
READY for SCHOOL Parent News: **Invented Spelling**

Invented spelling, also called developmental spelling, is used to describe children's early attempts at independent writing, often spelling the words as they think they sound. Words will frequently appear misspelled, but that is no reason to worry. It is common for children using invented spelling to miss hearing the vowels in words. For example, if the letters your child hears in the word *cat* are *c* and *t*, then your child may spell the word *ct*. This way of writing is important in helping your child understand phonics and the composition of words. Children will gradually learn the correct spelling of words through practice, guidance, and from seeing the words around them in print.

To better understand invented spelling, it may be helpful to understand some of the typical stages in children's writing:

- Scribbling is often a child's first attempt at written communication. A child may make a scribble and say "That says 'Mommy.'" This important stage shows that your child understands that marks on a paper can have meaning.
- Scribbling is often followed by one letter words. He may write a "J" and say "I wrote 'Jason.'" As they progress, they may add other consonants, especially those for which they recognize sounds, such as "s"; then "Jason" becomes 'JS.'" The addition of vowels comes later. Vowels are more challenging for young children to hear. The process of listening to the sounds in words and trying to write the word from the sounds is an extremely important step in learning both to write and to read.
- Children will gradually move towards writing short sentences or phrases with two or three words. They may not spell words yet according to adult rules, but they are learning phonics during this writing process.

Adults sometimes worry that it will be hard for children to later learn correct spellings of words. Typically, the opposite is true. This process helps children gradually transition to correct spellings. It allows children repeated practice in the "sounding out" of words rather than just memorizing spellings. This process will make it easier for them to later generalize their skills to new words.

Ways to support this process:

- When your child draws a picture and talks to you about what she drew, ask "Can I write those words at the bottom of your picture?" The next time you look at that picture, together reread your child's words written at the bottom.
- When your child puts letters on a drawing, ask him to read what he has written to you. This encourages your child to think of himself as a writer or author. Offer encouragement for all writing attempts.
- Be patient. Your child will move gradually towards correct spellings. If your child asks you to spell a word so that she can write it down, this is a great time to model the correct spelling. You can write single words on index cards for your child to copy and keep as a "Word Bank."

Resource:

Neuman, S. B.; Copple, C.; & Bredekamp, S. (2000). *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Thanks to Jen Oswald, Kindergarten Teacher at Great Expectations II in Newark, Delaware who contributed to this article.