

Tricky Words

What is a tricky word?

There are a number of very commonly used words that do not follow phonic rules and have to be learnt by sight. These words are usually called key words or sight words, but we call them tricky words.

Learning these tricky words for reading and spelling will be hard for most dyslexics. We will explain different memory strategies that can be used to help the dyslexic learn.

Ways of learning and remembering -

1) Mnemonic with drawing

A mnemonic (pronounced with a silent 'm') is just a method or rhyme to help jog the memory but has also become a term for this particular way of remembering a spelling pattern.

e.g.

does

does Oliver eat sweets?



He does!

The first letter of each word gives a clue to the order and spelling. To reinforce this as a memory the student needs to –

1. draw it
2. put it on his bedroom wall and all around the house in funny places where he will see it i.e. on the back of the toilet door.
3. Other places might be a light switch, pair of shoes, the fridge or a door handle. Strangely, to start with even though it seems more to learn a sentence or rhyme, a mnemonic is often more easily recalled than trying to recall the letter pattern just by sight alone.

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2) Saying, writing and drawing

By writing 'was' **while saying** 'was a sausage' as he writes, the student gets into the habit of always vocalising when he/she is spelling. Some of our senior students still automatically use these mnemonics to help them recall the correct letter order, even though they are working at exam or college level.

The drawing acts as a visual clue that is often more readily remembered than the string of letters and constantly seeing that word during the day helps to make it stick. By saying the words while writing them there is a memory for hearing his/her own voice and a memory from the movement of his/her hand. We call this a multi-sensory approach because we are trying to make use of all the senses.

Have a blitz on 'was'! Make sure the student says the mnemonic every time he writes it. Don't forget to praise and reward and never criticise for getting it wrong, instead help them to laugh at their mistakes and to accept them without fear. Everyone makes mistakes, and we can learn from them.

The mnemonic rhyme is often more easily remembered when the student makes up their own, but be careful; anything too complicated will not be as effective. When making up your own it is important to be fun and to try and start the mnemonic with the 'key' word, as in '**was a sausage**'. This is not always possible as some words like '**one**' start with a different sound. It can be quite difficult and time consuming to think up mnemonics, so we have included some suggestions for the trickiest ones.

Using mnemonics is often the most helpful memory strategy but it doesn't help everyone so there are other learning strategies to suit different people. If the word is not being retained then it is not the students fault, it is just the wrong method of learning. Try different ways of learning until one finally clicks.

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3) Looking up

It seems odd, but by looking up we can often remember things more readily. We can take advantage of this. Write the target word on a card of the student's favourite colour (visual memory). Hold it above their line of sight so they have to look up with their eyes. While looking up, the student must say each letter aloud (memory for hearing). Later, they can often recall the spelling, by looking up at their imagined word.

4) Singing and rhyme

It is amazing how students can sometimes remember the words to their favourite song. A tune, beat or rhyme can be a useful memory aid. A few years ago, teaching methods encouraged the whole class to sing out spellings and in many ways it is a pity that this is now unfashionable. Some students learn well through singing and chanting.

Rhyming in particular is a very useful skill for helping with both reading and spelling. Many dyslexics have very weak rhyming abilities and these need to be developed by playing games. Understanding that words that rhyme usually have the same pattern of letters is an important step. Where a student cannot think how to spell a given word, it may be helpful to think of a rhyming word.

5) Kinaesthetic and Hepatic

Some students have weak visual and auditory memories. Saying rhymes or drawing pictures does not help them remember these tricky words. A kinaesthetic (memory of touch and feeling) approach may be more effective.

The student closes their eyes and traces out the letters of the word on different tactile surfaces (eg. carpet, sand, glass) while saying each letter aloud. This activity should be done in large sweeping movements (memory for movement) and repeated in several different ways (repetition re-enforces memory).

A hepatic approach is similar but the letters are drawn in large movements in the air, with eyes closed and saying each letter aloud as it is written. Repeat this several times during the lesson to reinforce the pattern.

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6) Games

Use your imagination to incorporate the targeted tricky word in as many different fun activities as possible. i.e. snap, board games, flash cards, pairs, poky, computer, etc. Each Nessy tricky word stage has games to make and play.

7) Sentences

It is much easier to spell or read a word when it is on its own and you can focus all your concentration on it but for practical purposes the student must be able to recognise or spell automatically when sentence writing. So we also need to practise the skill of transferring that word to the context of a sentence.

Each Nessy tricky word stage has suggested sentences for both reading and spelling.

You can make up your own sentences, but they must only use words that the student can read and spell, except for the new words you are including. Put them on to small cards and use for reading games and then turn them over and use for spelling games.

These sentences can be used for 'cloze' sentences too. i.e. sentences where a word is left out.

e.g. The cat _____ hot. and the child has to put in the word 'was'.

Make a dictation of the words to be learnt and use this daily for a week, until the patterns have been learnt and can be recalled automatically. This can be tedious, but works for some students. Don't try to overload; only learn really important words in this way.

8) Now we are ready

Using the above techniques may seem slow and complicated, but it gives security. It is only a trigger to ease memory access. There should not be too many words to learn at the same time and **THEY MUST BE SECURE BEFORE MOVING ON.**

TRICKY WORDS PROGRESS CHART

STAGE 1	R	SP	STAGE 2	R	SP	STAGE 3	R	SP	STAGE 4	R	SP	STAGE 5	R	SP
the			all			about			could			our		
that			are			been			should			over		
of			for			before			would			very		
to			have			by			like			right		
was			one			call			little			their		
			said			came			look			there		
			they			come			more			two		
			with			some			much			want		
			you			do			new			were		
			see			down			now			when		
						first			off			what		
						here			old			where		
						went			only			which		
STAGE 6	R	SP	STAGE 7	R	SP	STAGE 8	R	SP	STAGE 9	R	SP	ADD YOUR OWN	R	SP
who			find			school			piece					
why			four			these			necessary					
your			green			three			success					
after			head			write			soldier					
again			house			work			birthday					
always			know			year			believe					
another			knew			does			pretty					
any			mother			beautiful			shoulder					
many			other			water			queue					
ask			Mr			horse			busy					
because			Mrs			money			sure					
bird			once			month			straight					
blue			own			nothing								
don't			walk			picture								
every			talk			through								
						dyslexia								

Keep a record of all the tricky words you learn as you work your way through Nessy.