

■ Information for Teachers and Students

Spelling Counts is a workbook that guides ESL students through the basics of spelling by listening for sounds and by examining patterns in the vowel and consonant systems of written English. It is intended for adult or secondary school students at the low-intermediate level or higher and is appropriate for mixed-level classes. It may be used in high schools, in community college academic and community-based programs, in adult education classes, and in intensive English programs. Students who benefit most from the book may speak quite fluently and should know a fair amount of vocabulary. They may not, however, be completely familiar with the sound/symbol correspondences of English.

Spelling Counts is designed to be flexible in its use in that it can be an add-on text to a reading, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, or integrated skills class, or it can be the focal point of a spelling class, especially if supplemented with reading material that can be used as a resource for exemplars. It is intended for classroom use, as it relies on a teacher with native-speaker pronunciation, and it includes a small amount of material to be used for independent study (i.e., homework). *It is not meant to be a book that can be handed to a student who has trouble with spelling.* It is, instead, a course text for teacher-led instruction. As such, the text contains a Teacher's Script located at the end of the book from which teachers read. *No audio is provided.* The approach in *Spelling Counts* works for a wide variety of learners as it takes an academic approach yet moves slowly and methodically through the sound-letter correspondences of English. Students are asked to analyze examples and complete descriptions of spelling patterns in each lesson. Teachers can work through these descriptions, called Pattern Discoveries, with students.

Spelling Counts derives some of its approach from the field of word study, a method that asks learners to investigate patterns and understand phonics rather than memorize lists of unrelated words. Thus students learn to spell English rather than learning to spell the words of English. This may be a fine distinction, but students should have, as their goal, the ability to hear an unfamiliar word, write it down, and then find it in the dictionary. Another goal is for students to hear a term or name in a lecture and, again, be able to write it, approximating correct spelling, and later be able to match the name or term to a reference in a textbook. If a student in a history class hears *squire* and writes *skwair*, that student will be unsuccessful with a dictionary, the course text, and in a testing situation. Once students learn that [kwai] is most often represented with *qui* (*quite, quiet, squire, require*), they have a key to success.

Spelling Counts moves through the first three stages of word study: from letter name spelling for short vowel sounds to within-word patterns for long vowels, and

finally to syllables and affixes (also known as syllable juncture) for doubling and *e*-drop patterns. Teachers may find useful supplemental materials by searching for these stages on the Internet.

In addition to this focus on seeing and relying on patterns in spelling, *Spelling Counts* helps students learn many words that do not follow patterns. Therefore, each lesson also introduces three to six “must spell” words, which are recycled through the unit. These words are generally referred to as “sight words,” and that is the label they are given here. The thinking is that these words just “look right” or “look wrong” to a native speaker, and everyone is expected to be able to spell them correctly, even though they often do not follow the basic rules covered in the material. With the inclusion of these sight words, by using *Spelling Counts*, students will gain confidence in their ability to spell not only unknown words like *clutch* and *gobble*, but also familiar words that they may say every day, like *Tuesday* or *once*.

One important point to keep in mind is that spelling instruction must be administered in small doses. Therefore, *Spelling Counts* presents many short lessons. Teachers may work on one or more lessons in a given class period, and may recycle material and create extra quizzes from the exemplars in the textbook as needed.

Another important point to keep in mind is that spelling instruction requires students to recycle everything and asks teachers to never mistake understanding nods and apparent lightbulbs-over-heads for acquisition. Teachers should check students’ accuracy often, on exercises presented in the book as well as on additional quizzes. If students have invented their own spelling systems, it is essential that they start at the very beginning to rebuild, erase the flaws, and fill in the gaps in their personal knowledge. Teachers are encouraged to move as quickly as necessary through the first pages of the book, slowing down when students begin to make too many errors. Students will start by spelling *bit* and *twin*, move into an understanding of why *hopping* has a double *p* while *hoping* has one, distinguish homophones like *stairs* and *stares*, add endings to create longer words like *hopefully*, and spell compound words like *nightlife*.

An answer key can be found online at www.press.umich.edu/esl/.