

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Spelling and Note-taking Skills

Spelling Skills

- Developing pupils' awareness of letter-sound relationships
- Dividing words into small parts
- Identifying affixes to root words
- Looking for letter patterns
- Highlighting problem parts
- Understanding the meanings of words

Note-taking Skills

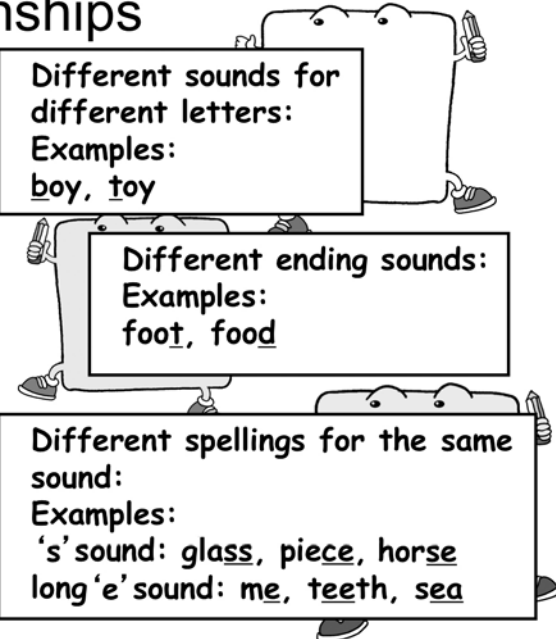
- Helping pupils understand the meanings of key words through demonstration
- Listening for key words
- Identifying main ideas and supporting details
- Using headings to organise ideas
- Using tables and other graphic organisers to organise ideas
- Using short forms, abbreviations, numbers and symbols to take notes

Strategies to improve pupils' spelling and note-taking skills are discussed here. Teachers should introduce these strategies to pupils explicitly and encourage them to apply these strategies in the daily learning and teaching process.

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Spelling Skills

Developing pupils' awareness of letter-sound relationships

- Draw pupils' attention to the **letter-sound relationships** and help them develop **phonics skills**.
- Let them try **pronouncing** new words using phonics skills instead of telling them the pronunciation right away.



Different sounds for different letters:
Examples:
boy, toy

Different ending sounds:
Examples:
foot, food

Different spellings for the same sound:
Examples:
's' sound: glass, piece, horse
long 'e' sound: me, teeth, sea

To help pupils understand the letter-sound relationships and develop phonics skills, teachers should let pupils know that there are different sounds for different letters. For example, the word 'boy' is made up of the consonant sound 'b' and the vowel sound 'oy'. Also, pupils often miss the ending sounds (e.g. the ending consonants 't' as in 'foot' and 'd' as in 'food') if they do not pay full attention. Teachers should alert pupils that a slight difference in sound will make a big difference in meaning.

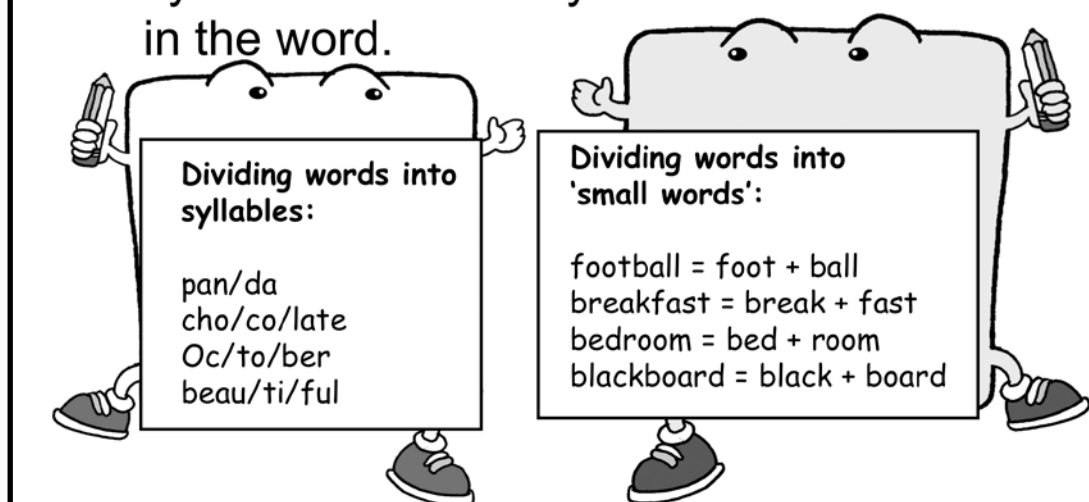
Besides, pupils should be reminded that the same sound may have different spellings (e.g. the ending 's' sound in 'glass', 'piece' and 'horse'; the long 'e' sound in 'me', 'teeth' and 'sea'). However, it is not necessary to teach all the variations at one time. Through exposing pupils to more reading texts, teachers can build on pupils' prior knowledge of letter-sound relationships and draw their attention to the variations in the spelling of the same sound.

To encourage the application of phonics skills that pupils have been taught, teachers should let them try pronouncing new words they encounter instead of telling them the pronunciation right away.

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Spelling Skills

Dividing words into small parts

- Guide pupils to divide words into syllables and identify the 'small words' in the word.



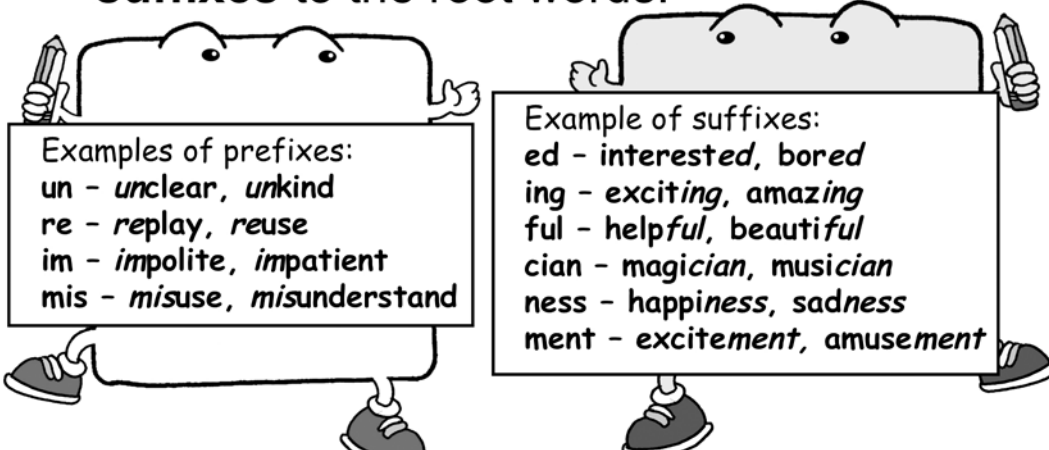
In order to work out the pronunciation or the spelling of new words, teachers can guide pupils to divide big words into small words (e.g. 'foot' and 'ball' in 'football', 'break' and 'fast' in 'breakfast'). Since the small words are simpler, pupils may know how they are pronounced. It will then be easier for them to work out the pronunciation of the new words by themselves.

In case there are no small words, pupils can divide the words into syllables (e.g. cho/co/late). This can help them work out the pronunciation or the spelling of the words on their own.

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Spelling Skills

Identifying affixes to root words

- Develop pupils' knowledge of word formation, e.g. adding **prefixes** and **suffixes** to the root words.



The illustration shows two anthropomorphic notepad characters with faces, arms, and legs. The character on the left is white and holds a sign listing examples of prefixes. The character on the right is grey and holds a sign listing examples of suffixes. Both characters are holding pencils in their right hands.

Examples of prefixes:

- un - *unclear, unkind*
- re - *replay, reuse*
- im - *impolite, impatient*
- mis - *misuse, misunderstand*

Example of suffixes:

- ed - *interested, bored*
- ing - *exciting, amazing*
- ful - *helpful, beautiful*
- cian - *magician, musician*
- ness - *happiness, sadness*
- ment - *excitement, amusement*

A root word is the basic form of a word. It stands on its own as a word and it has a meaning. New words can be formed from root words by adding prefixes and suffixes.

A prefix is a group of letters (e.g. 'un', 're', 'mis') which can be added to the beginning of a root word to change the meaning of the word (e.g. un + kind = unkind). Teachers can explain to pupils the meaning of prefixes (e.g. 'un' means 'not', 're' means 'again', 'mis' means 'wrong') whenever appropriate.

A suffix is a group of letters (e.g. 'ed', 'ing', 'ful') which can be added to the end of a root word to change the part of speech of the word. For example, by adding 'ful' to the root word 'help', the word is turned into an adjective 'helpful'.

Teachers should draw pupils' attention to word formation and help them spell and remember words more easily.

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Spelling Skills

Looking for letter patterns

- Draw pupils' attention to the **letter patterns**, i.e. groups of letters that often appear together, in lots of English words.
- Remind pupils to learn letters as a group or pattern instead of as an individual letter on its own.

Pattern: ough
Examples:
tough, rough, enough

Pattern: ight
Examples:
light, fight, night

Pattern: ould
Examples:
should, would, could

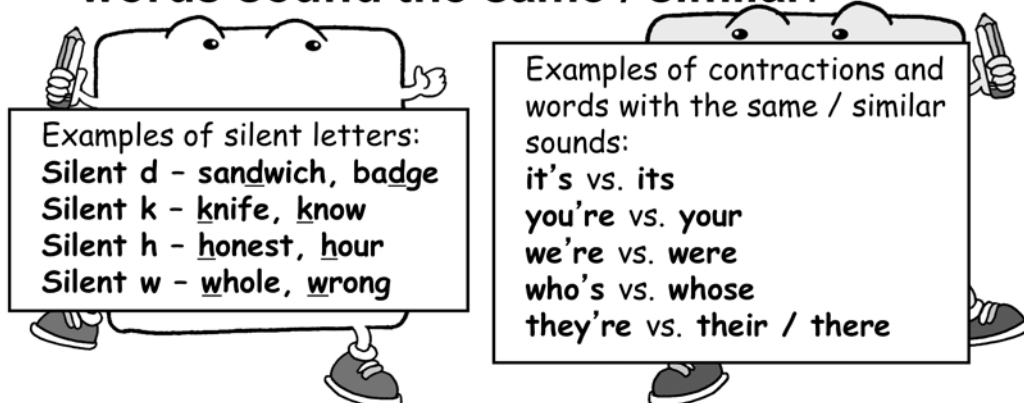
Letter patterns are groups of letters that often appear together in lots of English words (e.g. 'ough', 'ight', 'ould'). It is a good idea to remind pupils to learn letters as a group or pattern rather than as an individual letter on its own. For instance, 'ough' is found in the words 'tough', 'rough' or 'enough' and pronounced as /ʌf/; 'ight' in 'light', 'fight' or 'night' and pronounced as /aɪt/; and 'ould' in 'should', 'would' or 'could' and pronounced as /ʊd/.

To help pupils consolidate the learning of the letter patterns, teachers can design some activities (e.g. writing rhymes / poems) where pupils have to brainstorm different rhyming words.

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Spelling Skills

Highlighting problem parts

- Draw pupils' attention to the **silent letters** in some words.
- Highlight that some **contractions** and **words sound the same / similar**.



Teachers can identify words that are confusing to pupils and guide them to pay extra attention to spell these words. Two examples to arouse pupils' awareness of silent letters in words and the words with contractions are illustrated in the following paragraphs:

Silent letters are letters that you cannot hear when you say the words, but the letters are there when you write the words. There are no fixed rules and pupils need to learn the words with silent letters from their experience and make extra effort to remember the words. For example, the word 'know' has a silent 'k', which means the 'k' sound is not pronounced. Teachers should draw pupils' attention to the silent letters whenever they appear.

It is also noticed that some contractions and words sound the same or similar (e.g. 'it's' vs. 'its'). Pupils should be reminded to think about the parts of speech and the meanings of the words in context in order to write the correct words.

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Spelling Skills

Understanding the meanings of words

- Guide pupils to understand the meanings of the words learnt.
- Draw pupils' attention to the confusing words, i.e. words with the same / similar pronunciation but different meanings.



sun?



son?



pan?



pen?

It is very hot. The son / sun is shining.

I use a pen / pan to fry an egg.



Pronunciation vs. Meaning

Many English words sound the same, but have different spellings and meanings. They are called homophones (e.g. 'hour' vs. 'our', 'knew' vs. 'new', 'here' vs. 'hear'). When pupils are confused with words that have the same or similar pronunciation, teachers should draw their attention to the meanings of the words.

In the first example, 'The son / sun is shining', teachers may say, 'I understand that you are confused with which word to write. You may read the sentence that comes before to get some hints. It says, "It is very hot." It is about the weather. Now you should know which word to write.'

In the second example, 'I use a pen / pan to fry an egg', teachers may say, 'You have nearly got the spelling of "pan" right. Here, we're talking about something which is used for cooking. Do we need a "pen" to cook? Can you think of another word which has a similar sound to "pen"?''

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Note-taking Skills

Note-taking Skills

- Helping pupils understand the meanings of key words through demonstration
- Listening for key words
- Identifying main ideas and supporting details
- Using headings to organise ideas
- Using tables and other graphic organisers to organise ideas
- Using short forms, abbreviations, numbers and symbols to take notes

It is important to develop pupils' note-taking skills through dictation, as it is a useful skill for pupils to learn independently. Both note-taking and controlled dictation require pupils to listen carefully and write down the words. However, when pupils are doing note-taking, they only need to write down the key points. In order to jot down the words quickly, they can make use of short forms, abbreviations, numbers and symbols. To organise their ideas, they can make use of headings, tables and other graphic organisers.

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Note-taking Skills

Helping pupils understand the meanings of key words through demonstration



- Read a short text with the whole class.
- Underline the key words, which carry the important messages in the text.
- Explain to pupils that function words are less important.

Dear Mark,

How are you? I am going to visit Hong Kong with my parents at Christmas! We will stay for four days.

On the first day, we are going to do some shopping. At night, we are going to watch the beautiful lights in Tsim Sha Tsui. Over the next few days, we can visit the theme parks and the Peak together.

We will be in Hong Kong on 23 December. The plane leaves Beijing at a quarter past eight in the morning and arrives at around eleven o'clock.

See you soon.

Leo

It is important to help pupils understand the meanings of key words in a text before engaging them in more demanding dictation activities such as dicto-comp / dictogloss.

Teachers should define the meanings of 'key words' clearly. They are important messages that indicate the time, place, people involved and things that happened. Function words (e.g. articles, verb to be) in the passage are less important as most of them do not affect our understanding of the message even when they are missing. As a start, teachers could make use of a reading text to demonstrate to pupils what is meant by 'key words'.

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Note-taking Skills

Listening for key words

- Divide the text into smaller parts and read aloud the text bit by bit.
- Use guiding questions to help pupils jot down the relevant information.
- Read aloud the text several times if necessary.
- Allow time for pupils to tidy up their work.

Guiding questions

Part 1

1. When will Leo visit Hong Kong?
2. How many days will he stay in Hong Kong?

Part 2

1. What will he do on the first day?
2. What will he do over the next few days?

Part 3

1. When will he be in Hong Kong?
2. What time will the plane arrive?

To build up pupils' confidence in note-taking, teachers could read aloud the same text and ask pupils to jot down the key words in their exercise book.

Initially, when pupils have not yet acquired the note-taking skills, teachers could divide the text into several parts and read it to pupils bit by bit. Guiding questions could also be provided to give pupils a clear focus for listening (e.g. When will Leo visit Hong Kong? How many days will he stay in Hong Kong?). Teachers could read aloud the text several times if necessary and give sufficient time for pupils to tidy up their work.


! 3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Note-taking Skills

Identifying main ideas and supporting details

Mr Chan is my favourite teacher. He's a great teacher in many ways. **First**, he's **humorous**. He looks funny and has many interesting topics to talk about, so we like him very much. Mr Chan is **also helpful**. When we tell him our troubles, he gives us useful advice. We're lucky to have such a good teacher. **Lastly**, Mr Chan is a **healthy** person. He doesn't get sick easily. He's good at water sports. He's been my PE teacher for many years.

What makes Mr Chan a good teacher?

- 1. Humorous**
 - looks funny
 - has many interesting topics
- 2. Helpful**
 - tell him our troubles
 - gives us useful advice
- 3. Healthy**
 - does not get sick easily
 - good at water sports




Pupils should make decisions about what is important and what can be left out when taking notes. They should be guided to identify the main points and supporting details as well as to understand that there is no need to jot down all the words they hear.

In this example, pupils are asked to note down what makes Mr Chan a good teacher and give supporting details. With a clear focus in mind, pupils will know what they have to listen for. Teachers should remind pupils of the organisation of the text. Usually, the main points are followed by the supporting details. The adjectives (e.g. humorous, helpful, healthy) are used to describe the special qualities of a good teacher and they are the main points, whereas the explanation and elaboration which follow the adjectives are the supporting details. Teachers can also draw pupils' attention to the connectives (e.g. first, also, lastly) that signal to pupils they are going to hear a new idea.

With sufficient practice and exposure to note-taking activities, pupils will be able to develop the skills progressively.

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Note-taking Skills

Using headings to organise ideas



Hi! My name is Judy. I'm a primary two pupil and I'm studying at Green Tree School. Let me tell you more about myself. I was born on 20 February 2004. I love swimming and playing badminton. My favourite subject is English. My telephone number is 7345 1237. My address is Room A, eleventh floor, Lucky Street, North Point, Hong Kong.

1.	Name:	Judy
2.	Level:	P2
3.	School:	Green Tree Sch
4.	Date of Birth:	20 · 2 · 2004
5.	Hobbies:	Swimming badminton
6.	Favourite subject:	Eng
7.	Tel No.:	73451237
8.	Address:	Rm A 11/F. Lucky St. North Pt HK

To help pupils develop note-taking skills, more practice should be provided. Teachers could provide headings so that pupils would know what they should pay attention to while listening. In this example, when pupils are asked to introduce themselves, their classmates could be asked to note down the key points in the form of a table. The headings provided could help pupils jot down the key points.

Apart from taking notes when listening to presentations, pupils could be engaged in authentic activities where note-taking is necessary, such as interviewing a tourist in project learning.

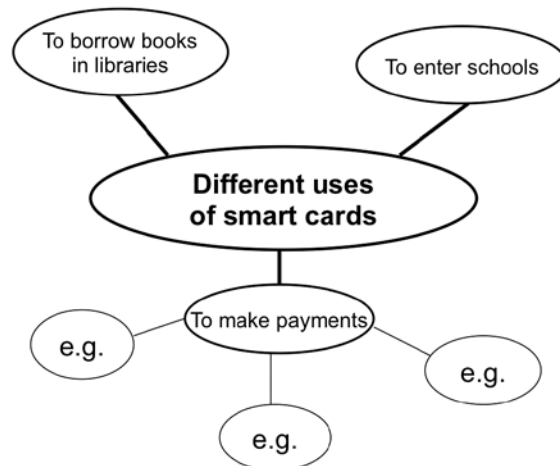
3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Note-taking Skills

Using tables and other graphic organisers to organise ideas

A shopping list for Christmas party:

	Things to buy
Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fish balls • chicken wings • sausages
Drink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cola • fruit juice • water
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paper cups • paper plates • forks

A spider web to show the topic, main ideas and examples:




Tables and other graphic organisers are flexible and convenient tools to help pupils note down information and ideas systematically. Here are two examples:

- a table can be used to list information clearly under different columns / headings, and
- a spider web / mind map can be used to show the topic, main ideas, examples or supporting details clearly.

3) Strategies to Improve Pupils' Note-taking Skills

Using short forms, abbreviations, numbers and symbols to take notes

- Using short forms / abbreviations for units of measurements, places and subjects
- Writing numbers (e.g. telephone number, date, time)
- Using symbols (e.g. ↑ for increase, ↓ for decrease)
- Creating own abbreviations and symbols (e.g. 6 sandwiches → 6 )

Pupils should be taught to use short forms, abbreviations, numbers and symbols when taking notes. Teachers should introduce some commonly used short forms / abbreviations. Pupils should be reminded to use numbers instead of full words, especially in writing telephone numbers and dates. Below are some examples:

a) Units of Measurements

- centimetre (cm), kilogram (kg), feet (ft), two minutes and thirty seconds (2 min 30 sec or 2'30"), hours (hrs or h), percent (%)

b) Time / Days / Months / Dates

- seven o'clock in the morning (7am), Monday (Mon), January (Jan), 28 February 2011 (28.2.2011)

c) Places

- Kowloon (Kln), Mong Kok (MK), Seventh floor (7/F), Street (St), Road (Rd), Building (Bldg), Room (Rm)

d) Subjects

- Chinese (Chi), English (Eng), Mathematics (Maths), General Studies (GS)

e) Other common abbreviations

- with (w/), without (w/o), page (p.)

Pupils can use symbols (e.g. “/.” for “between”; “&” for “and”; “@” for “each”), arrows or simple drawings (e.g. an arrow pointing upward represents an increase; an arrow pointing downward represents a decrease) to note down quickly what they have heard. Pupils can also create their own short forms or abbreviations (e.g. “diff” for “difficult”; “exp” for “expensive”; “rest” for “restaurant”; “Δ” for “sandwiches”).