

Suggestions for Using Personal Dictionaries

Personal dictionaries are one way to accommodate individual differences in a spelling program. Some students are naturally talented spellers who need and appreciate extra challenge. Others have great difficulty learning to spell basic and commonly used words, in large part because of the inherent inconsistency in English orthography. Personal dictionaries aid in “bridging the gap” between *instruction* in spelling and *application* in writing. The following directions to students show one possible way of using the dictionaries, or adapt them in any way you wish.

Directions to Students

- Have your personal dictionary on your desk during creative writing.
- If you want to write a word you cannot spell:
 - Write an invented spelling (circled or in all caps) and deal with it during editing, or
 - Open the personal dictionary to the page with the first letter of the word, and scan to find the word. Check carefully to make sure you copy it correctly.
- If the word you want is not in your personal dictionary:
 - Place the open dictionary in a certain place on your desk and continue with your writing. This signals the teacher that you need help and he/she will get to you as soon as possible.
 - Look up the word you need in a regular dictionary and copy it carefully into the personal dictionary. Check your copying!

Preparing Personal Dictionaries

Teachers, if you have not used personal dictionaries before, use a simple one before taking time to redesign the cover or do anything special. First develop a system for using it that you like and that is integrated into your teaching style.

- Prior to reproducing a dictionary for each student, clearly print the name of the school, grade, and teacher on the cover, and the name of your city and state on p. 8.
- You may want to design your own cover, using student art or the school mascot. The school name, address and phone number as well as the principal’s name may be integrated into the cover design.
- Alternately, type your school name and address on the inside of the front or back cover. You may also wish to list the principal’s name, names of other adults in the school, names of students in the class, and/or any other words which may be useful for reference as students write, such as names of nearby cities or towns.

- Decide whether to reproduce just the blank dictionaries (to save paper), or the entire dictionary including reference materials. If you use just the blank pages, block out the page number 9 on the **A** page before copying.
- Consider running the cover on brightly-colored, heavy paper. Decorate it with stickers before laminating if you wish.
- Fold and staple pages together with a long-armed stapler, *or* cut pages in half and use a plastic comb binder.

Suggestions for Using Personal Dictionaries

- After you’ve checked any *Spelling Plus* pretests, have students mark or highlight words from the 1000 word list (pp. 2-8) which they spelled correctly. After final review testing in the spring, have them highlight the additional words they have learned. They may also mark or highlight any other words in their personal dictionary once they’ve been mastered.
- Have students highlight spelling rules (p. 33), guidelines (p. 34) or mnemonics (p. 35) which you have reviewed or taught and for which you hold them responsible.
- Words students have needed or misspelled while writing will be on blank dictionary pages. These can be studied as personal spelling words. In the *Spelling Plus* program, each student chooses five personal words per week to add to the base list.

- Gifted spellers may select personal words to fill out their list of five from the challenge words (pp. 36-38), proper nouns (p. 39), calendar words (p. 40), or words you've listed inside the front or back cover.
- The spelling study procedure on p. 40 is the *Spelling Plus* homework procedure. Perhaps have students practice their words with this procedure when a substitute is teaching.
- Teach "If You Can't Find a Word in the Dictionary" (p. 40) using a class set of dictionaries. Have students look up *ph*, for example, and read some of the entry words which begin with the sound of *f* but are spelled with *ph*. Do the same for *kn*, *ps*, *ch*, etc. Are there any etymological clues to the spellings in the dictionary?
- There are several ways to get words into the dictionaries. The teacher may print them in as they're requested or the student may copy them in after looking them up in a regular dictionary. The teacher may collect misspelled words from student writing by noting them on Post-It notes. When these are handed back, students stick them into the dictionary, perhaps inside the front or back cover, and carefully copy them onto the correct pages when time allows. By doing this, they should notice which words they tend to misspell again and again.

Advantages of Personal Dictionaries

- Personal spelling demons need not be repeatedly looked up in a big dictionary.
- The responsibility for correct spelling in writing is placed on the student. Mistakes in first draft writing can sometimes be avoided.
- Personal dictionaries are useful for record-keeping. They provide a way of tracking individual progress in spelling. This is useful for communication with parents and for reinforcing a sense of progress in students.
- Personal dictionaries are a good source of personal words.
- Copies of words in the dictionaries can be sent home to parents.
- Personal dictionaries can be sent on to the next teacher in a schoolwide program.

Suggestions for Minimizing Disadvantages

- Personal dictionaries require that students be somewhat responsible. They must be used consistently and as an integral part of the writing process in order to be effective. Teachers who wish to use them must devote time to teaching and monitoring their proper use, especially at first.
- Teachers must monitor to make sure that words children write in their personal dictionaries are spelled correctly. These are "personal demons" and are *very* likely to be misspelled in the process of copying.
- Words are entered in the order they're needed, not in alphabetical order. Students must be able to scan.
- If a student loses his/her personal dictionary, there is virtually no way to recover the words. To prevent loss:
 - Have a color code for spelling. Store personal dictionaries in a pocket portfolio of that color, along with other papers related to spelling.
 - Reproduce the covers on bright paper.
 - Don't allow personal dictionaries to be taken out of the classroom except by special arrangement with parents.

A Suggestion for Parents

- Set up a 3x5 card file with a card for each of your child's "personal demons." The child can alphabetize the words. Review them frequently for short periods of time. As each word is mastered, i.e. correct every time it's spelled, put a sticker on its card and celebrate! Continue infrequent review thereafter to check and maintain mastery.

This Personal Dictionary is an optional component of the *Spelling Plus* program.

Spelling Plus: 1000 Words Toward Spelling Success, Item 048, \$19.95

Dictation Resource Book, Item 137, \$12.95

Homophones Resource Book, Item 145, \$15.95

Personal Dictionary, Item 153, \$3.50