

Using the Personal Word Wall

The goal is for students to locate a word on the list quickly and copy it correctly on their paper. Don't assume the students know how to use a word wall. I have had to teach third- and fourth-grade students how to use the alphabetical framework to locate a word quickly. I have even taught students how to copy a word efficiently from the chart to their paper. This probably sounds elemental, but these are real-life examples from experiences I have had with transitional readers. I observed one student who was copying words one letter at a time. I taught her how to look at the word, say the first three letters aloud, repeat them as she wrote them on her paper, then return to the list and repeat the process with the next three letters.

Emphasize that the words on the list must be spelled correctly every time. No excuses. If you notice that a student misspells a word on the personal word wall, don't circle the misspelled word or point it out. If you do this, you are monitoring for the student. Your goal is for the student to realize when he needs to use the chart. Instead say, "There is a word in this line you need to check because it is on the list. See if you can find it." When I see a student using the word wall, I draw a star on top of the paper and offer a quick praise such as "I am so glad you used the word wall." You will be surprised how other students listen to these "private" conversations and repeat the behavior you just praised. If students need help spelling a word that is not on the list, encourage them to use other spelling strategies such as sounding out or clapping each syllable. If the unknown word is one the student uses frequently, write it on the child's personal word wall and tell him or her you expect them to spell it correctly from now on. If students consistently use this chart, at least 80% of the words they write will be spelled correctly.

You can make additional copies of the personal word wall for students to use during writing workshop. It is much better for students to spell these words correctly the first time than to have fix the spelling during revision.