

# Helping Kids with Wobbly Spelling

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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# Helping Kids with Wobbly Spelling



*“My spelling is Wobbly. It's good spelling but it wobbles,  
and the letters get in the wrong places.”*

A.A. Milne, 'Winnie-the-Pooh'

## **Our promise to wobbly spellers (and the people who really want to help them)**

1. No long lists of words or sounds to learn by heart.
2. No copying out words over and over again.
3. No horrid spelling tests.
4. You learn only words important to you.
5. Fun and adventure with words.

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## Who's this book for?

This book is for anybody trying to help a child cope with spelling difficulties. You may be a family member, guardian, carer, friend or teacher: in this guide, we call you a 'helper'. We call your pupil or child/teenager the 'learner'.

The aim is to get you comfortable with using a brilliant spelling method called 'Pick & Stick'. At the start, this method is meant to be used by the learner in partnership with their helper. Gradually, you'll notice your learner becoming more independent, at a speed that's right for them. In the next phase, you may notice a snowball effect, as the learner becomes a more adventurous, resourceful and competent speller.

## Will Pick & Stick work?

Have you already tried several methods and nothing really works? Does your learner hate spelling and avoids it at any cost? For many years Charmaine McKissock has been a specialist in learning difficulties, assisting both learners and their helpers to find solutions to some very stubborn challenges. She believes you can always find creative and practical ways to get round an individual's weaknesses and play to their strengths. Often the solution is very simple - this guide will help you find one.

Every new project involves kicking off with a plan of action: this guide helps you do that. With the Pick & Stick method, the learner is not seen as the 'problem', but the key to the solution. Pick & Stick does not use a one-size-fits-all approach. Each programme is tailor-made by you to fit the needs, interests, abilities and precise difficulties of an individual child. This is why it suits learners with dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD so well.

Pick & Stick also takes into account how our weird and wonderful English spelling system really works and how the brain can best remember spellings.

This method has helped a large number of individuals - of all ages and abilities - to improve their spelling and memory skills, as well as develop confidence and self-esteem: this is why many people are committed to this approach.

## What do you need to get started?



### Do you need any special skills to teach Pick & Stick?

As the 'helper', you'll be a trusted person, who works carefully through the Pick & Stick programme with the 'learner'.

You'll need:

- to be open-minded and willing to take a fresh approach to spelling;
- a sense of fun and adventure when guiding your learner;
- patience and sticking power to keep your learner on track;
- a good understanding of Pick & Stick, so you can be positive and confident about it with your learner;
- to be flexible: you'll find many practical ideas and worksheets to use in this guide, but I'm sure you'll want to tweak them to suit your particular learner and situation.



### What materials do you need?

You'll mostly need lots of scrap paper, coloured pens, highlighters and a small notebook. There are also some worksheets that you may wish to photocopy.

## How does the Pick & Stick method work?

There are 7 main ingredients that make the method work so well.



- 1. The Pick & Stick (P&S) method is multi-sensory: it uses a combination of sound, images, colour, touch, and movement.**  
This fixes spellings in your memory very efficiently, as they are stored in different parts of the brain.
- 2. P&S trains the learner to develop curiosity and calm concentration.**  
Pupils learn to pinpoint exactly what they find difficult, as they focus only on the 'problem' part of the word.
- 3. The learner finds an imaginative personal solution to the target word.**  
Pupils (supported by the helper) learn to use their own experiences and knowledge as an anchor for learning a new word.
- 4. The learner is never overloaded. He/she doesn't go onto learn something new until previous learning is rock solid.**  
Learnt words are stored in a personal 'bank' of words. The bank of words will grow slowly at first and then faster and faster, as the method rolls out.
- 5. The learner takes an active part in the programme.**  
Your learner chooses the words that are important to them and one of the 7 memory strategies that work best for them.
- 6. The learner practises at specific times and dates - for about 15 minutes several times a week.**  
This routine reinforces and stores memories as effectively as possible.
- 7. Most importantly, Pick & Stick is fun.**



## Here are the 3 Steps of 'Pick & Stick'



### 1. Pick



### 2. Stick



### 3. Tick



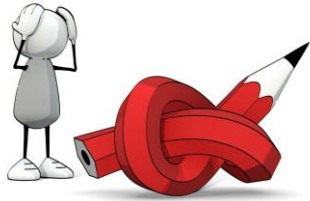
**If correct:**  
Store in Notebook



**If incorrect:**  
Go back to Start!



## Are there different types of memory involved in learning?



When you are first exposed to something new, that information is held in your **short-term memory**. This type of memory involves chemical and electrical processes to retain information for a short amount of time, rather than more lasting changes to the structure of the brain.

The key to making information stick in memory, however, occurs only when a second neuron repeats the impulse back again to the first neuron that sent the original message . This is most likely to happen when we think the new information is especially important or when a certain experience is repeated fairly often.

### What does all this mean for spelling?

- Use a variety of multi-sensory strategies to memorize spellings.
- Practise spelling words at particular and frequent intervals.
- Learn words and strategies that are particularly meaningful and memorable to you.
- Keep an active and curious mind.
- Create links between existing knowledge and new information.



## Sample Memory Techniques

### Cut-it-up



Cut the word into smaller bits.

If possible, try to find small words within larger ones.

**For example:**

hear = h / ear

independent = in / de / pen / dent

yoghurt = yog / hurt

business = bus / i / ness

### Say-it-your-way



Change the way you say the word, so that you can hear every letter. Tap the rhythm out...

**For example:**

Wednesday = wed / nes / day

friend = fri / end

know = k / now

## Memory Tricks



These are often called 'mnemonics': they are simple but effective tricks to help you remember something.

For example:

To remember 'rhythm':

rhythm has your two hips moving



To remember 'arithmetic':

A rat in the house may eat the ice cream



To remember 'said':



Sally is dancing

To remember 'piece':

a piece of pie



It's important for you and your learner to make up the silly sentences and draw the pictures together. Funny, strange, striking and rude ideas seem to stick the best, so let your imagination run wild!

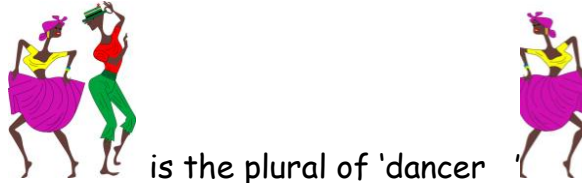
Try this: can you get your learner to draw this?

To remember 'because':

Big elephants can always understand small elephants

## Spelling Rule: Plurals

Plural means 'more than one'.



For example: 'dancers' is the plural of 'dancer'

Most words are made plural by adding 's'

For example: one hand



two hands



For words ending in: **s** / **ss** / **ch** / **sh** / **x** / you add: 'e'

For example:

one bus

two buses

one cross

three crosses

one wish

many wishes

one box

some boxes

For words ending in 'f' change the 'f' into a 'v' and add 'es'

For example:

one leaf



many leaves



## Relax into Learning



This section tackles stress and its effect on learning. We all go blank under pressure, and it's a scientific fact that anxiety affects our learning ability.

### Why is relaxing into spelling so important?

At some point, your learner is going to bring you feelings of frustration, shame, or hopelessness - especially if they are worried about making 'mistakes'. The problem is that anxiety is guaranteed to interfere with short-term memory and word-finding, as the body prepares to go into emergency fight-or-flight mode. Ways to help your learner relax, concentrate, de-stress and be less self-critical form an important part of the Pick & Stick approach. Quite simply, if learner and helper feel relaxed about tackling spelling, more learning can take place.



### What is stress?

Stress is the feeling - physical or mental - that comes when demands are made on you. Every child reacts differently to challenges and changes: these aren't necessarily bad for them, except if they start feeling really out of control. The unpleasant effects of stress hit you when there's a gap between the demands made on you and your ability to cope with them.

Often, even the thought of something unpleasant can bring about strong emotions and the stress reaction. When emotions become very strong, your primitive instinctive brain area takes over and thinking processes (processed in the Frontal cortex) become impaired, causing learning blocks. The Frontal cortex is used for working-memory, time, sequence, planning, organization and attention shifting. This is why your learner may get impaired decision-making, problem-solving, creativity and energy reserves when feeling stressed.

## Two Minute Instant Calmer



**In an emergency situation, if you start to feel panicky or worried, here's something that will help you...**

It's good to sit up straight with your feet flat on the ground.  
(Lying down or standing are also OK)

Make yourself comfy.  
Let your shoulders drop and relax.  
Let your hands and arms go floppy.

Close your eyes gently.  
Feel your feet on the floor (or bed).

Now take a deep breath in,  
and then let it go very slowly (like you're blowing up a balloon).

Take another deep breath in,  
hold your breath as you count to 3 slowly,  
and now breath out as you count to 5.  
Return to your normal breathing.

Now put your hand on your chest,  
and see if you can feel your chest rise and fall with each breath.

Now put your hand on your tummy,  
and see if you can feel your tummy rise and fall with each breath.

Now, you are going to take 5 slow breaths:  
each time you breathe out count 1.  
Continue counting until you reach 5.

If your mind wanders off,  
gently bring your mind back to counting your breath.

Now really listen for any sounds in this room for a moment.  
Now listen to any sounds outside this room.  
Feel your feet firmly on the ground.  
Have a yawn and a stretch.

See if you can keep this peaceful feeling as long as possible...

## Becoming a Spelling Detective



### Error Analysis

'Error Analysis' is extremely helpful for the helper to be able to analyse **what type** of errors the learner is making. This may be different from other spelling methods where the *number* of errors may be considered more important than finding a reason why the learner has made a particular mistake (which is the preferred method in Pick & Stick).

Here is a sample of an elementary level dictation that is commonly used for a formal error analysis.

'One day as I was walking down Bridge Street, I heard the sound of trotting. I turned and saw behind me the shaggy dark hair of a frightened little horse. I searched in my pockets for an apple from my dinner to give him. "I know where you should be," I said. So I removed the belt of my raincoat and tied it around his neck and lead him back. I opened the gate, and with satisfaction he galloped into his field. I was certainly very happy that now he was safe, away from the noisy and dangerous traffic.'

From 'Diagnosing Dyslexia' by C. Klein, Basic Skills Agency (2003)



You may wish to start a spelling programme by using a dictation. It's really important that your learner does not think this is a *test* - it's just a way to find a strong **pattern** in their strengths and weaknesses. You will find many examples of how to do this on pages 39-40. Of course, you can also use the learner's own writing, but he/she needs to be prepared to take risks and 'have a go' at words that they can't easily spell.



# NEW... NEW... NEW... NEW...NEW



*"Helping Kids with Wobbly Spelling is fresh, supportive and fun. At last a smart spelling method that really works for children of all ages and their helpers."*



"Most importantly, the Pick & Stick approach doesn't treat the learner as 'the problem'. Instead learner and helper become partners in solving a spelling mystery. This is not a one-size-fits-all method!"

"Brilliant for children with dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADD or just plain wobbly spelling."

