is one of those three, the first letter could be either **s** or **c**.) Any ideas about why this happens? (*If **sad**, for instance, started with a **c** it would read **cad**, since **c** represents a /k/ sound before most letters. Younger children may not have enough experience with language to grasp this, but the lesson can still proceed. It just means that getting /s/ sound words right won't come as naturally to them as it will in a year or two.*)*

7. See if kids can generate a rule for deciding how to spell the /s/ sound.

So what's a good rule to use if you're writing a word that starts with the /s/ sound? (*Build on their ideas to end up with: if the second letter is **e, i, or y**, the word could start with either **s** or **c**, so you have to know the word to be sure it's right. The rest of the time it has to start with **s**.)*

/s/ SOUND WORDS	
sa	ca
se	ce
si	ci
so	co
su	cu
sy	cy
s + any other letter	c + any other letter

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The /s/ sound is usually spelled with **s**. It's sometimes spelled with **c**, but only before **e, i, or y**.

Next Steps

» Follow-up

Right away:

When you're reading and writing today, try to notice words that start with the /s/ sound and see how well our rule works. You can add words to your chart if you like.

A few days later: Revisit the rule and talk about whether it's working for them. If not, try to clarify any confusion, but remember that the rule doesn't provide definitive answers about how to spell these words; only a dictionary can do that.

✓ Assessment

As a journal topic, suggest a question like:

✎ What have you learned (or what do you know) about how to spell words that start with the /s/ sound?

Also, look for invented spellings of these words in students' writing; see if they result from breaking the rule or are just words that could reasonably start with either **s** or **c**.

+ Extension

For older students, you can add the following:

Take a look at the words **psychology** and **scissors**. They don't fit our rule, do they? Who'd like to get a dictionary and find some other words that start with **ps** and **sc**. What do you think? Why do they break the rule? (*It has to do with their etymology; they typically come from Greek.*) You just have to know those words, don't you? Here's an interesting fact: in French, the **p** in **ps** words is pronounced (like in the word **psychologie**, meaning **psychology**).



Kids might want to keep their charts in their spelling journals for quick reference.

Sample Words

The /s/ sound is spelled **s** before:

	Easy	Medium	Harder
a	sad, same, saw	safety, salt, saddle	safari, salute, sausage
e	see, sell, seat	secret, sentence, seem	separate, select, setting
i	six, silly, sister	sign, silent, silver	signature, situation, simplify
o	so, soon, song	soccer, solve, soil	social, solar, sorrow
u	sub, sun, super	sudden, summary, subject	subscription, surrender, suspense
y	syllable	symphony	system
other letters	sleep, snake, smile, swim	sports, ski, strong, square	scorpion, skeleton, station, struggle

...and sometimes **c** before:

e	celery, center, cereal	certain, central, celebrate	cement, cemetery, ceremony
i	city, circle, Cinderella	circus, citizen, cinema	cinnamon, circumference, cinch
y	cycle	cyclone	cyberspace