

How to Use the Word Sort Cards

Word sorting is an extremely effective technique for focusing students' attention on the spelling patterns and the variations among those spelling patterns within the English spelling system. Understanding the similarities and differences among words will help students inspect words successfully, internalize the spelling system, and develop into independent spellers.

To assist in differentiation of instruction, three sets of **Word Sort Cards** are provided for each instructional unit in Grades 2-8: On Level Words, Below Level Words, and Above Level Words. Each **Word Sort Card** is identified by grade level, unit number, and level for your convenience. (Levels are identified by symbols on the cards: diamond for On Level, circle for Below Level, and square for Above Level.) After printing the cards and cutting them apart, you may wish to store the cards for each unit in a separate labeled envelope. These cards can be reused when students study Assessment and Review units.

The large **Word Sort Cards** (On Level) are suitable for use as a teacher-led sort and/or with whole-class or large-group instruction. The small **Word Sort Cards** (On Level, Below Level, and Above Level) are appropriate for small-group or individual study or review. Although the cards will generally be used in the classroom, they can also be taken home for study and review.

The Answer Keys provide one way to sort the cards in that unit, but sometimes a certain word may fit into more than one category. Allow for these variations when students can justify their responses. Students and teachers are also encouraged to experiment with sorting the words in other ways. For example, **Word Sort Cards** from two or more units can be combined to create **multi-unit word sorts**. This is especially helpful as students study review units. For a **blind word sort**, one student reads a word card to a partner, asking the partner to identify which of the defined spelling pattern categories the word fits. If the partner identifies the correct category, he or she then places the word card in that category. In an **open word sort**, individuals secretly decide on the criteria for the word sort and then sort the words according to those criteria. Finally, other students attempt to define the criteria after examining the completed word sort.

Work with the students, and encourage them to use their growing knowledge of spelling patterns and their own inventiveness to develop additional word sort activities.