

Literacy Testing 3

*-Age Level Spelling Test-
Primary*

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-Testing Spelling Skills-

Since the early 1980s, government literacy curricula in Australia have been oriented towards actually *eliminating* spelling from both literacy teaching and testing at all levels. Unlikely though this seems, no other conclusion is more viable. Consider just some snippets from a large body of evidence:

- Our 2005 National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy in Australian schools did not investigate either the testing or teaching of spelling.
- Our 1996 Australian National Primary School Literacy Survey, the first such survey in 21 years, did not have an age level spelling test.
- Since 1996 our annual State of Victoria wide 'LAP' and 'AIM' primary school surveys of basic English skills, have not once included an age level spelling test.
- Our 1998 Australian National Literacy Benchmarks have an example of a year two level spelling test in the section for year five. It's still hard to believe, but the inescapable proof is on page 35 of the printed version of the Benchmarks.
- Since 1994 all new government English curricula for primary schools in Australia have been based on the "**Outcomes Based Education**" theory. Not one of these 'new' curricula has contained recommended year level spelling lists, sample spelling tests, or even a list of English spelling rules for Australian literacy teachers.
- In 1982, Victoria's recommended year level spelling list for primary schools contained **1,400** words that were organized in 16 levels for children in years 3 to 6. By 1994, our only recommended spelling list was only **100** words long.
- In all the above documents, the words 'dictation' and 'test' simply cannot be found.
- By 1996 industry sources had reported that a staggering **70%** of Australian youth entering the workforce failed industry standards in spelling.
- 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 'core' words in 22 editions of this journal showed that the word literacy was mentioned over **2,700** times, but the word spelling only **3** times and the word test only **twice**. The expressions dictation, read aloud and word recognition scored 0 each.

And why should we care about spelling ?

Even for *merely respectable* literacy skill accuracy in spelling is important within English language business communities. All accurate spellers notice spelling mistakes. Most poor spellers are acutely aware of their writing problems, and avoid all unnecessary writing. Poor self esteem is usually tied to poor spelling skill, both at school and in the work place. Testing and teaching spelling in a systematic way offers many advantages to children, teachers and educational systems:

- Theoretically speaking at least, you can test the spelling skill of an entire nation's primary school children in only 12 minutes. All you would need is a mandatory 'national spelling test' to be broadcast or televised into government schools during school hours: See the sample tests which follow.
- Children who can spell well are always children who can read well: After only one simple and brief spelling test, a new teacher to any classroom is enabled to pick out all the children who are most likely able in all literacy skills. Other simple literacy tests can then sort out those of the remaining students who have correctable spelling problems and correctable reading problems of different types.
- Any person at all with an officially 'approved' class level spelling list of the old fashioned type, can design, administer and correct a simple and reasonably valid spelling test.

FINDING THE SPELLING AGES OF PRIMARY CHILDREN

The forty spelling test words in **bold** below are probably the most tested forty words in the history of English spelling testing. They were first published, free of copyright restriction, by J C Daniels and Hunter Diack, in their 1958 book called The Standard Reading Tests. They have been used to find the ‘spelling ages’ of millions of children globally ever since that time: They are still being used for this purpose by a number of teachers in private practice in Australia.

The forty spelling words in *feint* below are simply parallel *substitutes* for the words in the original test. Each *substitute* word has been picked because it is a close match to the original spelling word with respect to (1) its length (2) alphabetic complexity and (3) frequency of occurrence in primary school texts.

The aim of this *substitute* test is to provide a reasonably valid backup spelling age test that might corroborate student scores on the original:

GIVING A SPELLING TEST

The method of giving a spelling test remains the same regardless of the age of the student:

1. Say the test word. eg. road
2. Repeat the word in a sentence. eg. We have a long road to go.
3. Repeat the word road, before the student writes it.

The Two Spelling Tests

on in	hot hat	cup pen	van ten	jam him	lost help	sit set	plan plug	mud mad	beg big
the one	go no	for her	so by	me we	are were	of to	do she	who what	here where
ship shop	chop chip	food moon	fire hair	thin thick	date hate	seem feel	dart harm	loud cloud	form born
eye buy	fight light	friend water	done love	any many	great break	sure sugar	women people	answer minute	beautiful wrestling

The Original Spelling Ages for Student Scores

0. 5.0 yrs	10. 6.1 yrs	20. 7.2 yrs	30. 8.5 yrs
1. 5.2 yrs	11. 6.2 yrs	21. 7.3 yrs	31. 8.7 yrs
2. 5.3 yrs	12. 6.3 yrs	22. 7.5 yrs	32. 9.0 yrs
3. 5.4 yrs	13. 6.4 yrs	23. 7.6 yrs	33. 9.2 yrs
4. 5.5 yrs	14. 6.5 yrs	24. 7.7 yrs	34. 9.5 yrs
5. 5.6 yrs	15. 6.6 yrs	25. 7.8 yrs	35. 9.8 yrs
6. 5.7 yrs	16. 6.7 yrs	26. 7.9 yrs	36. 10.2 yrs
7. 5.8 yrs	17. 6.8 yrs	27. 8.1 yrs	37. 10.5 yrs
8. 5.9 yrs	18. 7.0 yrs	28. 8.2 yrs	38. 11.0 yrs
9. 6.0 yrs	19. 7.1 yrs	29. 8.3 yrs	39. 11.6 yrs
			40. 12.3 yrs

Not long after their publication in 1958, the above ‘spelling age’ scores became recognized in many parts of the English speaking world, as appropriate ‘average for age’ performance for children in the primary school . . . In 1979, a South Australian study, by Peter Westwood, produced Australian norms for the same 40 original words.

A 'Forever' Spelling Age Test

5 year to 9 year olds

Limitless Substitute Spelling Tests Based on 1958 Research

The 'letter and sound' patterns which underpin the original 1958 spelling words, again provide the basic spelling test design which enables us to form a virtually limitless number of viable substitute spelling tests for children between the ages of 5 and 9.

There are 33 words in each of the columns below. To design a 'new' and relatively viable 'spelling age' test of 33 words for 5 to 9 year olds, is as simple as selecting one of the five words in each row as you proceed down the columns.

PLEASE NOTE WELL

Each of the many millions of substitute 'spelling' tests that can be formed in this way, will almost certainly show that the child is performing at the same spelling level or age. From a strictly technical standpoint it is clearly statistical cheating to use the original 1958 table of 'normal scores for age' for each of these substitute tests. But from a very practical teaching standpoint who cares?

THE FOREVER SPELLING TEST

No.	LIST 1	LIST 2	LIST 3	LIST 4	LIST 5	ORIGINAL DANIEL & DIACK WORD
1.	in	up	at	it	am	on
2.	mat	jet	cot	fit	nut	hot
3.	zip	gap	pup	mop	sip	cup
4.	ten	fun	win	pin	ran	van
5.	fox	wax	him	sum	box	jam
6.	lent	best	help	pond	sent	lost
7.	vat	yet	rot	bit	cut	sit
8.	plum	drag	stop	glad	tram	plan
9.	red	hid	mad	cod	fed	mud
10.	bug	log	wag	rag	mug	beg
11.	this	that	the	these	those	the
12.	so	no	go	so	no	go
13.	from	by	for	from	by	for
14.	as	is	us	as	is	so
15.	he	we	be	she	he	me
16.	was	were	are	was	were	are
17.	to	of	to	of	to	of
18.	does	do	does	do	does	do
19.	what	who	when	what	who	who
20.	there	where	here	there	where	here
21.	shop	dish	rush	shut	wish	ship
22.	chip	rich	chat	such	chug	chop
23.	moon	roof	cool	hoop	boot	food
24.	hair	tire	fare	fear	more	fire
25.	thin	them	then	with	broth	thin
26.	ride	late	fine	fate	time	date
27.	feed	seen	deep	keep	feet	seen
28.	part	cart	harm	park	tart	dart
29.	cloud	road	trout	soak	scout	loud
30.	born	north	worn	fork	torn	form
31.	sight	light	night	tight	might	fight
32.	some	done	love	come	shove	done
33.	thief	piece	chief	niece	priest	friend

Literacy Testing 4

*-Age Level Spelling Test-
Secondary*

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-Testing Spelling Skills-

Correct spelling in the secondary school is usually tied in with the particular subjects that each group of students has chosen to study. *General* spelling lists to suit all secondary school students were abandoned well before general spelling lists for the primary school.

Determining then, what amounts to a satisfactory *general* level of spelling for older students in modern classrooms, is a seriously inexact business for teachers. *No experimental data* on students' age level spelling abilities has been collected by Australian educational authorities since a 1978 SA study on only 23,000 students. The only thing we can do under these circumstances is to carefully study the now 'out of date' spelling lists and spelling tests in the archives. These allow informed guesswork only.

With the foregoing in mind, the archived lists and tests allow us to cautiously promote *seventy five percent* correct as reasonable benchmark spelling skill for the words within the lists. Below is a brief list of 72 words for years 6 to 8 of the Victorian government school system (Ages 11.5 to 13.5). Students in these classes who get as many as seventy five percent correct on this test of *general* spelling level, are probably on their way to being reasonably competent in their spelling by year twelve.

The lists below allow for 3 'quick' tests of only 8 words, or for a more thorough test of 24 words for each age group.

GENERAL LEVEL SPELLING TEST JUNIOR SECONDARY

LIST	YEAR 6	YEAR 7	YEAR 8
A	explained disappeared believe Australia chocolate diseased breakfast whispered	celebrated calculator computer disappointed naturally vegetables opposite foreign	arrangements cheque successful calendar occasionally immediately excellent persistence
B	parents minutes quarter remember favourite bicycle scissors science	neighbour stomach business argument separated necessary furniture accident	stationery interfere definitely expensive quantity opportunity thoroughly temperature
C	straight cousin woman different machine system sincere library	accept scientific experience orchestra quarrel knowledge century especially	council secretary character cyclone interfere achievement barbecue catalogue