

What should I do when my child spells some words incorrectly when writing?

Question 18 from *Helping Your Child Become a Reader*
(Scanlon, Anderson, Barnes, Morse, & Yurkewecz-Stellato, 2024)¹

Young children’s unconventional/inaccurate spellings are referred to in various ways including: *invented or inventive spelling*, *kindergarten spelling*, *temporary spelling*, and *sound spelling*. It is OK for children at early points in developing their reading and writing skills to spell in unconventional ways. When children are first attempting to write, they often spell words using only a few of the letters in the word and/or using letters that are not correct. They use letters to stand for the sounds they notice in words.

However, as they do more reading and writing, they begin to represent more of the sounds in the words for which they do not yet know the conventional (accurate) spelling. They usually get to the point where it is possible to understand what they have written. For example, this message: “I lik to swm in the oshin” (*I like to swim in the ocean*) can be read even though some of the words are misspelled. Referring to these attempts as sound spellings can help children understand that, when they write, it is useful to think about the sounds in the words they don’t yet know how to spell and use letters that often stand for those sounds.



When children demonstrate the ability to spell in this way, they typically begin to move toward more conventional (correct) spelling for more and more of the words they write.

It is important to keep in mind that we want children to learn to spell so that they can communicate in writing. Allowing sound spelling at early points in development encourages children to focus more on the communication aspect. They may attempt to write longer and more interesting messages when there’s no pressure to spell every word correctly. As their writing and knowledge of sound/letter relationships matures, their spelling attempts will also become more conventional. They are also likely to learn and use the conventional spellings for the words they encounter frequently in their reading and/or learn through the explicit instruction they receive in school.

¹ The complete 23 question booklet can be accessed at: eltep.org/isa-parent-booklet
All individual questions and the complete booklet can be shared for non-commercial purposes.