

Word Challenge - a directed word integration activity.

The task of putting thoughts onto paper is the most complex form of symbolic use. The brain must juggle multiple processes simultaneously. Dr. Louisa Moats of the Houston Health Science Center describes two general processes to help us picture the complexity. [Text Generation](#) is the process of choosing words - translating ideas into words. The second process is called [Transcription](#) and must occur simultaneously if fluent production is to occur. Using pencil, pen or keyboard [transcription](#) demands that the brain must translate phonemes into the physical movement patterns needed for the production of each symbol in the sequence for the word. Get the Scope and Sequence PDF for more info.

Word Challenge is a simple activity designed to provide transcription practice and allow integration and automation for fluent, legible writing in applied work. The challenge is to write the word legibly as it is spelled aloud. Each letter is created as it is called aloud in the spelling sequence. Add another level of fun by writing with the eyes closed*.

1. Display the target words on chart or chalkboard at a size that is visible to all from their seat.
2. Attack the words one at a time using the following sequence of commands to direct the challenge:
 - A. Students chant aloud the letters in a target word as the teacher points to the letter. This step should be repeated to establish the pace for the chant. Pace the rhythm to accommodate your group. Start at a slow pace. Speed is a secondary objective to rhythm. Until a rhythm pattern for the word is internalized, increased rate of production will usually result in chicken scratch or silence. When rhythmic movement stops voices will also quit.
 - B. Once the verbal rhythm is established (usually two or three repetitions) move to airwriting. Pupils write each letter in the air as they spell aloud. Repeat at least twice.
 - C. Move to paper. Unlined will be best at first. As skills improve lined paper can be introduced as a new challenge*. The goal is to keep the voices working which results in rhythmic movement. Use the command sequence: On your mark, get set, spell. At the *spell* command the chant begins and so should the writing. When the chant stops, the writing must stop.
 - D. Concentrate on the verbalization at first. When everyone can get the word on paper with the chant, evaluate the word for legibility. (If they can't do the word you need to do individual letters.)

Divide your word list into groups and work one group each day as part of your spelling/vocabulary effort. You will want to complete all of the words prior to test day but initial trials may take longer. Until skills improve, you may not be able to get through the whole list. Track the results of this effort. Note the time it takes to complete the dictation and writing of the words on test day. Track the time required for the test for at least six weeks. As skills improve the time required for the test will decrease. You will have a record of the teaching time gained from this one application of written language. The time gain will be realized from each classwork activity - a true multiplier. You will have to invest extra time in the beginning but will gain much more as student abilities improve.

* Eyes-closed practice:

Students must learn how to use the internal model for movement guidance. Hopefully this has been accomplished during the training of letter patterns, but word writing adds a new level of difficulty. You rely on the vocal as the indicator. When the student can maintain the vocal it shows that the internal model is involved. When the voices stop it means that the student has switched to external, visual-feedback guidance rather than relying on the internal model. This happens because rhythm is lost. The internal system guides rhythmic movement. The external system cannot move with rhythm. Eyes closed will more easily elicit the use of the internal model because the external visual system has been removed from the process. Be prepared for an excited reaction. Students will be amazed that they can produce anything legible with eyes closed. You will find they want to try again and again. Work to improve the legibility subskills with each iteration.

* Lined and unlined paper:

Word Challenge is designed to demand use of the internal model. Unlined paper makes this easier. Using lined paper creates a different type of demand because the brain must coordinate internal model and the external visual feedback systems to successfully align the movement sequences with the lines on the paper. We want the brain to develop and improve this ability as the long term goal.

For additional ideas - download the PDF file "Teaching Physical Language Skills"
See our reproducible product "Word Masters" for 1000 high frequency words in cursive.