

DEVELOPMENTAL SPELLING INVENTORY

An efficient and valid way of determining where children might be in their acquisition of word knowledge is to use a qualitative inventory of spelling development. The first versions of these tools were validated by Edmund Henderson and his graduate students at the University of Virginia during the 1980's and 90's. Two levels of an inventory are offered here. Both were shared with this author (Louisa Moats) by Dr. Francine Johnston, a coauthor of Words Their Way (Templeton, Bear, Invernizzi, and Johnston, 1996).

Directions for Administering the Spelling Inventories (from F. Johnston)

These two tests are designed to assess the word knowledge that elementary students have to bring to the tasks of reading and spelling. Students are not to study these words. That would invalidate the purpose of this inventory, which is to find out what students truly know. You can administer this same list of words three times to measure children's progress – in the fall, winter, and spring.

These words are ordered in terms of their relative difficulty for children in grades K to 5. For this reason you need only call out the words which sample features your children are likely to master during the year. However, do call out enough words to give you a sense of the range of ability in your class. For kindergarten you may only call out the first five to eight words on the primary list for most children. For the first grade call out at least 15. For 2nd and 3rd use the entire primary list. Use the entire elementary spelling inventory for grades 4 and 5 and for any 3rd graders who are able to spell more than 20 of the words on the primary list. You should also call out additional words for any children who are spelling most of the words correctly at the K or 1st grade level.

Testing. Call the words as you would for any test. Use them in a sentence to be sure your children know the exact word. Assure your students that this is not for a grade but to help you plan better for their needs. Seat the children to minimize copying or test the children in small groups (recommended for K and early 1st grade).

Scoring the test. Copy a scoring sheet for each child and simply check off the features for each word which are spelled according to the descriptors at the top. Add an additional point in the "correct" column if the entire word is correct. Note that some words are scored for some features and not others and the number of possible points varies by words.

Assigning points and analyzing the results. Total the number of points under each feature and across each word. Staple the child's spelling test to the individual form. The total point score will give you a number which can be compared over time but the most useful information will be the feature analysis. Look down each feature column to determine the needs of individual students. Transfer these numbers to a class composite sheet to get a sense of your group as a whole and to form groups for instruction. Highlight children who are making two or more errors on a particular feature. For example, a child who gets 6 of 7 short vowels correct on the primary list can be considered in pretty good shape although some review work might be in order. A child who gets only 2 or 3 of the 7 short vowels needs a lot of work on that feature. Since the total possible number will vary depending on how many words you call out the criteria for mastery will vary. I generally think like this. If X is the number of possible correct responses then X or X-1 indicates good control of the feature while X-2, or more, indicates the need for instruction. If the child did not get any points for a feature it is beyond their instructional range and earlier features need to be addressed first.

Primary Spelling Inventory – Individual Score Sheet (adapted from Francine Johnston, 7/98)

Name of Child _____ Teacher _____ Grade ___ Date _____ Total Pts _____

	Initial Consonant	Final Consonant	Di-graph	Blend	Short Vowel	Long Vowel VC e	Vowel Team/diphthong	R-control Vowel	Inflections	Correct	Word Totals
1. fan	f	n			a						
2. pet	p	t			e						
3. dig	d	g			i						
4. mob	m	b			o						
5. rope	r	p				o-e					
6. wait	w	t					ai				
7. chunk			ch	nk	u						
8. sled				sl	e						
9. stick		-ck		st	i						
10. shine			sh			i-e					
11. dream				dr			ea				
12. blade				bl		a-e					
13. coach			-ch				oa				
14. fright				fr			igh				
15. snowing				sn			ow		-ing		
16. talked							-al		-ed		
17. camping				-mp					-ing		
18. thorn			th					or			
19. shouted			sh				ou				
20. spoil				sp			oi				
21. growl				gr			ow				
22. chirp			ch					ir			
23. clapped				cl					-pped		
24. tries				tr					-es		
25. hiking									-king		

Feature Totals:

Elementary Spelling Inventory – Individual Score Sheet (adapted from Francine Johnston, 7/98)

Child _____ Teacher _____ Grade ____ Date _____ Total Pts _____

	Short vowel	Blend/digraph	Long vowel	Other vowel	Complex consonant	inflection	Syllable juncture	Unaccented syllable	suffix	Correct	Word Totals
1. speck	e	sp			ck						
2. switch	i	sw			tch						
3. throat			oa		thr						
4. nurse				ur							
5. scrape			a-e		scr						
6. charge		ch		ar	ge						
7. phone		ph	o-e								
8. smudge	u	sm			dge						
9. point		nt		oi							
10. squirt		squ		ir							
11. drawing		dr		aw		-ing					
12. trapped		tr				-pped					
13. waving						-ving					
14. powerful				ow				-er	-ful		
15. battle							tt	-tle			
16. fever							v	-er			
17. lesson							ss	-on			
18. pennies						-ies	nn				
19. fraction									-tion		
20. sailor							l		-or		
21. distance							st		-ance		
22. confusion									-sion		
23. discovery								dis-	-ery		
24. resident								si	-dent		
25. visible									-ible		
Feature Totals											Total Pts: