Practice makes permanent

Did somebody tell you practice made perfect? That's only if you're practicing it right. Each time you spell a word wrong, you're 'practicing' the wrong spelling. So, if you're not sure how to spell the word, find out, *then* practice that spelling. Keep an ongoing notebook of words, so you've got your own personal dictionary and you can see your progress. Start small, though!

Don't try to learn all the words at once

Even if you learn them all in one sitting, practice them a few at a time. Find out what works best for you — it may be one or two words or as many as three or four. Then, add another word to your list, or start on different ones. Each time you learn another word, go back and practice the ones you learned before it, because, after all, *practice makes permanent*.

Review, and review some more!

If you already know some of the words on your list, practice them once or twice each before you start tackling the ones you don't know yet. It's a good confidence booster (and besides, *practice makes permanent*).

Practice spelling as if you expect to spell those words right when you're writing

There's more to learning to spell than passing a spelling test. There are lots of ways to get from guessing to knowing what to write down on a test, AND spelling words right when you're writing sentences and paragraphs. You want to train your hands to write the correct letters in the right order when you think a certain word. Use the "six ways to practice spelling" listed here.

Use the words you've practiced

That's the point to learning them, anyway. Have a list of words you're learning handy, in a notebook, and you can look them up to make sure you're spelling them right. Besides, using them is practicing them, and *practice*…you know…*makes permanent*.

Methods

### Trace, copy and recall

Make a chart like this with 3 or four spelling words you want to learn:



Then fold over the "recall" part so that only the first two columns show:



Then,

* Say the word to yourself.
* Trace it in the first column, saying the letters as you trace. Say the word again. You might put a little rhythm into it, "WORD. W – pause – O – pause – R-D. WORD!" (Remember, the goal here is to remember how to spell the words, not to successfully follow these directions.)
* Go to the second column, say the word, and write it the same way.
* While the rhythm and the sound and the feeling are fresh in your mind, flip the paper over and say the word and spell it out — the same way, saying each letter (because, after all, practice makes permanent).
* If it's a hard word, put it on the list more than once. If you're feeling particularly smart, trace and copy TWO words, and try to remember them both before you flip the page over. However, if your short-term memory isn't big enough to hold all that, do one at a time because you want to practice the words RIGHT, not make guesses!
* After you've done all the words this way a few times, start doing them two or three at a time, and when you feel like you know them, do the list again — but skip the tracing, or, when you're feeling VERY confident, skip the tracing and the copying both.

### Reverse chaining by letter

* Say the word. Then write it, saying each letter (be enthusiastic and expressive)
	+ W - O - R - D
* Skip a line and say it and write it again — minus the last letter. Say the last letter, but don't write it.
	+ W - O - R - \_\_\_\_
* Skip a line and say it and write it again — minus the last two letters. Say them, but don't write them.
	+ W - O - \_\_\_ \_\_\_\_
* Do that until you're only writing one letter.
* Go back to the top. Read the word, then spell it out loud.
* Fold the page over so you can't see the whole word. Say the word, spell it, and add that last letter.
* Fold the page back again. Say the word, spell it, and add the last two letters.
* Keep going until you spell the whole word.
* GO BACK AND CHECK — make sure you didn't leave out a letter.

### Reverse chaining by syllable

This is harder, for longer words.

* Say the word. Then write it, saying each letter (be enthusiastic and expressive)
	+ S-E-P-A-R-A-T-E
* Skip a line and say it and write it again — minus the last syllable. Say the last syllable and spell it out loud, but don't write it.
	+ S-E-P-A-\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Continue until you aren't writing anything — but still say the spelling out loud.
* Go back to the top. Read the word, then spell it out loud.
* Fold the page over so you can't see the whole word. Say the word, spell it, and add the last syllable.
* Fold the page back again. Say the word, spell it, and add the last two syllables.
* Continue until you spell the whole word.
* GO BACK AND CHECK — make sure you didn't leave out any letters.
	+ should
	+ shoul\_\_
	+ shou\_\_ \_\_
	+ sho \_\_ \_\_ \_\_
	+ sh\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_
	+ s \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_
	+ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_

### Highlighting the hard parts

Some words, like separate, are only hard in some parts. You might be getting these right on a test — but always spelling them WRONG when you write, frustrating you and your teachers to no end. And since practice makes permanent, every time you practice it wrong you're making it more likely you'll write it wrong the next time. Here's something to help you focus on the troublesome part.

This is also a good technique for learning rules and patterns. If you want to learn a bunch of IE words — that "I before E" rule that so many people find so hard to use — this is a good way to do it.

Get different color pens or pencils or markers, and index cards. Write the words vividly, boldly on the cards — and make the 'hard part' a different color than the rest… maybe with stripes on the letters. Make a mental picture of that card, read the word aloud and spell it aloud, and change the way you say the "hard part," maybe saying it louder, maybe putting on a British accent. So, you'd write:

**sepArate    believe
relieve   grieve   achieve**

When you write the whole word, think about the hard part, what it looks like or sounds like. So, while you're writing "separate," you might be thinking "sep-AY-rate" and/or visualizing that bold, red A.

Again, the keys here are to NOT overwhelm your brain — don't try to learn 5 words at a time like this unless you've got an amazing visual memory. Better to do one word 5 times — and start spelling it right in your writing.

### Use a tape recorder to test yourself, and to practice using words

Read the words — be sure you're pronouncing them right — into a tape recorder. Record it like it's a spelling test: word, example sentence, word. For example, you'd say "Separate. Put the papers in separate piles. Separate. Spelled s - e - p - a - r - **a** - t - e." Play it back — and try to say the spelling before the tape plays it.

### Practice using the words in short phrases

If separate is the word, see if you can think of 5 different phrases with the word and write them out. Let's see… separate rooms, separate cars, separate houses, A Separate Peace, separate the pages. Or, try to use 20 of your words in the same story. Get silly — have fun with the words!