


The Stages of Spelling Development

The Gentry Writing Scale, developed by *Spelling Connections* author J. Richard Gentry, can help you understand your child's progress from one stage of spelling development to the next throughout the school year. Children advance through these five stages as they increase their letter knowledge, phonemic awareness skills, and knowledge of sound-symbol relationships. The chart below describes each stage and includes suggested activities that will help your child advance to the next stage.

Note: A child is considered to be in a particular stage when more than half of his or her developmental spellings fit the criteria for that stage.

Stage 0
(Non-Alphabetic Writing)

Scribbling and the use of letterlike forms characterize the writing of Stage 0 spellers.



Description of Stage 0

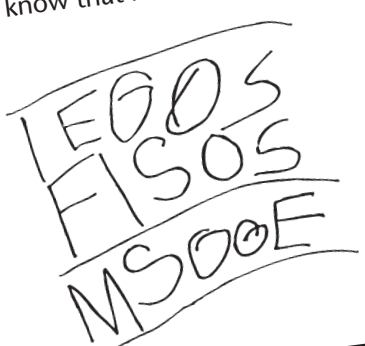
Children at this stage may scribble shapes and wavy lines to approximate letters, but there are no distinguishable alphabetic letters. Often a Stage 0 speller does not write his or her name.

Suggested Activities

- Read aloud and discuss stories.
- Introduce letters and their sounds.
- Teach your child to write his or her name.
- Encourage your child to use newly learned letters in place of scribbles.

Stage 1
(Pre-Alphabetic Writing)

Dan's grocery list reads "milk, bran flakes, doughnuts." Note that at Stage 1, Dan did not know that letters represent sounds.



Description of Stage 1

Children at this stage write letters that appear to be random with no matches to sounds.

Suggested Activities

- Sort picture cards based on sounds.
- Have your child match picture cards by beginning sounds, then letters.
- Encourage your child to do independent reading of wordless books and picture books.
- Focus on learning letters and sounds at the beginning and end of words.

The Stages of Spelling Development, (cont.)

Stage 2 (Partial Alphabetic Writing)

Leslie used Stage 2 spelling to label Humpty Dumpty. Stage 2 spellings are often abbreviated.



Description of Stage 2

Children at this stage begin to use letters to represent sounds, especially consonants (for example, *boat* is spelled BT).

Suggested Activities

- Use letter tiles for making words.
- Encourage your child to connect each sound in a word to a letter.
- Focus on learning the middle sounds in words (for example, focusing on the long o sound in *boat* will help your child move from BT to BOT to spell *boat*).
- Begin to help your child focus on four basic high-frequency phonics patterns: consonant-vowel-consonant (as in *cat*), consonant-vowel (as in *he*), consonant-vowel-consonant-silent e (as in *bike*), and consonant-vowel-vowel-consonant (as in *beat*).

Stage 3 (Full Alphabetic Writing)

This sample shows that Stage 3 spellers represent all the surface sound features in words. This *Tooth Fairy* story reads, "One night I was in my bed and the tooth fairy came."

tuth fare
wn nit I wsh mi
Bed and the tuth
Fare cam.

Description of Stage 3

Children at this stage write a letter for almost every sound in a word to create a spelling that is readable phonetically but not necessarily close to the correct spelling (for example, *eighty* is spelled ATE).

Suggested Activities

- Model how to stretch out the sounds in a word to hear each sound and then write the full alphabetic spelling.
- Use letter tiles for making words. Focus on words that rhyme and have the same spelling pattern (for example, *sat*, *hat*, *cat*).
- Continue working with basic patterns such as consonant-vowel-consonant (as in *hop*) for short vowels and consonant-vowel-consonant-silent e (as in *hope*) for long vowels.

Stage 4 (Consolidated Alphabetic Writing)

Writing stories using developmental spelling helps set the foundations for later spelling competency. This story includes Stage 4 spelling.

My feet
get fresh.
I whair
sis 3.
My feet take
me evrewhair
My feet like
to clime trees
and bildings
I walk to
School.
My feet
make me
swem in
water. My
feet are
tyerd at
the end
of the
day

My foot

Description of Stage 4

Children at this stage spell words in syllables or "chunks." They use developmental spellings that look more like English spelling (for example, *fried* is spelled FRIDE). Many familiar words and short vowel words are spelled correctly.

Suggested Activities

- Read with your child, focusing on specific words and their meanings.
- Encourage your child to write for his or her own purposes (for example, friendly letters, stories, book reviews).
- Model the use of correct capitalization and punctuation when writing sentences.