

Sketchpad

Teacher Background

Alan Baddley and Graham Hitch (2000) used the term “visual sketchpad” to describe the part of the working memory that temporarily holds visual images long enough to transfer into the long-term memory. Therefore, we call words that must be learned primarily through visualization Sketchpad words.

Being able to effortlessly spell the most common words of English aids writing fluency. Spell sorts cement English spelling patterns, but what should we do with words that do not follow these patterns? As we discussed above, some words are unfair Great Gramma Words and we cannot sound them out. We must have a visual image of them in our mind’s eye to transfer them to free writing. How many times have your students aced a spelling test, only to misspell the same words in their journals? Luckily, reading research has tested multiple effective spelling approaches, narrowing them to two strategies used in conjunction to produce the best results for learning these Sketchpad words (Berninger 2006). My clinical experience validates the research, and I now teach everyone these two things to help them spell well: **color-coding and mental imagery.**

Before we move into learning the Sketchpad routine, we must first create the list of words to be taught using the Sketchpad technique. Step One below explains the assessment method used to create the list. Step Two discusses how to use this list and apply the Sketchpad methods. Step Three briefly outlines best daily practice routines as well as offering additional suggestions for what to do when a student continues to struggle with spelling a Sketchpad word.

STEP ONE: FIND WORDS THAT NEED PRACTICE

Assess: Determine which words students already know effortlessly by dictating the Quick Words for students to spell, moving from one word to the next relatively quickly. Circle any incorrect words and write the word the way the student wrote it next to the correct word from your dictation list. For example, if the student wrote *wat* for *what*, record the omission of the *h*. If the student spells the word correctly, but takes too long, circle the word for extra practice to ensure it becomes automatic. Your assessment of what response time is too long will vary from student to student and should be based on the typical time it takes that particular student to spell a mastered word in general. (See the Automate section.) **Remember, students need to spell these words as quickly and as easily as their own names.**

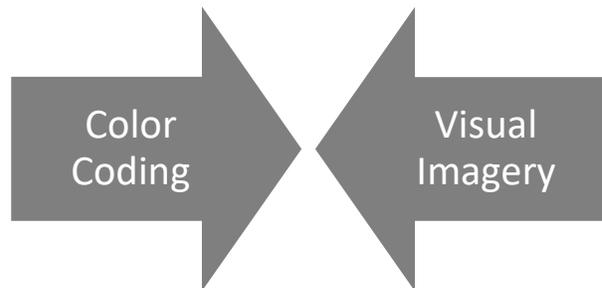
Create and Differentiate: How do you choose Sketchpad words? Initially, everyone can use the same high-frequency words, particularly those found in shared reading or those that have been worked on as Glue Words. **Be sure to focus on the meaning of the word before taking it through the Sketchpad process.** Eventually, you may want to assess each of your students to create individual word lists. At that time, you may also pull words from independent writing or words that are particularly important to or frequently used by that particular student.

STEP TWO: FOCUS ON WORDS THAT NEED PRACTICE (FUSS)

When you have discovered six to ten words that need work, write them on the Sketchpad worksheet on page 434. Determine if the word is fair. Break long words into syllables using Vowel Yanking if your

student is ready. A word may seem unfair for several reasons: it may be old with fossilized spelling patterns, it may be due to dialect, it may be that students have yet to learn the spelling pattern, or it may be that a vowel has flipped its sound/name, gone “lazy,” or gone schwa-ed.

According to research (Berninger 2006), these two strategies used together produce the best results to help students remember the spelling of irregular words:



Color-Code: Make the letter patterns pop with color

Research suggests that students remember the spelling if they write letter sounds with different, bright colors. You can color-code by spelling pattern (*oa, ai, th*), or later by meaning (*-ly, -ing, -rupt*). **Do not just write each letter in a different color.** You can use color codes to chunk speech sound patterns to aid recall. For example, the *th* in *though* should have both letters written in blue, to cluster the digraph in the visual memory. Each letter in *ough* can be written in red for the same reason. In this way, students can color-code letter clusters in tricky words.

Rationale: The purpose of color-coding is to highlight a pattern or make a challenging part of a word pop out. Generally, use the same color for letters that are working together. For example, color the *ey* in *they* green. If the *th* in *they* was hard for your student, choose a different color for the *th*. Also, students may color just the problem letter in a word. For example, many students just color the *w* in the word *write*, even though *wr* is working together to spell /r/. Later, students may choose to color morphemes, such as *ly* in *softly*. Create your color-coding based on sound patterns, letter patterns, meaning patterns, or the individual challenges of your students.

Visual Imagery: Stare at the word to burn it into the brain

Burn the word into your mind’s eye. Take a mental picture of it. Close your eyes and picture the image of it in your head. Spell what you see.

Mind’s-Eye Scaffolding

If a student has trouble “seeing” the word in their mind’s eye, provide more scaffolding. Have her make a dash mark for each letter in the word (much like what you do when you play Hangman) and “write” each letter in the dash marks with her pointer finger. She should say the letter as she “writes” it, while imagining the letter is really being written. Some students find it easiest to “write” the word on a clean white surface rather than in the air or on a desk surface.

Visual Imagery Quizzing

To make sure students are truly “seeing” the letters on their visual sketchpad and not just repeating it over and over in a phonological loop, ask students to name the letters they see in their mind’s eye in a random order. For example, if the word has six letters, the teacher may ask her student to name the

sixth letter, then the third, and finally, the first letter. Only do visual imagery with new or missed words.

Ask students to post their Sketchpad lists in a conspicuous spot in their houses to remind them to practice, and so that they see the words often throughout the week. Remember to change out the words each week to new words from their lists.

Commit to a Routine: A little bit of practice every day is the key to making Sketchpad words automatic.

Quiz: Each day, dictate Sketchpad words. Students must write them, not spell them orally. Practice spelling the way it will be used to ensure transfer. Use paper and pencil or have students use their finger to “write” it on the back of their hand. This is called finger spelling. (A great option if paper and pencil are not available.)

Safe Sentences: After students spell the words correctly five days in a row, a teacher or shoulder partner makes up and dictates short sentences using Sketchpad words. Optional: Play Picture-Ad.

Automate: As soon as Sketchpad words are ready to be used in Safe Sentences, they are also ready to be automated. To do this, the teacher or shoulder partner asks the student to write the Sketchpad words as quickly as possible without making errors.

Transfer: If a student has the written word correctly in at least three Safe Sentences, look for the correct spelling of the target word in writing assignments. Hold students accountable for correctly spelling mastered Sketchpad words.

Other Ways to Practice Sketchpad Words

Find other “unfair” words with the same pattern, such as *they/obey*, or *would/could/should* and create a Flashback Sentence. Making common words with rare spelling patterns into a Flashback Sentence is an effective time-saver. (See Flashback Sentences section on page 344).

If you need students to practice their Sketchpad spelling words independently or in student-led small groups, play **Sketchpad Flip**. You will need paper, pencils, strips of card stock, and paper clips. Students write the individual letters of the target words on strips of card stock. For instance, if they are working on the word *though*, they would write each letter on a different strip, shuffle the six strips, and lay them down on the floor. One piece at a time, students flip a strip and name where that letter falls in the word: second letter, fourth letter, and so on. After they name the letter’s position in the word, they write it on a sheet of paper, leaving room for missing letters still to come. Students may put down horizontal marks (much like they would do for Hangman) ahead of time if they need support to spatially plan for the word.

Teacher Preparation

Materials	Teaching Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colored markers • Sketchpad tracking sheet (Appendix C) • Sketchpad color-code and burn sheet (Appendix C) 	<p>By using our eyes, hands, voice, and ears, we can make stronger pathways in our brain to remember words. To get these words into our visual sketchpad, we'll color-code, picture, and feel the words.</p>
Lesson Summary	
Connect	Discuss writing fluency
Teach	Sketchpad spelling routine
Guided Practice	Students do the Sketchpad routine

CONNECT

I want you to write your name for me. Give students a chance to write their names. **Do you need to use your Vowel Key to spell the vowel? Do you need to say it while you write it? No. Why do you know how to spell your name so well? Yes, you have seen and written it so many times you can read and spell it effortlessly. Just like we need to be able to read the most common words of English effortlessly, we also need to be able to spell them effortlessly.**

Researchers at the University of Washington discovered that there are two things you can do to get these words into your head so you can spell them without thinking: color-coding and taking a mental picture.

TEACHING POINT

By using our eyes, hands, voice, and ears, we can make stronger pathways in our brain to remember words. To get these words into our visual sketchpad, we'll color-code, picture, and feel the words.

TEACH

To get unfair Quick Words into our visual sketchpad, we'll color-code the tricky part of the word and burn the word into our mind's eye so that we can close our eyes and see it. To help our hand practice writing the word and to prove that we made a mental picture of the word, we will make dash marks for each letter and finger spell the letters on the dashes. Then we will name the letters in the word both in and out of order. Finally, we will write the letters on the dashes using a pencil.

Sketchpad Routine

Teach	Clarification and Coaching Tips
<p>Let me show you what this looks like with the word <i>they</i>. Write <i>they</i> on the board. The first thing I need to do is look at each of the letters and figure out which ones are tricky. Say and stretch <i>they</i>. /They/. I can hear and feel the /th/ clearly. However, for the vowel, I hear and feel /ay/ but I see <i>ey</i>, which is not one of the ways to spell /ay/ on my Vowel Key. This makes spelling the vowel sound in <i>they</i> tricky, and I cannot use my Vowel Key to help.</p> <p>So I'll color-code <i>ey</i> and use my visual sketchpad to remember how to spell that unfair part of <i>they</i>. Color-code the <i>e</i> and <i>y</i> in green to make them pop.</p> <p>I look at the word and burn it into my brain while I finger spell it on my arm. Now I'll cover the word, close my eyes and picture the letters in <i>they</i>. To help me, I'll finger spell the word on my arm while my eyes are closed. Model. Finger spell <i>t h e y</i> on arm as you say the letters.</p> <p>Now that I can see the letters on the visual sketchpad in my brain, I'll open my eyes and make a dash for every letter in the word. Make four dashes. Next, I'll finger spell each letter on its dash and imagine that I am really writing them. Name letters while writing <i>t h e y—they</i>.</p> <p>Now I'm ready to prove that I really know it by naming the letters in any order. Point to dashes. This letter is <i>h</i> (point to second dash) and this is <i>e</i> (point to third dash) and this is <i>y</i> (point to last dash). Now I'll actually write the letters with a pencil while I name them. (Model: <i>t h e y—they</i>) Now, I'll uncover the word to check. Yes! I've got it.</p> <p>If I make a mistake in spelling the word at any step, I need to go back and start over. Burn, finger spell, visualize, and then prove I know the letters out of order.</p> <p>Every week we will "fuss" over a few tricky words and then spend the week quizzing each other and then eventually apply what we know by putting them in sentences. We will do this routine all year long.</p>	<p>Feel free to use a word that your student needs to work on.</p> <p>If a student has a stronger visual sketchpad, finger spelling may not be necessary when burning the word into their mind's eye. However, they should finger spell when they practice the word.</p> <p>Some students have a strong motor habit of writing a word incorrectly. They may say the correct letter as they write the incorrect one. Watch their finger spelling and have them start the process over if this happens.</p> <p>If students are using their phonological loop to remember the word (chanting <i>t-h-e-y</i> over and over), knowing the letters out of order will be challenging, and you will see and hear students saying the letters until they get to the dash you are pointing to. If they are doing this, have them go back and re-burn the word visually.</p> <p>If students struggle to picture the word, say, Let's see if your hand remembers, and encourage them to finger spell the word.</p>