

# MONSTER TEST

YOU CAN ANALYZE DEVELOPMENTAL SPELLING . . .

**And Here's How To Do It!**

Early Years K-8 (May, 1985)

Dr. J. Richard Gentry  
Professor of Elementary Education and Reading

---

The teacher's awareness of children's developmental spelling progress enables her/him to respond intelligently and more instructively as children progress toward spelling competency. A good place to begin gaining a better understanding of the developmental spelling process is to administer a developmental spelling test.

## **Administering the Developmental Spelling Test**

Administer the developmental spelling test on page 2 to your students. The test is designed for pupils in the lower elementary grades, but can be administered to students at upper levels who are experiencing difficulty with spelling. When you administer the ten-word spelling list, you will obtain spelling that can be categorized into five developmental stages: (1) precommunicative, (2) semiphonetic, (3) phonetic, (4) transitional, and (5) conventional.

**Follow these directions:** Call out each word in the spelling list on page 2, give the sentence provided, and call out the word again. What you want your students to do is invent the spelling or use their best guess at what the spelling might be. Explain that the activity will not be graded as right or wrong, but that it will be used to see how the student thinks certain difficult words should be spelled. Be encouraging and make the activity challenging and fun.

# MONSTER TEST

## SPELLING WORD LIST

1. monster                      The boy was eaten by a MONSTER.
2. united                        You live in the UNITED States.
3. dress                         The girl wore a new DRESS.
4. bottom                        A big fish lives at the BOTTOM of the lake.
5. hiked                         We HIKED to the top of the mountain.
6. human                        Miss Piggy is not a HUMAN.
7. eagle                         An EAGLE is a powerful bird.
8. closed                        The little girl CLOSED the door.
9. bumped                       The car BUMPED into the bus.
10. type                         TYPE the letter on the typewriter.

# MONSTER TEST

## How to Analyze the Spellings

### An overview of the developmental levels of spelling:

A scoring chart is provided on page 5 to help you analyze the spellings. Before going further, think about the features that you will look for at each developmental level. For example:

- 1. PRECOMMUNICATIVE SPELLING** is the “babbling” stage of spelling. Children use letters for writing words but the letters are strung together randomly. The letters in precommunicative spelling do not correspond to sounds. Examples: OPSPS = eagle; RTAT = eighty.
- 2. SEMIPHONETIC SPELLERS** know that letters represent sounds. They perceive and represent reliable sounds with letters in a type of telegraphic writing. Spellings are often abbreviated representing initial and / or final sound. Examples: E = eagle; a = eighty.
- 3. PHONETIC SPELLERS** spell words like they sound. The speller perceives and represents all of the phonemes in a word, though spellings may be unconventional. Examples: EGL = eagle; ATE = eighty.
- 4. TRANSITIONAL SPELLERS** think about how words appear visually; a visual memory of spelling patterns is apparent. Spellings exhibit conventions of English orthography like vowels in every syllable, e-marker and vowel digraph patterns, correctly spelled inflectional endings, and frequent English letter sequences. Examples: EGIL = eagle; EIGHTEE = eighty.
- 5. CONVENTIONAL SPELLERS** develop over years of word study and writing. Correct spelling can be categorized by instruction levels. For example, correct spelling for a corpus. . . words that can be spelled by the average fourth grader would be fourth grade level correct spelling. Place the word in this category if it is listed correctly.

### Analyzing the words:

1. Look at the student’s spelling for each word. Find the error type in the chart provided on page 5 that best matches the student’s spelling of the word.
2. Write the appropriate developmental label next to the word on the student’s spelling list. You will determine if the student’s spelling most closely matches the word listed on the chart below that is representative of the Precommunicative spelling stage, the Semiphonetic spelling stage, the Phonetic spelling stage, the Transitional spelling stage, or the Conventional spelling stage. Once you have decided which word on the chart on page 5 is the best match to the way that the student spelled the word, write the matching developmental spelling stage beside each of the ten spelling words.

# MONSTER TEST

3. Next look at the spelling stages next to each word to determine if most of the student's spellings were at the Precommunicative stage, the Semiphonetic stage, the Phonetic stage, the Transitional stage, or the Conventional stage. This is the student's probable developmental level. Even though ten words is a small sample, this test will reveal the types of developmental errors that a student is likely to make in free writing.
4. Observe other invented spellings in the student's written language sample to verify the student's level of development. Remember that many of the student's spellings in free writing may be conventional. Students who are at lower developmental levels may have memorized spellings for words such as C - A - T, cat. It is their misspellings, however, that provide "windows into their minds" to reveal their developmental level of spelling.

# MONSTER TEST

## DEVELOPMENTAL SPELLING TEST SCORING CHART

Dr. J. Richard Gentry  
Professor of Elementary Education and Reading

<b>WORDS</b>		<b>Precommunicative Stage</b>	<b>Semiphonetic Stage</b>	<b>Phonetic Stage</b>	<b>Transitional Stage</b>	<b>Conventional Stage</b>
1.	monster	Random letters	mtr	mostr	monstur	monster
2.	united	Random letters	u	unitd	younighted	united
3.	dress	Random letters	jrs	jas	dres	dress
4.	bottom	Random letters	bt	bodm	bottum	bottom
5.	hiked	Random letters	h	hikt	hicked	hiked
6.	human	Random letters	um	humh	humum	human
7.	eagle	Random letters	el	egl	egul	eagle
8.	closed	Random letters	kd	klosd	closed	closed
9.	bumped	Random letters	b	bopt	bumped	bumped
10.	type	Random letters	tp	tip	tipe	type