

**THE COMMON-WORD SPELLERS: A  
TWO-BOOK COURSE IN SPELLING  
FOR THE COMMON SCHOOLS. BOOK  
ONE: FOR THE FIRST, SECOND, THIRD  
AND FOURTH GRADES**

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# THE COMMON-WORD SPELLERS

A TWO-BOOK COURSE IN SPELLING  
FOR THE COMMON SCHOOLS

## BOOK ONE

FOR THE FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, AND  
FOURTH GRADES

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## PREFACE

The outstanding features of the *Common-Word Spellers* are :

1. The books contain a scientifically selected vocabulary of the words most commonly used in written correspondence.
2. These words are graded according to their difficulty as established by actual tests rather than by guesswork.
3. Phonetic words are grouped into lessons according to their phonetic elements.
4. Unphonetic words are taught separately as sight words.
5. Reviews are arranged both in columns and in context, the more difficult words being reviewed more frequently.
6. Sentences and letters for dictation are composed exclusively of words previously presented.
7. Especial attention has been paid to the hard spots in words and to words most often misspelled.
8. A standard test in spelling is given at the end of each grade, beginning with the second.
9. Practical exercises in pre-dictionary work occur in grades three and four.
10. Syllabication is taught by means of established principles as well as by practice.

## INTRODUCTION

*Aim.* The chief aim in spelling is to teach pupils to spell accurately and rapidly the words most commonly used in social and business correspondence.

*Vocabulary.* The first problem, then, in preparing a textbook in spelling is to select in a scientific manner the words which are most commonly used in written intercourse. The name *Common-Word Spellers* is purposely chosen for these books, as it accurately describes the vocabulary contained in this series of spellers.

A careful study of the word lists compiled by Ayres, Pryor, Cook and O'Shea, and others revealed the fact that none of these lists was complete beyond the first 1000 words. Therefore a much more thorough investigation was undertaken by Dr. W. N. Andersen, under the direction of the writer, to determine the 3000 most common words.

Dr. Andersen tabulated all the words, together with their repetitions, occurring in 3723 social and business letters written by persons engaged in professional, agricultural, commercial, industrial, and domestic occupations. He found that the writers of these 3723 letters used a total of 9223 different words. Many of these words were used again and again. Only 3000 of the words were used five times or more. It is this list of 3000 words which is used as the basic list for the *Common-Word Spellers*.



## INTRODUCTION

The words used by adults in written correspondence are for the most part the words learned in childhood. When writing, a person tends to avoid a word the spelling of which he is in doubt about. Poor spellers overwork a limited vocabulary. The study of spelling should extend one's vocabulary rather than restrict it. Two thousand common words are insufficient to provide variety of expression adequate to the use of good English. Furthermore, investigators have found that on the average adults use upwards of 3000 words in their written correspondence.

*Gradation.* The second problem in preparing a textbook in spelling is to determine the grade in which each word should be taught. Words may be graded by guess or by test. The former method has been all too frequently employed. It is unscientific. A word is not easy or difficult for a child simply because it appears to be. Testing is the only reliable method of determining its difficulty. Dr. Ashbaugh in the Iowa Spelling Scales determined the difficulty of 2977 words contained in the *Common-Word Spellers*. The difficulty of each word was determined on the basis of 200 or more spellings by children in each grade above the first. The difficulty of additional words was determined by the Ayres Spelling Scale and by Buckingham's extension thereto, together with a study of the lists prepared by Pryor, Starch, and others.

*Method.* The third problem concerns the method employed in classifying and teaching the words chosen. It is obvious that if the English language were as purely phonetic as is the Italian, spelling would offer little difficulty.

## THE COMMON-WORD SPELLERS

Unfortunately this is not the case. There are 44 elementary sounds in English speech, with but 26 letters to represent them. An overlapping of sounds necessarily takes place. Two or more different symbols may represent a single sound. Certain sounds are represented by a combination of symbols. These facts make learning to spell more difficult.

The following simple classification is here employed :

1. Words purely phonetic. In such words each elementary sound is represented by its common symbol; for example, *hen, jump, storm*.

2. Words containing sounds which may be represented by more than a single symbol; for example, *firm, fern, crowd, cloud*.

3. Homonyms — words of the same pronunciation but of different spellings and meanings; for example, *cent, sent, scent*.

4. Unphonetic or *sight* words. In such words the pronunciation offers little or no help in the spelling; for example, *tough, does, come*.

The value of this classification is evident when the method of teaching is considered. Obviously words in the first group need but little attention. They "spell themselves." A child who is familiar with the elementary sounds and their common symbols has no difficulty in mastering them. Since over 50 per cent of our common words fall into this group, the value of phonetics as an aid to spelling is evident.

Words of the second group are much harder to learn. The sound of *er* may also be spelled *ir* and *ur*. Just

## INTRODUCTION

which spelling is to be used in each case is a difficulty for the learner to overcome.

Words of the third group, called homonyms, should be taught in relation to their use in sentences. The word *cent* is correctly spelled if a small coin is meant, otherwise not. The context alone can show this.

It is for words of the fourth group that special effort in teaching and persistent review are necessary. The child must rely largely on the appearance of the word, or by sheer force of memory he must hold the order of letters in mind. These words have very properly been called "demons." The pronunciation of a demon is no guide to its correct spelling.

*Hard Spots.* Hard spots occur in words, (1) if a sound is not represented by its usual symbol, (2) if a phonetic equivalent is used in the spelling, (3) if there are silent letters, and (4) if there is an elision of a vowel. Words containing hard spots must be reviewed again and again before it is safe to consider their spellings fixed.

*Rules for Spelling.* A few rules, not verbally learned, perhaps, but well practiced in their application, are a great stimulus to correct spelling. The four simple ones at the back of this volume are especially helpful in avoiding errors.

*Pronunciation and Syllabication.* A much neglected feature of spelling is the ability to syllabify correctly. To commit syllables to memory is a needless waste of time and effort. The principles applied to syllabication worked out in these lessons and tersely stated on the closing pages will prove helpful not only in the division of words into syllables