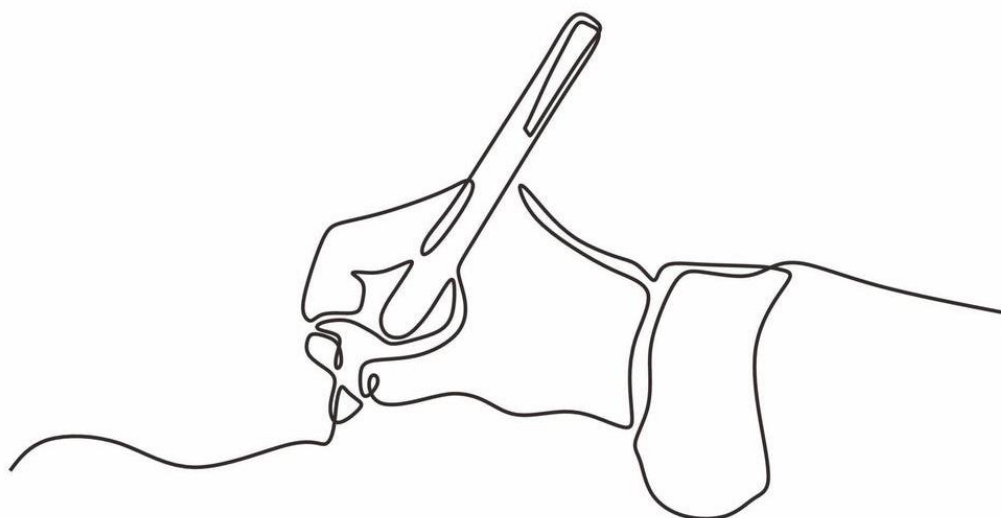# Spelling Assessment

Guidance for Practitioners

Fife
COUNCIL

Age and Stage Appropriate Expectations

Spelling words correctly is important in helping us communicate more effectively with others however it is not a natural or easy process. Learning the common regularities and patterns of the English language (as well as the many anomalies!) is incredibly challenging for our young learners.

With high-quality instruction and experiences, we can support learners to progress through identifiable stages in their development to become more effective spellers.
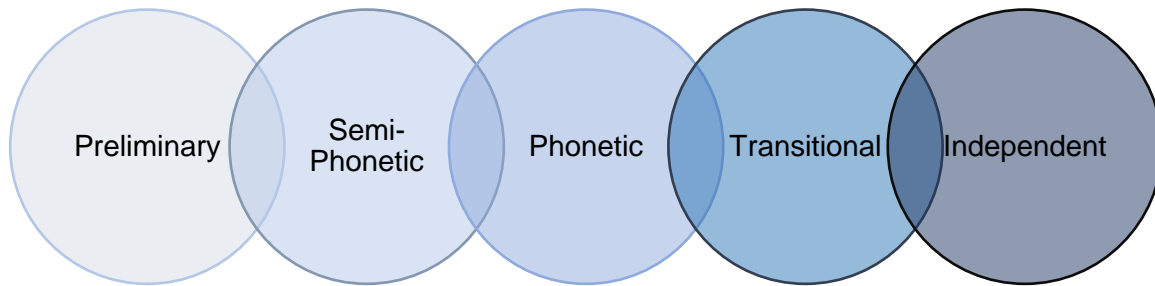
Rees (1990)

Our approach to spelling assessment and instruction should (for the most part) avoid overemphasis on absolute correctness, mechanics, and memorisation as research has shown this can inhibit developmental growth. This does not mean we lower our expectations for correctness but rather we ensure that a learner's representations of words are viewed fairly, as appropriate to their age and stage of development, and used as key indicators to inform further spelling instruction, practise, and learning.

CfE and The Stages of Spelling Development

Early Level

Preliminary > Semi-Phonetic

Learners will initially use their own symbols and then, more recognisably, the letters from the alphabet as they begin to learn about different sound-letter correspondences.

Unfamiliar words will likely be written using letters that learners are most secure with or letters that represent the most obvious sounds they hear in the words.

Learners will begin to explore high frequency words and should be encouraged to spell some of these accurately drawing on both their sound-letter knowledge and useful strategies for learning any irregular parts.

First Level

Semi-Phonetic > Phonetic

Learners will be developing their understanding of a wider variety of sound-letter correspondences and selecting a letter or group of letters to represent every substantial speech sound that they hear in a word.

Although their attempts may not be the accurate English spellings, these should demonstrate their developing phonic knowledge and be readable.

Learners will continue to explore a wider range of high frequency words and should be encouraged to spell the majority of these accurately drawing on both their sound-letter knowledge and useful strategies for learning any irregular parts.

Second Level

Phonetic > Transitional

Learners will be gaining more knowledge and experience of language and beginning to use the correct spelling when representing sounds, evidencing their greater understanding of how different letter patterns and rules can be applied.

Some examples of misspelling will still occur particularly when words are less familiar or sounds have multiple or irregular spellings. Again, their attempts should demonstrate their developing knowledge of the complexities of the English language and be plausible.

Learners will continue to use a range of high frequency words and should be encouraged to spell most of these accurately drawing on both their sound-letter knowledge and useful strategies for learning any irregular parts.

Third Level and Beyond

Transitional > Independent

Learners will be much more knowledgeable of both common and more complex or irregular sound-letter correspondences and spelling rules. They will be more able to use their morphemic awareness when spelling, recall the correct spelling of a large number of words, recognise incorrect attempts and apply different strategies or resources to help them achieve a greater level of accuracy.

Learners will continue to use a range of high frequency words and should be encouraged to spell almost all of these with a high degree of accuracy.

Assessment and Professional Judgement

To support with assessment and professional judgement, the table below provides guidance around what could be considered an appropriate spelling attempt at each stage of development.

Stage	Characteristics	Example
Preliminary	Sounds are represented by symbols	ol¬2∪ı○
Semi-Phonetic	Some sounds in the word (usually the most obvious) are represented by letters	c s l
Phonetic	All sounds in the word are represented by letters or patterns (though these may not always be accurate)	c a s u l
Transitional	Most sounds in the word are represented by the correct letters or patterns (using spelling rules or knowledge of language)	c a s l e
Independent	Almost all words are written accurately (using more complex spelling rules and knowledge of language)	c a s t l e

When assessing your learners' spelling attempts, it may be helpful to use the following questions to support your professional judgement:

- What characteristics does this learner's spelling attempts demonstrate?

- Do their spelling attempts align with the letters, letter patterns or rules I would expect them to know and use for their age and stage?

- Considering their spelling attempts and stage of development, what would now be the most appropriate next steps for learning?