

**SIX 'OLD FASHIONED' AUSTRALIAN SPELLING TESTS: 1936 to 1967**  
**PERFORMANCE AGE RANGE: 8.5 to 13.5 year olds**

**Where Oh Where in Basic Literacy Teaching  
Has the Official Honesty Gone ?**

There was indeed a time in Australian literacy education, when all of our state education authorities were actually prepared to honestly report the spelling-for-age levels of the students in Australian schools. Strategically locked away in government sponsored archives are the clear records of this honesty.

Surviving tattered copies of these forty year old records however, occasionally crop up in rare places. From a photocopy of one of these copies I present the ever so sad evidence of a distant past official honesty in the reporting of the 'age-level' spelling skills of Australian school children.

My 36 page copy of the evidence is entitled A.C.E.R. SPELLING TESTS. It was originally produced by The Australian Council for Educational Research in 1936 and went through 12 officially sanctioned reprints until the last one in 1967. For these 31 years it was a guide for the age-level spelling skills of school students in all Australian states. A one page summary, extrapolated from the 36, is presented over the page.

A mere five snippets, mentioned also in other sections of this website, serve to indicate the vastness of the gulf that currently exists between the 'old' and 'modern' governmental attitudes to accurate spelling in literacy teaching.

- In 2005, the **National Inquiry into Literacy Teaching** in Australian schools did not investigate the testing or teaching of English spelling: And spelling happens to be at least half of every literacy task that has ever been enacted . . . and this in every (alphabetically ) written language around the world.
- In 1998 our **Australian National Literacy Benchmarks** have an example of a year 2 level spelling test in the section for year 5: The inescapable proof of this is on page 35 of the printed version of the benchmarks.
- In 1996 the **Australian National Primary School Literacy Survey**, the first such survey in 21 years, did not feature an age level spelling test at all.
- Since 1994 all new government sponsored English curricula for primary schools in Australia have been based on the now thoroughly discredited "Outcomes Based Education" theory.

Not even one of these 'modern' literacy curricula has contained recommended year level **spelling lists** or **sample spelling tests** to guide Australian literacy teachers.

- In 1993-95 the official **nationally promoted** newsletter of advice to some 10,000 Australian teachers of adult English language and literacy was called **Literacy Update**:

A simple count of the 'core' words in 22 editions of this journal showed that whilst the word **literacy** was mentioned over 2,700 times, the word **spelling** was mentioned only 3 times and the word **test** only twice. The word **dictation** was not mentioned at all.

All the above amount to a very clear indication that Australian based officialdom in literacy education, since at least the early 1990s, has been and still is, hell bent on actually removing the teaching of **accurate writing skills** from the literacy curricula that we require our teachers to follow.

<b>AGE</b>	<b>8.5 yrs</b>	<b>9.5 yrs</b>	<b>10.5 yrs</b>	<b>11.5 yrs</b>	<b>12.5 yrs</b>	<b>13.5 yrs</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>SCORE</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>42</b>	

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A	B	C	D	E	F
1. gold	ring	send	rich	baby	letter
2. bring	stay	word	most	box	door
3. high	some	true	blow	push	very
4. took	catch	wife	looks	buy	garden
5. part	unless	always	father	should	use
6. north	build	sorry	often	few	none
7. burn	helped	hold	these	finish	died
8. climb	however	care	caught	ticket	daughter
9. press	post	who	shoe	afraid	seemed
10. sometimes	need	tiny	hurt	across	news
11. return	pair	instead	busy	worth	laugh
12. music	dozen	flour	short	running	remember
13. speaks	enough	until	though	calm	quite
14. size	chain	honey	search	struck	amount
15. obtain	study	forest	laid	family	weary
16. coffee	whistle	woman	cheap	since	minute
17. chimney	against	hungry	comrade	district	cousin
18. weigh	expect	listened	needle	piece	repaired
19. wear	enemy	cabbage	stopped	proper	crowd
20. towel	refused	freeze	result	guess	visitor
21. choose	famous	included	led	pleasant	doubt
22. usual	grocery	common	copy	divided	written
23. allowed	view	meant	whether	banana	biscuits
24. ought	lose	sleeve	wholesome	ninety	readily
25. quarrel	bargain	grief	arrived	difficulty	volumes
26. tomato	seized	piano	neither	really	justice
27. canoe	speech	unusual	clothe	unfortunate	height
28. described	vegetable	lining	argument	machine	impossible
29. receive	earliest	decided	commences	business	salary
30. concern	scissors	imagine	regularly	probably	council
31. label	presence	practical	separated	system	arrangements
32. opposite	proceed	successful	especially	finally	gradually
33. sincerely	nervous	grease	niece	disappointed	absence
34. occupy	occasions	immense	delicious	disease	foreign
35. familiar	cushion	excitement	suggest	excellent	expense
36. quantity	evidence	experience	enormous	immediately	completely
37. opportunity	bicycle	kerosene	naturally	chocolates	calendar
38. extraordinary	secretary	necessary	interfere	sensible	thoroughly
39. annual	extremely	foresight	solemn	decision	source
40. receipt	desirable	science	coarse	discussion	possess
41. consequence	cyclone	caterpillar	profiting	character	conqueror
42. committee	convenience	intelligent	sufficiently	propeller	literature
43. orchestra	kindergarten	irritable	acquaintance	scientific	peculiar
44. persistence	sovereign	municipal	commemorate	sympathy	practised
45. recommend	necessity	accuracy	tragedy	occurrence	cemetery
46. stationery	benefited	mischievous	parallel	principle	bachelor
47. indispensable	parliamentary	anniversary	courteous	millionaire	accommodate
48. unanimous	criticism	appropriate	enthusiasm	bilious	miscellaneous
49. privilege	discernible	definitely	pneumonia	perseverance	inflammable
50. irresistible	counterfeit	colossal	embarrassment	conscientious	paralysis

**ACCURACY: NORMAL SCORES FOR AGE in 1936 to 1967 : Plus or Minus 1.3 words**

NOTE: The 'average' spelling scores for the ages listed below have been extrapolated from a 1967 book entitled A.C.E.R. SPELLING TESTS by The Australian Council for Educational Research

AGE	8.5 yrs	9.5 yrs	10.5 yrs	11.5 yrs	12.5 yrs	13.5 yrs	2
SCORE	13	21	28	34	39	42	

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