

CHANGE & CONFIDENCE COME FROM UNDERSTANDING

Providing educators with a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of the English language is a critical step toward providing literacy for all students. Most educators do not have this understanding. Phonics has been researched and proven to be effective to a degree and yet, too many students are deemed "treatment-resisters" due in part to the large percentage of words that phonics cannot explain.

Students deserve a complete understanding of how the writing system works.



Empower Learning Center

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Encourage, Educate, Empower

Change Literacy Education

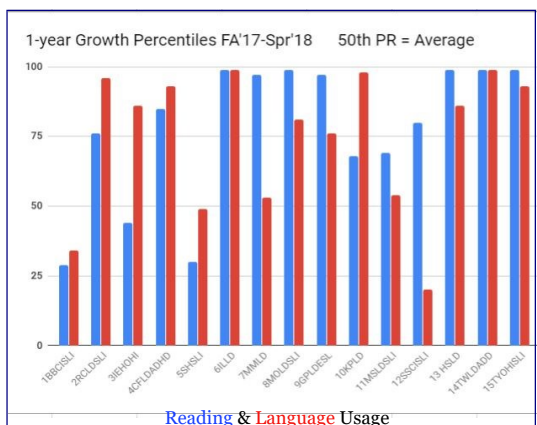


Structured Word Inquiry

Understanding how the English language is structured through the interrelationships of morphology, etymology and phonology provides solid, logical anchoring, especially for dyslexics.

- ♦ Inquiry based instruction
- ♦ Explicit
- ♦ Systematic
- ♦ Direct
- ♦ Scientific

*An **understanding**, not a program*



BUILD CONFIDENT THINKERS THROUGH LITERACY

Students who gain an understanding of the way the language is structured also gain confidence and critical thinking skills as they study the language by working with essential scientific principles.

Guiding principles of Structured Word Inquiry (Bowers & Kirby, 2010)*:

- ♦ The primary function of spelling is to represent meaning.
- ♦ The conventions by which English spelling represents meaning are so well-ordered and reliable that spelling can be investigated & understood through scientific inquiry.
- ♦ Scientific inquiry is the only means by which one can safely accept or reject hypotheses about how spelling works.

*See www.wordworkskingston.com for more info

MORPHOLOGY & ETYMOLOGY

Morphology is the organizing principle for spelling; **words are built from consistently spelled units of meaning**. As students begin to recognize commonly used prefixes and suffixes, they begin also to recognize familiar structures between words. Morphology focuses on that structure and the elements in a word that contribute to a word's sense and meaning.

Etymology is an essential and crucial part of understanding our language. Etymology is the study of the foundational sense of a word, its origins, its evolution through time, and its relatives past and present. Etymology informs phonology as well. For this reason, phonology can't be studied alone.

For example, with the word *comfort*, first, establish the meaning of the word as "ease, relaxation" or "provide ease and relaxation." Next, from an etymological dictionary, determine the Latin root *fortis* "strong, mighty". The root *fortis* provides a hypothetical free base <fort>. Next, assemble relatives that share both this spelling & meaning and test their morphemic structures with word sums to confirm your base element <fort>.

comfortable → com + **fort** + able
 comfortably → com + **fort** + able/ + y
 fortify → **fort** + i + **fy**
 effortless → ef + **fort** + less
 fort → **fort**

Etymology is not only looking at the history of a word but also at its relatives in Modern English. It is not possible to determine the morphological relatives without knowing, through etymological research, that the words are related. For example, students might think that the word 'forty' was related, until they disprove it by checking the etymology of *forty* and learning that this word does not share an etymological ancestor with *fort*. It seems intuitively true that *forty* doesn't have a sense of "strong," but sometimes historical connections are difficult to see in the surface meaning of present day words. **Etymology is the research tool that allows students to verify their hypotheses about relationships between words.**

PHONOLOGY

There are hundreds of dialects of spoken English. If English spelling were based on pronunciation, whose pronunciation would we use?

The traditional approach of trying to spell a word the way it sounds is not going to lead to the correct spelling of the word *comfortable*. Based on a student's pronunciation of this word, they might spell it as *<comfterble>, *<comftubl> or *<comfetable>. There is no way for a student to predict the <or> grapheme from any pronunciation of the word. But, if students know that comforting someone involves giving them strength, and that <comfort> has the same base element as the word *fort*, "a strong structure", then <or> is the obvious grapheme choice for every word in this family.

Having looked at morphology (meaningful structures), etymology (history and relatives) and phonology (phoneme/grapheme correspondence) in the family of <fort>, students can now understand and remember why an <or> must appear in the spelling of the word <comfortable>, whether or not it is pronounced.

Studying the morphology and etymology of any word family, helps us explain the phonology of a word as well as connect it to other words. This also allows for repeated practice spelling and using affixes, solidifying the orthographic patterns. With this simple matrix, below, the presence of <fort> in the spelling of every word in this family can be understood and remembered. And, the student has an anchor to the deeper meaning of all the words in the family. Thus, by studying one word, the student gains access to many.

com ef	fort "strong, mighty"	able	ly
		less	
		ed	
		ing	s
		i	fy
			tude

Latin *fortis*

Lexical Word Matrix represents word family