

The Smart Connection

Newsletter for Students, Parents, and Educators

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Smart Tutor Referrals
www.SmartTutorReferrals.com

News & Announcements

Canadians Like Tutoring

The Canadian Council on Learning, an independent, non-profit corporation that promotes and supports research to improve all aspects of learning, published its 2007 Survey of Canadian Attitudes Toward Learning on Nov. 26, 2007.

According to the survey, "one-third of Canadian parents with children aged five to 24 report having hired a private tutor or a tutoring company to assist their child with reading and/or writing, math, science, or other subjects.

"...Tutoring, whether provided as supplemental or remedial instruction for low-achieving students or for enrichment or competitive advantage to high-achieving students, is generally perceived as a valuable investment.

"...The decision to hire tutors seems to reflect strong parental involvement in their children's academic success." It is common for parents to hire tutors for enrichment or homework support so that the love of learning can be fostered without compromising family time.

The survey noted the importance of working with tutoring agencies that have high standards of educational and professional values.

Winter Break

Our tutors keep tutoring through the holidays, but our writers take a break. "The Smart Connection" will be back with more articles packed with tips and practical ideas in February.

BestWishesforHappyHoliday
Season&aPeacefulNewYear!

Spelling - It Ain't Easy, But It Can Be Fun

This month's "Smart Connection" is a discussion with two Smart Tutor Referrals elementary and middle school-level tutors: Cora Oliver, a recent BEd with 2 years of teaching experience in both Canada and Japan, and Lorraine Patterson, a BEd, with over 25 years of elementary teaching experience. They both have a strong passion for teaching beginning reading and spelling and they especially enjoy making learning fun for their students.

Spelling can be a challenging topic for many students, particularly in early grades. As adults, we've learned to associate a written alphabet with spoken language. Actually, what we have learned to do is to decipher a visual code. Learning to spell can be fun, but it's also not easy. Children's brains grow and develop in stages and at different rates. While most children may be ready to read between ages 5 and 7, they may not become proficient spellers until several years later.

STR: Many students find spelling to be very challenging. What makes spelling in English difficult?

CO: English borrows from so many languages. It often doesn't follow rules, and when it does, those rules are often inconsistent.

LP: English is such a strange amalgamation of words from other countries. I truly marvel at students' abilities to read, and especially spell.

CO: In grade 1, most students learn and understand phonetics (how letters sound). Students can usually sound out phonetic words (like 'at', 'cat', 'dog', or 'walk'). But phonetic rules only apply to about half of the words students encounter in early years.

LP: Both phonetic and non-phonetic words need to be understood. Non-phonetic words (like 'house', 'there', 'hour', and 'above') can be difficult to

spell and often can cause great confusion for the student.

STR: What are some common mistakes students make in spelling?

CO: When students start learning spelling rules in grades 1, 2 and 3, they often over-apply those rules and make mistakes, even with words they could previously spell.

LP: Since there are so many exceptions to spelling rules in English, students often rely on a 'rule' that does not help them, for example using phonetic skills to try to decode words that are non-phonetic (like 'hoo' for 'who' or 'joos' for 'juice').

LP: Letter reversals (like 'b' for 'd') are also common and can lead to spelling mistakes.

CO: How a child pronounces words can affect his/her ability to spell. If a child pronounces 'truck' as 'chuck', for example, this needs to be noted so that correct pronunciation and spelling can be worked on at the same time.

CO: Students will also often drop vowels since consonants have a stronger sound, or they might miss out silent letters.

LP: Spell-check on word processing programs can be both positive and negative. It can allow students to express themselves in writing without a strong focus on spelling, or to use new words, but it may inadvertently introduce new, incorrect words if the student doesn't recognize a mistake. Spell-check can also create a situation where students aren't practising spelling.

CO: Kids are typing at earlier and earlier ages now. Text-messaging definitely isn't helping kids to read, write, spell or compose sentences.

STR: Do you have any suggestions for how to address common spelling difficulties?

About Us

Our Mission Is:

- ▶ To provide top quality, flexible learning support and service to students and parents through:

In-home private tutoring matched specifically to each student's needs.

Stimulating workshops building skills in a practical and creative way.

- ▶ To enhance students' skills and increase learning confidence through one-on-one support that is truly individualized, recognizing each student's unique abilities.
- ▶ To improve the quality of life, in individuals and communities through education.

Our tutors are certified teachers and professionals. They are carefully screened and chosen specially to match the needs and learning styles of each student.

We support families in education.

For more information and resources, visit us on-line at:

www.SmartTutorReferrals.com

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LP: In early grades, if students can be allowed to use 'inventive spelling' this is fabulous. With 'inventive spelling' students go with the flow of their ideas and relate their feelings in writing without getting too concerned about correct spelling. We want to encourage enjoyment of the language, not fear of spelling mistakes.

CO: Kids can shut down if they can barely form letters, but are told their spelling is wrong. When I was young, I used to limit my story writing to words that I knew how to spell. This type of response is fear-based for students and can hamper their love of language. If students are helped to recognize their natural strengths, they can work on improving their strengths and weaknesses without stress. It's normal for students to make mistakes with spelling; it's best if spelling doesn't feel like a chore.

LP: Yes, we want to make spelling fun, not link stress or anxiety to spelling. If possible, students ought to be working on spelling words at a level that they are comfortable with, and with words that are relevant to them.

CO: Practicing spelling rules by looking for clues in spelling patterns can help students develop their own relationship to spelling rules.

STR: Do you have any tips or suggestions for how to study spelling or ways that parents can help their kids in spelling?

CO: Making spelling a game can help to keep it fun. Repeating words or their spelling at random throughout the day (not just quizzing words over and over), or pointing out when they appear in daily life (like while shopping or driving) is great.

LP: I used to make fun of 'stupid words' in my class – words like 'people' or 'island'. We would pronounce the sounds of the words (as 'pee-o-pull' or 'is-land') so that the kids would enjoy learning these more difficult words and so that spelling was more fun and easier to remember.

CO: I feel it's important that parents not offer material rewards for spelling – learning should be about learning and wanting to learn – let the rewards come from an increased ability to read and write.

- ▶ sing the words or their spellings
- ▶ make up rhymes with the words
- ▶ use alphabet dice
- ▶ use plastic or rubber letters, or scrabble pieces to make words
- ▶ find the words in signs, in the newspaper, in a book
- ▶ look up words in a dictionary (picture dictionaries are good for young students)
- ▶ spell words on a partner's back
- ▶ write words in pudding, dried rice in a pan, or in the sand
- ▶ write words using shaving cream, playdough or blocks
- ▶ use string to form letters on the ground and then 'walk' the letters
- ▶ use your body to form letters
- ▶ cut letters out of sandpaper so that words can be felt with fingertips
- ▶ write on paper in crayon over a window screen or pavement so words are raised
- ▶ use different mediums for writing – pencil crayon, felt, paint, crayon, chalk
- ▶ write the words on chalkboards, white boards, felt boards, paper
- ▶ trace a printed word with white glue and cover the glue with seeds or sand
- ▶ use different colours to emphasize sounds, word endings, word beginnings or any pattern
- ▶ draw a picture to match the meaning of the word or the shape of the word
- ▶ create flashcards with colour to emphasize spelling patterns
- ▶ pretend to type the word on a keyboard
- ▶ read articles or books and look for new, unknown words
- ▶ use new words in sentences or stories
- ▶ repeat words and their spelling into a tape recorder
- ▶ discuss word origins
- ▶ create a word journal – defining the word in the student's own words
- ▶ give positive verbal re-inforcement for improvement or effort

"If you hold a cat by the tail you learn things you cannot learn any other way."

Mark Twain