

Using Word Sorts to Enhance Reading and Spelling

Closed Sorts

- **Choose the categories and model the sorting procedure.**
Example: Present three categories, read three words (bolded), and place them in the correct column. Then, ask students to sort the remaining words.

<u>Short /i/ words</u>	<u>short /u/ words</u>	<u>short /a/ words</u>
pig	gum	man

Other words: *jug, bit, pat, run, wag, big, dug, kit, cat, plan, lip, hum, tan, cub, chin, clap, cut.*

- **Introduce patterns without naming the categories.**

For example, students have mastered short vowel sounds (CVC words) and are ready to learn long vowels. Introduce the VCe pattern by using a word sort. The words to be sorted might include: *van, vane, pan, pane, can, cane, Jan, Jane, man, mane, mad, made, hat, hate, tap, tape, cut, cute.* Sort the words and discuss the new pattern.

- **Word sorts can be designed to focus on a single new concept or can be used for a review with mixed concepts.**

For example, students know the CVC pattern with short /a/, so you create a sort with /a/ words and the new /o/ sound. An example of a mixed design would be sorting for all the short vowel sounds.

- **Word sorts can be scaffolded for struggling readers by choosing known words, by keeping the sorts focused on a single new category, and by providing more modeling. Color code the spelling pattern. Example: plaid**

Open Sorts

- **Students organize sets of words into categories based on what they notice about the words.**

Open sorts are most effective after students have had many opportunities with closed sorts and understand the concept of sorting.

Two-Step Sorts

- As students begin to understand the complexities of short and long vowel sounds, they may be asked to do two-step word sorts. First they sort for sound and then for spelling.

For example: In step one, students sort for sound.

<u>Short /a/</u>	<u>Long /a/</u>
<i>dad</i>	<i>make</i>
<i>flag</i>	<i>pale</i>
<i>fan</i>	<i>great</i>
<i>crab</i>	<i>paint</i>
<i>fast</i>	<i>mail</i>
<i>grass</i>	<i>say</i>
<i>pal</i>	<i>day</i>

In step two, students sort for spelling.

<u>ay</u>	<u>ai</u>	<u>ea</u>	<u>VCe</u>
<i>day</i>	<i>mail</i>	<i>great</i>	<i>make</i>
<i>say</i>	<i>paint</i>		<i>pale</i>

Writing Sorts

- Writing sorts provide opportunities for students to practice spelling words.

Words are sorted on paper or dry-erase boards.

Words are written down under category headings of key words.

Writing sorts can be done individually, with partners, or in small groups.

Blind Sorts

- Even when teachers incorporate sound and pattern, students sometimes rely primarily on visual patterns.

For example, when sorting short /i/ and short /a/ words, students may just place all the words with *a* in one category and all the words with *i* in the other.

- Blind sorts reduce students' reliance on visual cues. Words are spoken and sorted without students seeing them.

Blind sorts force students to depend on their knowledge of sounds and their associated pattern to determine where to place words.

- **Blind sorts involve students working with a partner. Key words are placed in front of the students. One student calls out the words.**
- **Without looking at the word, the other student decides where the word belongs and points to the appropriate category. The word is then placed in that category. Mistakes are corrected.**
- **Once all the words are placed, the student who did the sorting reads all the words under each category. Then roles are reversed.**
- **Blind sorts can also be written.**

In a written blind sort, students write the words under the key words instead of pointing. This kind of sort can be done in small groups as well as with partners.

- **Substituting pictures and/or including words that are exceptions to the patterns being sorted can also be effective.**
- **Blind sorts can be used to monitor students' word study and spelling progress.**

Speed Sorts

- **Speed sorts are practiced after students can accurately categorize words. The objective is to develop automaticity.**

Speed sorts can be practiced with a partner. Students alternate between sorting and timing the activity. Students sort words more than once, trying to improve their speed while maintaining accuracy.

Word Hunts

- **Word hunts provide extensions for word sorts. Word hunts encourage students to find other words in their reading that contain similar spelling patterns and sounds.**

Encourage students to identify words that do not fit under the word-sort categories. Noticing these words can lead to understanding that exceptions may have commonalities as well.

For example, *have*, *love*, and *give* are exceptions to the common VCe pattern.

Adapted from: Bear, D. R., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnston, F. (2000). *Words their way: Word study for phonics, vocabulary and spelling instruction* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill; Ganske, K. (2000). *Word journeys: Assessment-guided phonics, spelling, and vocabulary instruction*. New York: Guilford Press.