

Teacher Resource · Free resource

Pretest and retest pairs – Year 1

Year group: 1

Source: DfE, *English Appendix 1: Spelling* (2013)

Purpose: Pretest/retest pairs for Y1 common exception words and core phonics patterns.

How to use pretest/retest

The evidence: A pretest-teach-retest cycle is one of the most effective learning routines in spelling research. Pupils who attempt a pretest before instruction show significantly better retention than those who only study and test.

(Source: Kornell, N. et al. (2009). Unsuccessful retrieval attempts enhance subsequent learning. Journal of Experimental Psychology: General.)

The routine:

Monday pretest — pupils attempt the words without having studied them. Mark together immediately. Each pupil circles their own errors.

Tuesday–Thursday teaching — use phonics, dictation, and sorting activities focused on the patterns in the week's words.

Friday retest — same words in a different order. Pupils compare Monday and Friday scores.

One sentence — at the end of the Friday retest, ask pupils to use any word they got wrong on Monday in a sentence correctly. This consolidates learning beyond rote spelling.

A pupil who scores 4/10 on Monday and 9/10 on Friday is experiencing exactly the right kind of learning.

Set 1: High-frequency and exception words – Group A

Focus: the, a, I, is, it, of, in, at, to, and, he, she, we, me, be

Monday pretest:

the · a · I · is · it · of · in · at · to · and · he · she · we · me · be

Friday retest (different order):

be · me · we · she · he · and · to · at · in · of · it · is · I · a · the

Set 2: High-frequency and exception words – Group B

Focus: his, has, had, her, was, for, on, are, but, not · no, go, so, my, by

Monday pretest:

his · has · had · her · was · for · on · are · but · not · no · go · so · my · by

Friday retest:

by · my · so · go · no · not · but · are · on · for · was · her · had · has · his

Set 3: Exception words – common tricky words

Focus: said, says, here, there, where, come, some, one, once, do · you, your, they, love, put

Monday pretest:

said · says · here · there · where · come · some · one · once · do · you · your · they · love · put

Friday retest:

put · love · they · your · you · do · once · one · some · come · where · there · here · says · said

Set 4: Exception words – longer and trickier

Focus: ask · friend · school · full · house · our · push · pull · today · because

Monday pretest:

ask · friend · school · full · house · our · push · pull · today · because

Friday retest:

because · today · pull · push · our · house · full · school · friend · ask

End-of-Year 1 check – all common exception words

Use at the end of Year 1 to check retention of the statutory common exception words.

Test words:

the · a · do · to · today · of · said · says · are · were · was · is · his · has · I · you · your · they · be · he
· me · we · no · go · so · by · my · here · there · where · love · come · some · one · once · ask · friend
· school · put · push · pull · full · house · our

(43 words — administer over two sittings if needed.)

Phonics pattern pretest/retest

Set P1: Double letters – *ff, ll, ss, ck, zz*

Monday pretest:

off · fill · miss · back · buzz · cliff · bell · hiss · lock · fizz · stuff · ball · class · duck · jazz

Friday retest:

jazz · duck · class · ball · stuff · fizz · lock · hiss · bell · cliff · buzz · back · miss · fill · off

Set P2: Split digraph (magic e) – short vs long vowel

Monday pretest:

cap · cape · hop · hope · bit · bite · cut · cute · hat · hate · pin · pine · not · note · kit · kite

Friday retest:

kite · kit · note · not · pine · pin · hate · hat · cute · cut · bite · bit · hope · hop · cape · cap

Set P3: Plural spellings – *-s* and *-es*

Monday pretest (pupils write the plural):

cat → ? · fox → ? · bus → ? · church → ? · dog → ? · box → ? · wish → ? · king → ? · brush → ? · bench → ?

Friday retest (same, different order):

bench → ? · brush → ? · king → ? · wish → ? · box → ? · dog → ? · church → ? · bus → ? · fox → ? · cat → ?

Error analysis record

After each retest, note which words 3 or more pupils misspelled.

Word	Common error written	Pattern to reteach	Date

Long-gap retest (3 weeks after initial teaching)

Pick 5 words from any set taught 3 weeks ago. Test without warning. Words recalled after a gap are retained far longer than words practised immediately.

(Source: Cepeda, N.J. et al. (2006). Distributed Practice in Verbal Recall Tasks. Psychological Bulletin.)

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). Pretest-retest methodology: Kornell et al. (2009); Cepeda et al. (2006).