

Instructions for Administration of the LETRS Spelling Screeners

Administration of a qualitative screener of spelling development is an efficient and valid way of determining a student’s instructional needs.

The words in these screeners sample the student’s ability to spell regular phoneme-grapheme correspondences and orthographic patterns. The sequence in which these features are generally learned is reflected in the order of the feature categories from top to bottom in the first column on the screener. Each feature that is correctly spelled is circled and given a point. If a word is spelled correctly, the student also gets another point for the whole word in the Word Correct row.

Directions for Administering the Spelling Screeners

Use the Basic Spelling Screener for grades K–2. Use the Advanced Spelling Screener for grades 3–5, or until students show that they can spell these words. For kindergarten, you will probably only dictate the first 5–8 words on the Basic Spelling Screener. For first grade, dictate at least 15. For second and third grade, use the entire list. Use the first part of the Advanced Spelling Screener for any third-graders who are able to spell more than 20 of the words on the Basic Spelling Screener.

Guidelines for Words to Dictate	
Kindergarten	First 5–8 words, Basic Spelling Screener
1st grade	15+ words, Basic Spelling Screener
2nd grade	Entire Basic Spelling Screener
3rd grade, or younger students who spell 20+ words on the Basic Spelling Screener	Advanced Spelling Screener (stop when students have five incorrectly spelled words in a row)

Students are not to study these words in advance. Studying the words on the screener would invalidate its purpose, which is to find out what concepts and orthographic patterns the students have internalized. You can administer this same list of words three times—in the fall, winter, and spring—to measure students’ progress.

The words at the top of the page are ordered from left to right in terms of their relative difficulty for students in grades K–5. For this reason, you need to limit testing to the words that sample features your students are likely to master during the year. However, it is important to dictate enough words (easy to difficult) to give you a sense of the range of ability in your class.

Testing procedure. Dictate the words as you would for any test. Use them in a sentence to be sure your students know the exact word. Assure your students that this is not for a grade but to help you plan better for their needs. Seat the children to minimize copying, or test them in small groups (recommended for kindergarten and early first grade). Say each word naturally; then use it in a sentence (suggested sentences appear on the next two pages) and repeat the word. If you exaggerate the pronunciation to clarify the identity of sounds or syllables, you are providing a scaffold that may not be available in natural speech. If you ask students to repeat the word before writing it, you are also providing a scaffold that should help students attend to and remember the sound sequence.

Scoring the test. Use a scoring sheet for each student and simply circle the orthographic features for each word that are spelled according to the features in the first column. Remember to add an additional point in the Word Correct row if the entire word is correct. Note that some words are scored for some features and not others and the number of possible points varies by words.

Assigning points and analyzing the results. Total the number of points across for each feature and down for each word. Staple the student's spelling test to the individual scoring sheet. The total point score for features will give you a number that can be compared over time. The most useful information, however, will be the feature analysis. Look across each feature row to determine the needs of individual students. Transfer these numbers to a class composite sheet to get a sense of your group as a whole and to form groups for instruction. Highlight features where students are making *two or more errors*. For example, a student who gets four of five short vowels correct on the Basic Spelling Screener knows these vowels, although some review work might be in order. In contrast, a student who gets only two of the short vowels needs a lot of work on both sound identification and spelling patterns. Since the total possible number will vary depending on how many words you call out, the criteria for mastery will vary.

If X is the number of total correct responses, then X or X – 1 indicates good knowledge of that phoneme-grapheme relationship, while X – 2, or more, indicates the need for instruction. If the student did not get any points for an orthographic feature, it is beyond his or her instructional range and earlier features need to be addressed first.

Basic Spelling Screener Sentences for Dictation

1. mud Don't step in the mud.
2. nap I like to nap when I'm tired.
3. set The sun will set in the west.
4. fog It's hard to see in thick fog.
5. rib The football player broke his rib.
6. life Remember to enjoy life every day.
7. shack A shack is a small house.
8. stone Stone walls last a long time.
9. trunk I keep all my toys in a trunk.
10. goat A goat is a useful farm animal.
11. scrape Did you scrape your knee when you fell down?
12. beat Keep the beat when you clap to music.
13. champ The World Series winner was the champ.
14. third Third place is behind first and second.
15. drain Water goes down a drain.
16. bridges Two bridges go over the canyon.
17. crutch If you are hurt, you can use a crutch to walk.
18. growing We are growing carrots in our garden.
19. walked I walked slowly to school.
20. born The kittens were born yesterday.
21. spoil Don't let the rain spoil the trip.
22. smiling Smiling is easy if you are having fun.
23. slipping Our feet were slipping on the ice.
24. shouting My voice was tired from shouting.
25. higher Eagles fly higher than most small birds.

Advanced Spelling Screener Sentences for Dictation

1. cap My cap fits me perfectly.
2. chip It is hard to eat just one potato chip.
3. shut Please shut the window.
4. tent I love sleeping in a cozy tent.
5. grain I eat whole grain bread for breakfast.
6. broke My brother broke my phone.
7. slice Please give me one slice of apple.
8. trudge I'll trudge to school with my heavy pack.
9. flight My flight home was delayed.
10. dropping Dropping eggs is messy.
11. gnaw The squirrel will gnaw on nuts.
12. curved A bow is a curved hunting weapon.
13. fewer We had fewer rainstorms this year.
14. babies My rabbit had five babies.
15. matched Her sweater matched the color of her eyes.
16. known I wish I had known about the party.
17. pattern If you sew a costume, follow a pattern.
18. staples We will need staples for the stapler.
19. radar Airports track planes by radar.
20. except I like all vegetables except broccoli.
21. treasure The sunken ship still contained a treasure chest.
22. organization Would you like to join our organization?
23. questionable The results of the test were questionable.
24. obedient An obedient dog follows commands.
25. resident A new resident came to live in our neighborhood.