SENTENCE MAKING
SPELLING &
SENTENCE WRITING

READING TO LEARN
Accelerating learning and closing the gap
ABOUT THIS BOOK

The focus of this book is on the intensive strategies, Sentence Making, Spelling and Sentence Writing. So we are now in the inner circle of the R2L strategies.
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INTENSIVE STRATEGIES

Sentence Making, Spelling and Sentence Writing can be used to provide a higher level of support for students to practise skills in reading and writing, following Detailed Reading, but before they go on to Rewriting.

They are powerful techniques for reinforcing foundation skills, but integrated with reading and writing the curriculum.

They can be used every day in the primary classroom, and for additional support in the high school. In the first years of school, they are the fundamental strategies for introducing children to the skills of reading and writing.

The first section of this book sets out the strategies for Sentence Making, Spelling and Sentence Writing.

The second section provides an overview of the English spelling system to use in your teaching.

The third section shows a lesson sequence using Sentence Making, Spelling and Sentence Writing to explore meanings, along with grammar, spelling, punctuation and guiding students to write new texts.
SENTENCE MAKING

Sentence Making is an extremely powerful strategy for giving your students total control over the language in a text. In Sentence Making activities the learners are taking greater control of the reading and writing process. So it is an important step towards independent practice. It has three broad functions:

- It intensifies the discussion of meanings and wordings from Detailed Reading
- It enables learners to manipulate wordings to create meaningful sentences without the added load of hand writing
- As individual words are cut out they can be used to practise spelling.

The most effective way to do Sentence Making is in groups, as your students can share ideas and help each other with the learning tasks. This is also a great way to teach cooperative behaviour in a supported activity. It is a valuable step from whole class to individual practice.

The teacher first writes a paragraph from the Detailed Reading passage on cardboard strips. Eight strips can be cut lengthwise from a sheet of light cardboard. Write the words large enough to be easily cut up and manipulated. Make a set of strips for each group of up to six students.

In the first Sentence Making activity, you guide students to identify and cut out wordings in the strips. As in Detailed Reading, you guide them to identify chunks of meaning, expressed by groups of words. Instead of highlighting, students take turns to cut up the word groups, and put them back in the sentence. This focuses their attention on the patterns of word groups that make up each sentence. This is a powerful step towards controlling patterns of grammar.

To guide them you use a similar discussion as you did for Detailed Reading. However less preparation is now needed for students to identify words and groups, and you can also elaborate with more detail and discussion.

Once the students have cut up all the word groups, they mix them up, put them back together, and rearrange them into new patterns, using their imagination. This can be a fun game, trying to make new sentence that make sense (or not). Each group then reads their sentences to the class, which you can praise and discuss.

In the next step, you guide the class to cut up the word groups into individual words, and they play the same rearranging games. Punctuation can also be cut up and arranged, especially complex punctuation such as dialogue.

You should have a set of strips for each group of up to six students, so that all students get a chance to personally cut up and arrange the words. You can manage this by organising students to take turns in each group, to respond to each of your prompts – the first student cuts off first words, the next students cuts off the next words and so on. Watch how the teacher manages this activity in the video lesson Stories.
SPELLING

For spelling practice, you select 3 to 12 words from your sentences, depending on your students’ ages. Ask students to identify these words, and pass them to you. First check that all students can recognise each word out of context. Then you show them or ask them how to cut the word up, get one student to cut, and hold up the card so all can see the letter pattern.

Your students then practise spelling the word on their own whiteboards. These are wonderful aids, as your students can practise, self-correct, rub out and practise again. They can be easily made by laminating an A3 sheet.

Students either write one letter pattern or the whole word, depending on their age. Use the look-cover-write-check technique - show them the word then cover it, and show it again for checking.

Your students should always check and correct their own spelling. If they make errors you can ask them to check but don’t tell them they are wrong. Once they have checked, they can write the word at least three times to lodge it in their memory.

Spelling patterns

There are four levels of spelling patterns you can show students to rapidly improve their spelling, using words they know from the texts you are reading:

- compound words
- word endings and beginnings (suffixes and prefixes)
- multiple syllables ( multisyllabic words)
- Onset and Rhyme of syllables.

The English spelling system is based on the syllable and its parts - Onset and Rhyme. The Onset is the initial consonant or group of consonants, such as st-, str-, sc-, scr-, th-, thr-, tr-. The Rhyme (also spelt ‘Rime’) is the remainder of the syllable, such as eat, ow, ew, ee, ip, ust, ash, ough, ough. Onsets and Rhymes make up the English spelling system.

The full spelling system is on page 8 below.

Break up words as much as you need to for students to remember their letter patterns. Younger children will need practice with each letter pattern. With older students you may just point out the syllables and letter patterns, and let them write the whole word from memory.

Except with very young children there is usually no need to break up rhymes into smaller parts. For example, ough is a regular pattern, so there is usually no need to cut it into ou and gh, although you can point these out. Always keep double letters together.

The relation between sounds and letter patterns depends on the word and syllable they are in. The system is very complex, and can only be learnt in the context of meaningful words, as we learn the rest of language. For this reason this is a much more effective approach than trying to teach sounds and letters out of context.
SENTENCE WRITING

The purpose of Sentence Writing is to support students to practise fluently writing long stretches of meaningful text, without the load of inventing a story for themselves, planning how to write it, thinking of the words to use, and knowing how to spell them.

Once all learners can automatically spell most of the words in the paragraph, they can practise writing the whole paragraph from memory on their boards. To support them to do so, most of the words in the paragraph are turned over on a sentence maker (see Early Years above). Get the weaker students to come out and turn over spelling words (and others they already know), as the whole class reads them.

Leave just a few structure words, like a, the, then, etc, as a framework to help them recall the sequence of meanings. Ask students to say the words again, and get a weaker student to turn them back over to check. Then repeat turning them over, until all students can remember the passage.

As the quicker students write independently, you can support weaker students to write the sentences, by reminding them of the sequence. If needed, you can tell them some words, or even write some, and let them write the rest.

When they have finished writing, the words can be turned back over for the students to check their wording, spelling and punctuation for themselves.

All children enjoy this activity, which can be made a competitive game, and it rapidly improves their writing skills.

When to use the intensive strategies

The activities of Sentence Making, Spelling and Sentence Writing are guaranteed to enable every student to read and write a short passage with complete comprehension and fluency, no matter how hard the text or how low the student’s literacy skills. They are particularly valuable in the primary years, for giving students intensive practice in reading high level texts, and in spelling and hand writing. They can also be used in the secondary school, particularly for giving weaker students intensive practice with curriculum texts.

These strategies should be used whenever weaker students are receiving additional literacy support. Traditional remedial practices of drilling low level skills on low level texts can be abandoned and replaced with Sentence Making, Spelling and Sentence Writing on the same texts that the whole class is working on. This practice rapidly enables weaker students to actively participate in class activities, whether or not the class is using Reading to Learn strategies.

Although the intensive strategies are only used on a
paragraph of text, the practice gives students insights into general patterns of language, that they can immediately transfer to the rest of the Detailed Reading passage, enabling them to read the whole passage with comprehension and fluency. Likewise the practice with the Detailed Reading passage soon enables students to read the rest of a longer text with comprehension and fluency. And practice reading one text, after Detailed Reading, soon enables them to independently read other similar texts.

The principle here is the same as all teachers assume when we teach spelling. We cannot teach students to spell every word in the language; rather we teach selected words containing a range of spelling patterns. Practice spelling these words enables students to recognise and use the same spelling patterns in other words.

Similarly, practice in reading and writing language patterns in Detailed Reading and Rewriting, and more intensively in Sentence Making and Sentence Writing, enables students to recognise and use the same language patterns in other paragraphs, passages and texts.

Furthermore the general skills that students develop in recognising and using language patterns enable them to independently explore patterns in any text they come across, and use them in their writing. Twenty or thirty minutes spent on each of these activities has an enormous payoff in students reading and writing skills.