



SET Free: Unlocking Spelling for every pupil

Summary of unlocking spelling at Soke Education Trust

We value writing as an important tool for giving a social voice to our pupils. We want every pupil to be able to express themselves through writing. At Soke Education Trust, we recognise that spelling is a critical component of transcription, which must become automatic to enable pupils to focus on expressing their ideas effectively.

Our approach to unlocking writing

At Soke Education Trust, our strategy for teaching spelling is grounded in the writing evidence-base. Highly skilled teachers and teaching assistants use explicit instruction, modelling and scaffolding, and provide plentiful practice and time for pupils to become fluent in transcription. Fully resourced, CUSP Spelling is both teacher facing and pupil facing, building consistency in how Spelling is taught across the school and ensuring that all teachers have the deep subject knowledge required to teach the statutory content of the National Curriculum for Spelling.

The methodology behind our approach

The Simple View of Writing

The simple view of writing shows the importance of reducing the load on working memory, by developing automaticity in transcription and language composition.

Transcription involves the physical process of writing, including spelling and handwriting or typing. It is the ability to accurately and fluently convert ideas into written language at the word level. Composition refers to the ability to develop and organise ideas, construct sentences, and convey meaning effectively in writing. This depends on pupils' language skills, including vocabulary, grammar, and the capacity to structure coherent texts.

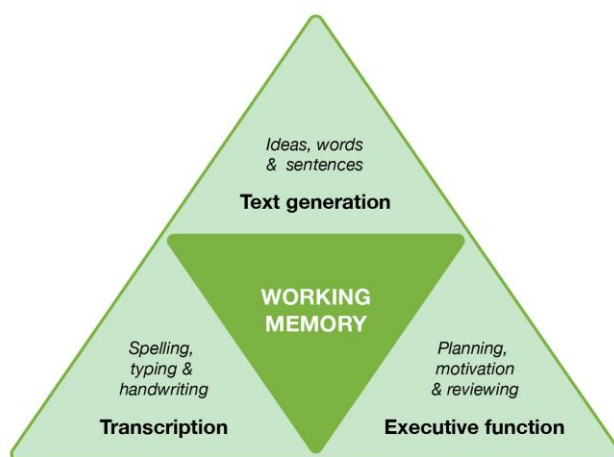
Strong writing outcomes require simultaneous development of both transcription skills and compositional abilities. Pupils who struggle with language skills need targeted support to



develop their spoken language and vocabulary, which underpin effective writing. High quality talk and language-rich environments are vital in developing these skills.

The simple view of writing highlights the importance of providing pupils with rich language experiences and explicit teaching of both the mechanics of writing and the skills to express ideas clearly and coherently.

Figure 10: Based on 'The Simple View of Writing'



The Simple View of Writing, EEF, 2025

The Writing Framework (DfE, July 2023)

The writing framework recommends prioritising early foundations for writing and focussing on automaticity in transcription to enable pupils to have available working memory to develop their voice as writers.

The framework provides the following recommendations for developing accuracy in spelling:

- Emphasise early language development and fine motor skills in Early Years to build writing readiness.
- Systematic teaching of phonics and spelling is crucial for early writing accuracy.
- Writing should move from transcription (spelling and handwriting) to composition (planning, drafting, revising).





Our approach in practice

Phonics and handwriting

Phonics instruction is crucial in developing pupils' spelling and handwriting skills, which are foundational for fluent writing. Secure phonics skills reduce the cognitive load of spelling, allowing pupils to focus on composing their ideas clearly and effectively. All Soke Education Trust schools use approved Systematic Synthetic Phonics schemes, with fidelity; all have had support from the New Wave English Hub to ensure that staff have the CPD, systems and resources they need to effectively teach their chosen scheme, through EYFS, KS1 and into KS2.

By using the phonics schemes with fidelity, we can ensure pupils have the foundations for Spelling (Encoding): they learn the alphabetic code, helping them understand how sounds (phonemes) map to letters or groups of letters (graphemes). This skill is essential for spelling words correctly, which is a critical component of writing.

Writing fluently depends on transcription skills—handwriting and spelling. Phonics instruction strengthens spelling by enabling pupils to segment words into sounds and identify the corresponding graphemes, making spelling more accurate and automatic. When pupils have secure phonics skills, they spend less mental effort on spelling. This frees up working memory to focus on higher-level writing tasks such as planning, composing, and structuring their ideas effectively.

We prioritise development of gross and fine motor skills, correct pencil grip and fluent handwriting. We use dictation as a means of practice: dictated sentences use taught grapheme-phoneme correspondences and provide pupils with structured opportunities to practice spelling, handwriting and sentence construction without the added difficulty of composing independently, thus reinforcing transcription fluency.

By mastering phonics and handwriting, pupils gain confidence in their ability to write words fluently and correctly, which supports their motivation and ability to produce written work. Over time, these skills integrate to support fluent, effective writing.





Vocabulary and language development

Developing vocabulary and language is a crucial part of becoming a writer with a voice, who can choose words and phrases to have the desired impact on the reader.

We use high quality talk from Early Years onwards to reflect recast and develop pupils vocabulary and grammar and engage them so they can express ideas and thoughts clearly. When pupils can say their complete thoughts, they can write them. Alongside explicit vocabulary instruction, this supports pupils in becoming confident and proficient writers.

Pupils who lack a well-developed vocabulary struggle to communicate effectively in writing. All pupils and especially those who are word-poor, benefit significantly from explicit vocabulary instruction, which helps to close word gaps early. We aim to develop a broad and deep vocabulary as we know this correlates with better writing outcomes. Teaching vocabulary explicitly is crucial, especially in early years and Key Stage 1 and we use CUSP Structured Story-time and the Drawing Club across the Trust to support this crucial aspect.

Writing quality improves when pupils have strong knowledge of the topic and understand the genre, linguistic, and grammatical features of texts. For this reason, teachers provide models of effective writing and ensure pupils write about curriculum content they have studied. They also focus on the audience in order to motivate and ensure that pupils develop awareness of their readers' needs and how their writing might be interpreted.

Effective writing instruction also includes explicit teaching of foundational skills such as sentence construction and grammar. This alongside the process of planning, drafting, revising and editing supports writing development. These elements are supported by our choice of writing scheme, which incorporates these aspects as part of daily writing, rather than a separate activity. This also helps pupils to develop their self-regulation and metacognitive skills in order that they can start to improve their writing independently.

CUSP Spelling

All Soke Education Trust schools use CUSP Spelling to teach whole-class spelling sessions. CUSP spelling is aligned to the DfE's writing framework and has a clear evidence-based pedagogical framework, which engineers success for all learners.

The CUSP Spelling curriculum is organised into 2-week blocks, with each block covering a particular set of key concepts, including spelling patterns, etymology and morphology and reasoning about spelling. These blocks are made up of three lessons per week: 2 x 15 minute





(minimum) discrete Spelling lessons and 1 x Spelling starter for the final Writing lesson of each week. CUSP-Spelling-Teacher-Handbook

Years 2-6 have 16 x 2-week blocks, leaving a small number of weeks for flexible content. This could include revisiting, assessment or enrichment. Year 1 has 6 blocks, which can be delivered during the summer term to begin to build on pupils' strong grasp of phonics at this point. CUSP-Spelling-Teacher-Handbook

Weekly Lesson Pattern

The sequence of a block follows a routine pattern to ensure that both teachers and pupils can become familiar with the rhythm of a unit. CUSP-Spelling-Teacher-Handbook

Week	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3 (within writing)
1	Teach new concept	Apply new concept	Reasoning and Spelling transfer
2	Etymology focus	Revisit previous concept	Correction Spelling transfer

Key Principles: Pattern Seeking, Not Rules

The curriculum is not built around the rote memorisation of spelling 'rules'; instead, the focus is building on what pupils have learnt about the alphabetic code through Phonics lessons and teaching them to seek patterns and reason about how to spell new or unfamiliar words.

Year-by-Year Progression

Reception and Year 1

Reception Focus: To make sure children get off to the best start, the emphasis in reception should be on building the foundations for it: transcription and composition. Children need to be able to compose orally (say out loud what they want to write) and know how to form letters, spell and punctuate correctly.

Year 1 Blocks (6 blocks - Summer Term):

Key concepts covered include:

- Common exception words
- Adding -s and -es to words
- Adding -ing, -ed and -er to verbs where no change is needed





- Adding -er and -est to adjectives
- Adding the prefix -un

The vast majority of pupils should develop strong foundations in their understanding of the alphabetic code before the end of Year 1. CUSP Spelling includes 6 x 2 week blocks of study that can be used at the end of Year 1, where pupils have secured the required understanding of Phonics.

Year 2 (16 blocks)

Covers concepts including:

- Common exception words (Y1 revisited and Y2 introduced)
- The /dʒ/ sound patterns (-ge, -dge, g before e/i/y)
- The /s/ sound spelt c before e, i and y
- Homophones and near-homophones
- Word endings (-le, -el, -al, -il)
- Adding suffixes to words ending in -y
- Contractions
- The suffixes -ment, -ness, -ful, -less and -ly

Year 3 (16 blocks)

Focus on:

- Revisiting KS1 concepts (common exception words, suffixes, homophones)
- Y3/4 statutory word list
- Adding suffixes to multi-syllable words
- Prefixes (un-, dis-, mis-, in-, il-, im-, ir-)
- The suffix -ation
- The suffix -ly
- Rare GPCs

Year 4 (16 blocks)

Includes:

- Statutory word list
- Extended prefix work (re-, sub-, inter-, super-, anti-, auto-)
- Word endings (-tion, -sion, -ssion, -cian)
- The suffix -ous





- Homophones (revisited and extended)
- Words with /k/ sound spelt ch
- Words with /s/ sound spelt sc

Year 5 (16 blocks)

Covers:

- Revisiting Y3/4 statutory words
- Advanced suffix and prefix work
- Word endings (-cial, -tial, -cious, -tious)
- Complex homophones
- Words ending in -ant/-ance/-ancy, -ent/-ence/-ency
- Words ending in -able/-ible and -ably/-ibly

Year 6 (16 blocks)

Final year includes:

- Comprehensive revision of all previous concepts
- Statutory word list mastery
- Adding suffixes to words ending in -fer
- Words containing -ough
- Words with 'silent' letters
- Flexible content blocks for consolidation

Spelling Transfer

Each week includes "Spelling transfer" sessions which focus on the application of spelling knowledge into writing. This deliberate focus ensures pupils can apply their learning in authentic writing contexts.

Integration with Writing Lessons

Session 3 each week takes place within writing lessons, focusing on:

Week 1: Reasoning and Spelling transfer

Week 2: Correction and Spelling transfer





This integration ensures spelling is not taught in isolation but as part of the writing process, which aligns with typical writing framework expectations around editing, proofreading, and applying spelling knowledge in composition.

Error Correction and Proofreading

The curriculum includes systematic teaching of:

- **Shine a Light tasks:** Pupils highlight words using taught concepts in their own writing
- **Spotlight on Spelling:** Pupils identify correctly and incorrectly spelled words in their writing
- **Error correction exercises:** Teaching pupils to identify and correct spelling errors

Etymology and Morphology

Depth word study has formed the foundation of vocabulary instruction across CUSP spelling. The morphemes outlined in the CUSP Spelling long term sequence deliberately align with this progression to build curriculum coherence and ensure that pupils can connect learning across their wider schema of knowledge.

Each block includes systematic study of root words, prefixes, and suffixes, building vocabulary knowledge that supports both spelling and composition.

Assessment Approach

Every year group has three diagnostic spelling assessments completed towards the end of each term. Each assessment is made up of word level testing and a dictation task. The words included represent words that have been taught in the current term, the previous term and, for KS2 only, the coming term.

This assessment approach evaluates both isolated word spelling and spelling transfer into sentences, providing a complete picture of spelling competence.

Resources Included

The CUSP Spelling curriculum provides teachers with teaching slides, subject knowledge explainer videos, home learning tasks, assessment materials and ongoing CPD resources to ensure that teachers' attention can be focussed on developing clear and concise explanations for the key concepts.





Use of the Pupil Premium Grant to unlock spelling

At Soke Education Trust, we are committed to using the Pupil Premium grant strategically to narrow the attainment gap for our disadvantaged pupils. We use Pupil Premium funding to enhance high-quality teaching, provide targeted academic support, and implement wider strategies addressing barriers to writing development. Emphasising structured writing strategies, fluent transcription skills, and targeted teaching will help close the writing attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils. We prioritise high-quality teaching and targeted academic support as the most effective means to accelerate progress.

We invest in professional development for teachers, including training in systematic synthetic phonics and mastery-based approaches to literacy and then use additional CPD, coaching and mentoring to enhance teacher expertise in teaching spelling.





EEF literacy Guidance

To unlock writing for every pupil, we follow EEF guidance:

EEF preparing for literacy	EEF Improving literacy in KS1	EEF Improving literacy in KS2
EYFS and preschool	KS1	KS2
<p>Recommendation 1: Prioritise the development of communication and language - high quality interactions; shared and interactive reading; storytelling; explicit vocabulary instruction</p>	<p>Recommendation 1: Develop pupils’ speaking and listening skills and wider understanding of language - high quality adult interactions; explicit and implicit approaches to teaching vocabulary; collaborative activities to use, learn and hear language</p>	<p>Recommendation 1: Develop pupils; language capabilities - purposeful speaking and listening activities such as discussing, reading aloud articulating ideas; high quality dialogue that develops thinking and use of language; explicit vocabulary instruction</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Develop children’s capability and motivation to write - Develop gross and fine motor skills; teach and use expressive language; develop motivation to write through a wide range of opportunities; support children to develop the foundations of a fast, accurate, and efficient handwriting style, providing additional support as necessary</p>	<p>Recommendation 5: Teach pupils to use strategies for planning and monitoring their writing - teach pupils to plan and monitor their writing; include pre-writing activities, drafting, editing and revising, sharing; provide teacher modelling and structured support for writing, with support gradually reducing to promote independence</p>	<p>Recommendation 4: Teach writing composition strategies through modelling and supported practice - engage pupils in planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing their writing; model these strategies and support pupils with practice alongside feedback; gradually reduce support to increase independence; give reasons to write and an audience so that pupils adapt their writing for different audiences</p>
<p>Preparing for Literacy KS1, Recommendation 3: Effectively implement a systematic phonics programme - SSP that explicitly teach comprehension and spelling; training, responsiveness to formative assessment, engagement, adaptations and focused teaching; (rec.1 and 2 of engaging parents); talk to less-involved parents about what would help them; support parents to have regular reading routines at home; consider initiatives that involve summer reading</p>		
<p>Recommendation 4: Embed opportunities to</p>	<p>Recommendation 6: Promote fluent written</p>	<p>Recommendation 5: Develop pupils’ transcription and</p>



<p>develop self-regulation - use the 'Plan-Do-Review' cycle; embed opportunities to develop self-regulation within day-to-day activities; monitor the development of children's self-regulation and ensure activities remain suitably challenging.</p>	<p>transcription skills by encouraging extensive and purposeful practice and explicitly teaching spelling - develop fluency in handwriting, typing and spelling to ensure transcription is accurate; provide purposeful practice and effective feedback; give time for practice and for pupils to engage in improving their writing; teach spellings explicitly</p>	<p>sentence construction skills through extensive practice - focus on handwriting, spelling and sentence construction, giving extensive practice and support to develop fluency in these skills; monitor and promote fluent handwriting; identify strategies to improve pupils' spelling; explicitly teach spelling and provide opportunities to practice spelling and sentence construction, leading to fluency</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: use high-quality assessment to ensure all children make good progress: Keep up and catch up methodology; tracking through phonics scheme to ensure the right support at the right time; use of assessments to inform practice; adjustments to engineer success for all</p>	<p>Recommendation 7: Use high quality information about pupils; current capabilities to select the best steps for teaching - high quality, timely information; the right support at the right time; use models of reading to diagnose the next area of focus; alternative approaches to develop each aspect of reading</p>	<p>Recommendation 6: Target teaching and support by accurately assessing pupil needs - high quality, timely information; the right support at the right time; formative assessment as part of classroom strategies; diagnostic assessments to ensure accurate teaching; well trained staff</p>
<p>Recommendation 7: use high quality targeted support to help struggling children: Small group interventions; the most capable adults for our children with the greatest need; evidence-based approaches delivered with fidelity</p>	<p>Recommendation 8: Use high quality structured interventions to help pupils who are struggling with their literacy - quality first teaching of reading; interventions carefully matched to needs; one-to-one and small group tutoring with structured evidence-based interventions; regular review of progress to ensure impact</p>	<p>Recommendation 7: Use high quality structured interventions to help pupils who are struggling with literacy - quality first teaching of reading; interventions carefully matched to needs; carefully match pupils with structured evidence-based interventions; regular review of progress to ensure impact</p>



<p>Recommendation 1: For all pupils: create a positive and supportive environment; promote positive relationships, active engagement, and wellbeing; the best possible teaching; positive behaviour management approaches</p>	<p>Recommendation 2: Build an ongoing, holistic understanding of your pupils and their needs - 'assess, plan, do, review' approach; assessment that is regular and purposeful; teachers who are empowered and trusted to use the information they collect to make a decision about the next steps for teaching that child</p>	<p>Recommendation 3: Ensure all pupils have access to high quality teaching - quality first teaching; flexible grouping, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, explicit instruction, using technology to support pupils with SEND, scaffolding</p>	<p>Recommendation 4: Complement high quality teaching with carefully selected small-group and one-to-one interventions - total inclusion; interventions that increase with need; accurate assessment and carefully targeted interventions</p>	<p>Recommendation 5: Work effectively with teaching assistants - Effective deployment of teaching assistants; ensure positive impact of TA deployment on pupils with SEND; TAs that supplement, not replace, teaching from the classroom teacher</p>
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OFSTED Research Review Series: English.

[DfE Writing Framework 2025](#)

