

Ohio Literacy Conference for K-3rd Grade Teachers

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A-8 **Sight Words: Hot to Teach Them Successfully (Gr. K-2)**

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Practicing Letter Formations and Sight Words

When we first learned to drive, we had to ‘think’ about every action.

With practice, most actions became automatic.

Those of us who teach know that practice makes perfect. It is a timeless principle that we would be wise never to forget. Falling writers need to practice proper letter formations and sight words until they become automatic. Once this happens, they can focus their attention on other things like spelling hard words, writing complete sentences, connecting their thoughts, and editing their work.

Consider the following points:

Important to Know

1. If children learn to write their name and other basic sight words using upper-case (capital) letters only, they have a difficult time relearning them using lower-case letters. Most words are written with lower-case letter formations. Teach young writers those first!
2. When falling writers are allowed to write letters in unusual ways, they commit these to their long-term memory. Behaviors that become habitual are very hard to break, especially during times of stress and pressure. They need to know that an ‘o’ goes to the right, not the left.
3. Sight words must be spelled correctly from the very beginning. Too many children go to upper grades writing ‘very’ as ‘vere,’ ‘which’ as ‘wich,’ and ‘was’ as ‘wuz.’ Requiring them to spell sight words correctly, from the beginning, is a gift.

Solutions

1. Group letters and numbers together by common formations. For instance, teach students formations of all the letters that start with a stick: b, h, k, l, p, r, u, v, w, x, y. As they write learn these letters, be sure that they are verbalizing the command so their brains connect the words with the motion: “Down, up, and around.” “Down.” “Down, up.” “Down, Down.” This is the BEST way to teach struggling writers to form their letters properly and more importantly, to commit them to memory. The more they write them, the more automatic they will become. Have them trace over

dotted letters 5 times and then practice them on their own 5 times. Do this daily for several weeks and they will learn their letters and numbers correctly, both in upper-case and lower-case.

2. Sight words need to be brought to fluency. That means the falling writers need to write them over and over again, correctly. Writing them and erasing them on a white board is effective. Writing them in each corner of a blank sheet of paper is also fast and fun. Writing them in the 'dust' with their pointer finger on the chalkboard is different and motivating. Practicing them with a wet paint brush on a dark sheet of construction paper is also motivating and 'magical.' There are many sight word lists. If every teacher in your building does not have a list of common sight words to use, speak to the leaders in your school immediately!

Thinking It Over

How can we educate parents about the importance of proper upper and lower-case letter formations and the need for sight word automaticity? Can these issues be addressed during parent 'open houses' and parent/teacher conferences? If so, what is the most effective way of sharing this information with parents, especially parents/guardians of falling writers?

C. Hebert. *Catch a Falling Writer*. (2010). Corwin Press.

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Writing Sight Words FAST

- ◆ Use white boards and fine-line markers because they are the best tools for writing words *fast*.
- ◆ Choose words they know, to start with. This will build success and keep motivation levels high.
- ◆ Say “Today, we’re going to practice writing words *fast* so that we don’t have to think about them too much.”
- ◆ Say “Write the word ‘the’ fast.” As kids are writing, the teacher is circulating from behind, helping those who may hesitate on certain letters. It may be necessary to give a verbal command for forming the letter. An example of this would be, “down, up, and around” for the letter *h*. You will then want to encourage the child to practice this a few times, followed by writing the word “the” fast.
- ◆ After completing that word, ask them to erase it fast. “Now write that word again fast!” “Now erase it fast.”
- ◆ Say, “Now let’s write the word “an” fast. Good! Under that word, write the word “and” then look up at me!” “Great! Now erase them both and write the word “that.”

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Reflections . . .