

Ms. Doglio,

My son has been really struggling in spelling and I am at a loss on what to do. He writes the words several times a day, we use letter cards, and we verbally spell the words. He tells me that he is having trouble concentrating. Do you have any suggestions? Do you think that it is an attention problem? Any advice you can give is greatly appreciated.

Reply

Sorry it took so long for me to reply. I've been thinking this one over. My favorite strategy for spelling practice is *Look, Cover, Spell, Check*. You can do this with paper and pencil.

You can also access the link below to use the method for the weekly spelling words:

<http://www.amblesideprimary.com/ambleweb/lookcover/lookcover.html>

To enter the personalized weekly spelling list, click twice in the white boxes containing words, backspace, and let your child type in his words--you should double-check to make sure they are correct--or you could type in the list for him. When he clicks **Go**, he can practice his words as many times as he likes.

Just writing the words, often doesn't help--I think students just copy without thinking--which is common. *Look, Cover, Spell, Check* adds that thinking measure every time the child writes the word.

Another method that seems logical to me for longer words is breaking the word into syllables--we use it for decoding as well. For example, *distraction* may appear difficult to the child, while **dis trac tion** would be manageable.

Most likely you've found that he will consistently get the word correct orally, but then miss it at times on the weekly test; oddly, the transfer from oral to written just doesn't seem to correlate for some learners. That's not to say oral practice doesn't help--I believe it's important for students to show competency in both realms--Spelling Bees are always oral tests. And it's so easy to practice riding in the car or when you're busy with 100 other things.

Another suggestion that might work involves adapting/aligning games such as SCRABBLE or even CANDYLAND to the weekly word list to help break up the monotony of word study.

Generally, children who struggle with phonics and/or lack phonemic awareness struggle with spelling--they just don't hear the sounds and/or word parts; in addition, they may be confused as to what letters to apply for particular sounds--for example, if your son hears "shun" he may not realize he will probably be writing *tion*. Another problem is the many words that break phonetic rules.

Attention/concentration deficits do have a negative affect on all areas of learning and classroom performance. Thank you for drawing this concern to my attention. He does quite well in the small group, but I will discuss it with his teacher and let you know if we think it is an area/issue that needs to be addressed at this point. He is young and the short attention span is common. Another point to consider is that if he is working for too long a period in the evenings after a somewhat stressful day of school, he may just be feeling a little overwhelmed, tired, and/or frustrated, all of which can make concentration nearly impossible for emergent readers and writers especially considering the high expectations prevalent in today's primary classrooms.

Thanks so much for writing and for your support. I appreciate all you do to help your child succeed in school. It's parents like you that make our jobs easier and more pleasant.

Sincerely, Ms Doglio