

In order to tailor instruction appropriately for children, it is important for teachers to learn about their students' orthographic understandings. As previously discussed, ongoing monitoring of students' writing is one part of the information-gathering process (see Laminack & Wood, 1996, for a discussion of evaluating spelling in context); periodic assessment with a dictated word inventory, such as the Developmental Spelling Analysis (DSA), is another.

I devised the DSA with teachers in mind. Teachers typically have classes of 20 to 30 students and many curricular demands to meet. The often difficult and time-consuming process of analyzing and interpreting children's spellings for instructional purposes needs to be quick and easy. The DSA enables teachers to readily and confidently identify children's stages of spelling development, highlight specific strengths and weaknesses in featural knowledge so instruction can be timely and appropriate, and monitor progress over time. The DSA includes a Screening Inventory and two different, but parallel, Feature Inventories. The Screening Inventory identifies the developmental spelling stage of students. The Feature Inventories provide more specific information and are used to determine the particular instructional needs of students. Both components may be used with individuals, small groups, or an entire class. This chapter describes how the inventories are used. A summary of the key steps appears at the end of the chapter for future reference.

## THE SCREENING INVENTORY



The main purpose of the Screening Inventory (Figure 2-1) is to determine a child's stage of development so that the appropriate portion of the Feature Inventory can be dictated. The screening device consists of 20 words that become progressively more difficult. The words are grouped into sets of five, with each set focusing on a different stage of word knowledge, beginning with letter name. Although the Screening Inventory has been found to accurately identify a child's stage of development over 90% of the time (Ganske, 1999), it is not intended for repeated use with the same students. Once a child's stage of spelling development is initially established and the Feature Inventory is used, the Screening Inventory is no longer necessary.

### Dictation

Consider the following guidelines before starting:

1. Be familiar with the inventory.
2. Minimize distractions, and encourage a relaxed atmosphere. I let students know that I will not be grading their papers but will instead use the information to understand how to help them learn more about words.

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**Directions:** I am going to say some words that I want you to spell for me. Some of the words will be easy to spell, and some will be more difficult. When you don't know how to spell a word, just do the best you can. Each time, I will say the word, then use it in a sentence, and then I will say the word again.

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| 1. hen          | The <u>hen</u> sat on her eggs.                                |
| 2. wish         | The boy made a <u>wish</u> and blew out the candles.           |
| 3. trap         | A spider web is a <u>trap</u> for flies.                       |
| 4. jump         | A kangaroo can <u>jump</u> high.                               |
| 5. brave        | A <u>brave</u> dog scared the robbers.                         |
|                 | * * *  |
| 6. smile        | A <u>smile</u> shows that you're happy.                        |
| 7. grain        | One kind of <u>grain</u> is called wheat.                      |
| 8. crawl        | The baby can <u>crawl</u> but not walk.                        |
| 9. clerk        | The <u>clerk</u> sold some shoes to me.                        |
| 10. clutch      | The <u>clutch</u> in the car needed fixing.                    |
|                 | * * *  |
| 11. palace      | The king and queen live in a <u>palace</u> .                   |
| 12. observe     | I like to <u>observe</u> birds at the feeder.                  |
| 13. shuffle     | Please <u>shuffle</u> the cards before you deal.               |
| 14. exciting    | The adventure story I'm reading is very <u>exciting</u> .      |
| 15. treason     | The man was found guilty of <u>treason</u> .                   |
|                 | * * *  |
| 16. column      | His picture was in the first <u>column</u> of the newspaper.   |
| 17. variety     | A grocery store has a wide <u>variety</u> of foods.            |
| 18. extension   | The workers need an <u>extension</u> ladder to reach the roof. |
| 19. competition | There was much <u>competition</u> between the two businesses.  |
| 20. illiterate  | An <u>illiterate</u> person is one who cannot read.            |

Stop when a child has spelled 0 or 1 word correctly out of any set of 5.

**FIGURE 2-1.** The DSA Screening Inventory.

3. Instruct students to print their responses on the reproducible answer sheet found in Appendix 2 so that scoring will be easier. Sharpened pencils also help.
4. Speak clearly and distinctly when reading the items, but avoid over-emphasizing parts of the target word.
5. Dictate the number of the item, say the word, read the sentence, and then repeat the word before moving on to the next item. (Primary grade teachers may omit the sentence if the children find it distracting.)
6. Allow sufficient time for students to respond, but move along quickly.
7. Encourage reluctant spellers to write what they can.

Begin by dictating the first set of five words. Continue dictating succeeding sets as long as students are able to spell at least two of the words within the set. *As soon as someone spells only one or none of the words correctly, that child may stop.* In a small-group or individual setting, it is easy to monitor who should stop when. However, when a whole class is being assessed, use one of the following alternative approaches. Dictate the entire list to all students, watching for anyone who may be frustrated by words beyond the stopping point, so that you can quietly tell them they may stop if they wish. In classrooms where children's efforts at representing "big words" are routinely encouraged and respected, even the very young are usually willing to try. The dictation may also be spread out over more than one day, enabling you to review the results and determine which students need to stop. Regardless of which alternative you choose, be sure to observe the above criterion for stopping when scoring the papers.

### Scoring

Score the Screening Inventory by awarding one point for each correctly spelled word. *If a child completed any sets of words beyond the stopping point, these words receive scores of zero, regardless of their spelling accuracy.* Record the number of correctly spelled items at the top of each child's paper. To identify the likely stage of development, locate the child's score on the chart in Figure 2-2.

As the chart reveals, a few scores suggest two possible stages instead of one. Students in transition from one stage to another tend to achieve scores at the upper end of one set or at the lower end of the following set—namely, scores of 5 or 6, 10 or 11, 15 or 16. These individuals often vary in their actual stage of development. For example, some students with scores of 10 or 11 are within word pattern spellers, while others are at the syllable juncture stage of development. Because of this variation, both stages are listed as possibilities. Performance on the Feature Inventory is used to determine which stage is more appropriate.

Students with scores of 1 or 0 on the Screening Inventory also tend to vary in their stage of development. Those with scores of 1 may or may not be at the letter name stage. Sometimes children achieve this score due to familiarity with a specific word on the list, and yet on the whole, they may not exhibit spelling knowledge characteristic of this stage. By contrast, a child who is unable to spell any of the first five words correctly may nonetheless exhibit considerable knowledge of individual spelling features. A close look at the

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Inventory score	Predicted stage(s)
20	DC
19	DC
18	DC
17	DC
16	SJ/DC
15	SJ/DC
14	SJ
13	SJ
12	SJ
11	WW/SJ
10	WW/SJ
9	WW
8	WW
7	WW
6	LN/WW
5	LN/WW
4	LN
3	LN
2	LN
1	LN*
0	LN*

\*Children who achieve scores of 1 or 0 may or may not be letter name stage spellers.

**FIGURE 2-2.** The Screening Inventory prediction chart: Identifying students' stage(s) of development from the Screening Inventory.

spellings of these children can determine the value of progressing with the Feature Inventory. In general, if the spellings indicate attention to initial and final sounds, and especially if a vowel has been included, dictation of the letter name portion of the Feature Inventory is recommended.

After you have identified a child's likely stage(s) of development on the chart, note the result on the answer sheet by circling the appropriate letter at the top: *L* for letter name, *W* for within word pattern, *S* for syllable juncture, or *D* for derivational constancy. When this process is complete, information can be gathered from the Feature Inventory. The Screening Inventory snapshots of Chris and Tracy in Figure 2-3 illustrate how this process works.

### THE FEATURE INVENTORIES



Two different Feature Inventories, Forms A and B, were developed for the DSA so that children would not become overly familiar with certain words as a result of repeated use. Each inventory has separate lists for the letter name, within word pattern, syllable juncture, and derivational constancy stages of word knowledge. The individual lists contain 25 words that focus on five different spelling features. Although the words are different for the two inventories, the orthographic features are the same.

The Feature Inventories are designed for flexible use and enable teachers to choose between a brief assessment option and a more comprehensive one. The procedures for the two are similar. The primary differences are that the brief approach provides teachers with less information and takes less time to administer than the more comprehensive approach.

With the brief option, information is gathered about a child's stage of development only. This provides useful instructional information and entails minimal dictation of words. Students with LN predicted as their stage complete the letter name list; those with WW complete the within word pattern list; those with LN and WW complete both; and so on. This option enables teachers to determine which features are areas of strength, which seem to be relatively weak, and how well the child can accurately spell words at this stage, thereby making it easy to plan appropriate instruction.

The comprehensive option provides the same instructional information as the brief approach. However, because it is more extensive, it enables teachers to assess the full range of a child's word knowledge, not just stage of development performance. While this makes the process somewhat more time-consuming, it insures that students begin responding to words that are relatively easy to spell, thereby building their confidence. The information that results from this approach leads to a *total inventory score*, which is useful for following children's progress from year to year as well as for comparing the progress of students.

One method is not better than another. The choice is a matter of the teacher's purpose, which may differ over the course of a school year. Most teachers prefer to gather comprehensive data once or twice a year to document overall progress, but rely on stage