

Correcting high-frequency word spelling errors

It is important that students do not practise writing high-frequency words incorrectly because this very quickly reinforces the incorrect spelling. As beginning writers, students tackle writing words they cannot immediately spell from their sight-word memory by writing the sequence of sounds they hear. They may write words like this: *thay, woz, sed, becos, poot, wen, haz, mi* and so forth.

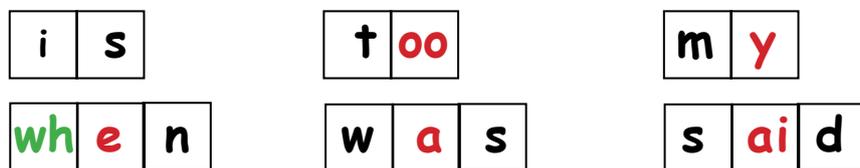
It is always important to first of all acknowledge what students have done correctly.

For example: A beginning writer has written *they* as *thay*.

“How clever are you! You have written both sounds in *they* the way they could be written. Look, you’ve put a **th** for the /th/ and an **ay** for the long /a/ sound – and you’ve spelled the long /a/ sound the way we do in lots of words like *Monday, Tuesday, play*. Do you know, that in the word *they*, the long /a/ sound is written with an **ey**, not an **ay**, so *they* looks like this – a **th** for the /th/ and an **ey** for the long /a/. Let’s put that word in your spelling notebook and we’ll write the **ey** in a different colour to help you remember how to spell the long /a/ sound in *they*.”

th ey

You can use the same approach with any high-frequency words that are spelled phonetically accurately, but not correctly, highlighting the spelling patterns for different sounds in different colours, different sizes, or by writing them in Elkonin boxes.



Older students who have been practising writing high-frequency words incorrectly for years are likely to be unaware of the way they spell them as they write. If you asked these students to spell the word *they* aloud, they will most likely say **t h e y**, but they continue to write *thay* without being aware of this. This is not because they are lazy or careless. It is simply that they taught themselves to write the word this way as a beginning speller and they now write it this way from habit. By explaining the strategy that students use to teach themselves to spell as young writers, and showing them how easy it is for incorrect spelling to become a habit, you will remove the sense of embarrassment and shame that many of these older spellers feel when they make errors with these seemingly simple high-frequency words.

The quickest way to help older spellers who write high-frequency words inaccurately, is to provide them with a cardboard bookmark and ask them to find the high-frequency words they commonly miss-spell (you may need to help them with this) and to write the correct spelling for these on the bookmark. At the end of *every* piece of writing, you will need to allow a five minute proofreading period for these students to go through their writing to look for these specific words and to correct them; they will find this easy to do.