

# Tricks of the Trade

## A Student's Individualized Spelling Notebook

by Gayle Graham

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## Introduction

Spelling got you down? Afraid to write to that penpal because then he'll know what a rotten speller you are? (Or worse yet, he won't even be able to *read* what you wrote because of your terrible spelling?) If so, you're not alone. Some kids are born spellers. They usually spell every word right. It's not because they studied harder in school or even because they're smarter. They just seem to have "eyes in their brains" that remember how words should look. Others are like my Heather.

Heather loves to talk. (And boy, does she have a lot to say!) She also likes to write, but even though she knows plenty of words to *say*, she doesn't always notice when they *look* funny on paper. Now, that's not so bad when you're six or seven years old because no one really expects a first grader to spell right. In fact, they think it's kind of cute when a young child spells funny. (Like spelling the word "love", "L-U-V".) But by the time you're eleven or twelve, it can be downright embarrassing to spell wrong. One day my Heather walked into the kitchen with tears in her eyes and said, "*Mom, will I ever learn to spell?*" I knew right then and there I had to do something to help Heather (and kids like her) solve her problem. I decided to create a "tailor-made" spelling notebook for Heather. I call it "tailor-made" because it's made to fit YOU! You see, not all children have trouble spelling the same words. Some have trouble hearing the difference between 'e' as in '**pet**' and 'i' as in '**pit**'; others mix up words that sound alike but mean different things such as '**their, they're, there**'.

This approach can suit you as well as it suited Heather. And the good news is, it's not really all that complicated to use! Would you like to figure out exactly which words are giving you a problem and what to do about them? You won't have to memorize a bunch of rules and recite them. You won't have to use spelling workbooks (unless your teacher decides to use them for another reason), and you won't even have to write your spelling words ten times to learn them!

When Heather first started using **Tricks of the Trade**, her spelling got better overnight. In fact, she improved so fast, I had

to tell her to, "*Slow down!*" You see, I wanted to keep analyzing her mistakes for awhile so I could learn more about how children spell.

So why don't you try **Tricks of the Trade** for yourself and see how it works? Follow the instructions on the next few pages for a whole school year and find out what a great speller you can become! Then, write me and tell me about your results. I'd love to hear from you!

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## The Puzzle Pieces: How We Write the Code

All words are constructed from pieces we call **consonants**, **vowels**, and **syllables**. Just as a spy fits together pieces of a code to send urgent messages, you fit together consonants, vowels, and syllables to make words. Let's take a look at how those word parts work.

**Consonants** are sounds you make by blocking the air that comes from your throat with your tongue, teeth, or lips. Say the sound of **'l'** as in **laugh, light, or love**. Did you feel your tongue move up to the top of your mouth? Say the sound of **'th'** in **this, that, thunder**. Do you feel your tongue and teeth stopping the air? Now try saying **purse, powder, pioneer**. Your lips stopped the airflow that time.

Technically speaking, consonants are silent. They aren't good for much except getting our mouths in the right position for the rest of the word! Try sounding **'l'**, **'th'**, and **'p'** silently. (Feels weird, doesn't it?) Now I'll tell you a little secret: You really can't even *say* a consonant sound without a vowel sound with it.

**Vowel** sounds flow freely from our mouths without obstruction. But we have to shape our mouths correctly if we're going to say the vowel sound exactly right. Practice your vowels at the beginning of these words:



/a/	a—apple
/e/	e—elephant
/i/	i—Indian
/o/	o—olive
/u/	u—up

The **/e/** and **/i/** are the easiest to confuse. Look into the mirror when you say them. When we say the sound of short **'i'**, we have a silly half-smile on our faces. When we say the sound of

short ‘e’, our mouths are opened slightly wider than with the ‘i’ sound. At any rate, these sounds won’t be much of a problem *if you practice them attached to a word—and not isolated!*

Vowels and consonants slide together to make a **syllable**. Each syllable must have one (and only one) vowel sound. But a syllable doesn’t always have a consonant sound. Syllables remind me of legos. They fit together snugly to build words.

Remember when you were a little kid? You may have “clapped” the syllable beats for a word. Why do you think your teacher had you practice clapping syllables? It’s because if we can hear syllables in a word, we can usually spell that word. Clap the word ‘happy’. How many syllables does it have? The answer, of course, is two. Clap the word ‘perpendicular’. How many syllables does it have? The answer is five. Now **‘perpendicular’** might look like a hard spelling word to you but if you spell it syllable-by-syllable like this: **per / pen / dic / u / lar**, it’s really not so difficult. Do you think you could spell all the little parts of ‘perpendicular’? If so, you’ve pieced together five little legos to build a gigantic word, ‘perpendicular’!

Take a look at your notebook and you’ll see listed all the kinds of syllables you’ll ever meet. (Fortunately, you won’t have to study all those syllable patterns—just the ones giving you trouble!) We classify syllables by the type of *vowel sound* they contain. If you can learn to spell word parts (syllables), you can spell almost any word, long or short. So, whenever you misspell a word in your own writing, look to see *which syllable gave you the problem*. Find out how to spell that syllable and then write the word in your notebook under the correct syllable pattern. That way you’ll pinpoint exactly which pieces of a code you need to study. Soon you’ll be constructing words you never dreamed you could spell!

# Clue Sheets

## CONSONANTS

(Secret: No consonant can make a sound without the help of a vowel.)

### 1. Single Consonants

'c'	says /c/ in cat, cup, cot ..... 1
'c'	says /s/ in cent ..... 1
'ce'	says /s/ in face ..... 2
'ce'	says /sh/ in ocean ..... 2
'ci'	says /sh/ in special ..... 2
'g'	says /g/ in game ..... 3
'g'	says /j/ in ginger, age ..... 3
'k'	says /k/ in kitten ..... 4
'qu'	says /kw/ in quilt ..... 4
's'	says /sh/ in sugar ..... 4
'se'	says /z/ in noise ..... 5
'si'	says /sh/ in session ..... 5
't' ('ti')	says /sh/ in initial ..... 5
've'	in have ..... 6
'w'	says /w/ in watch ..... 6
'x'	says /ks/ in box ..... 6
'ze'	says /z/ in freeze ..... 6

# CONSONANTS

## 'c' /c/ in cat, cup & cot

Use 'c' for the /k/ sound before a, u, o.

cod

counterfeit

## 'c' /s/ in cent

Use 'c' for the /s/ sound before i, e.

cider

cellular

