

magical spelling

'I did it! I did it! Mummy, didn't I do it?'
(A five year old boy last weekend, who has just spelled rhinoceros backwards.)

I was once running a Magical Spelling session for a dyslexia society. Six dyslexic children were sitting in the front row. When they had all learned to spell *miscellaneous* backwards, they got a certificate. I was aware that a number of adults in the back were surreptitiously following the session, and at the end, a bearded tradesman in his 40's came up. He spelled *miscellaneous* backwards, and asked if he could have a certificate too. 'I've never had a certificate before,' he said. 'I haven't even passed my joinery exams, because I couldn't write them. Now I think I could.'

Magical? It's only magical if you have never been able to spell English accurately and consistently. Then it seems like a miracle, a real life-changing event.

In 1987, when I did my first NLP training with PPD, the manual included a copy of the spelling strategy which Robert Dilts had modelled from people who could easily spell well. I am one of those 'natural' spellers and recognised the strategy as the one that I have always used. Spelling was my claim to fame as a child. Totally bereft of any hand and eye co-ordination skills, I was picked last for a sports team, but I was chosen first for a spelling contest.

I was an English teacher, and then a secondary special needs teacher. My own two children were early readers, and fluent writers, but couldn't spell at all! I tried everything I knew to help them, to no avail. By their early 20s, they had found ways to deal with the problem. When I saw Dilts's spelling strategy, I thought I would have one more try. And it worked! It only took a few sessions, and both of them quickly learned to spell.

I tried it out on more people, younger ones, and much older. It became obvious that though the strategy itself is simple, teaching it to people who aren't familiar with the thinking systems it uses, is sometimes quite challenging. They have to learn to feel good about spelling; to place a visual image of the word in a specific position; to be able to access it when they want it. You need to re-educate their brains to process language in a particular pattern, so the words are also available for reading and writing.



Cricket Kemp

A colleague and I practiced a little bit on 'friends' and then we put up three small notices for a Saturday spelling workshop, hoping we would get 8 or 10 non-spelling strangers, and see if we could teach them to spell this way. Seventy three people turned up, aged from 5 to 63, to learn to spell! When we had them all spelling by the end of three hours, I decided to call this teaching process **Magical Spelling**.

For the next eight years, I taught and researched Magical Spelling, often on Saturday mornings. I usually only saw a learner once, for a few hours. Then parents started to contact me to say that since learning Magical Spelling, their child was doing much better at school, no longer needed special help, was much more confident, was reading more, etc.. One parent came to say that her son had been assigned to a special needs class, but had learned Magical Spelling, and five years later had just been admitted to a prestigious university.

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1. Place the correct spelling of the word, using lower case lettering, on a piece of card or paper in front of you.
2. Close your eyes and think of something that makes you feel good, something that feels familiar, something that feels comfortable, or all three of these, making sure you have a **really** positive feeling.
3. When the feeling is **very** strong, open your eyes and look at the correct spelling.
4. Move the correct spelling up and to your left, so that your eyes also move up and to the left, continuing to be aware of your good feelings.

You can play with this feeling to make it **even stronger**. Make the picture of it nicer. Make the sounds of it even more appealing, in whatever way works best for you.

5. Removing the card from your line of sight again and continuing to 'see' that the word is still there, up and to the left ...
6. Write down the letters you are 'seeing' in your mind's eye, up and to your left, looking up as frequently as is useful. Decide **before** you check, whether you have the right spelling written down. Notice the feeling that tells you, you are right.

Look at what you have written. Mark each correct **letter** with a tick, as you check it against the correct spelling on the paper. Notice that having written the correct version gives you a good feeling somewhere. If your word isn't the same as the correct version yet, simply go back through the process again.

When it **is** correct, go on to **Step 7** for a special game.

7. Look up again at the word in your mind's eye, and write the letters starting from the last one on the right, writing from right to left, so the word looks correct when you finish! When you have it all correct, **say the letters out loud**, quickly, starting from the end of the word!

Now You are a Magical Speller!

Eventually we realised that the increased confidence we always saw as people learned to spell this way, could not account for the increased literacy skill that was being reported to us. One of our colleagues did some serious research for her MEd and found that a Year 7 intake of secondary pupils, who learned Magical Spelling, gained an average of 13 months of reading age in 12 weeks time (7 x half hour sessions).

English is an unusual language in that it hasn't naturally evolved. It has many distinct inputs, each of which comes with its own spelling system. As a result, we really become literate by learning most of our words as a picture. Traditionally written Chinese requires the same process. Unlike learning a phonetically consistent language like French or German, learning English requires a lot of input from the right brain. This makes it more difficult for people with poorer connections between the right brain and the left brain, where our spoken language is stored. This may account for why English speaking countries produce many people with twelve years of education, who are still functionally illiterate. Our language requires a different approach. Schools aren't using it.

Teaching Dilt's spelling strategy requires a full set of NLP Practitioner skills: rapport, anchoring, lots of positive language, presuppositional forms, linguistic ambiguity, sensory acuity, pacing and leading. With these skills polished, you can teach any educable person to spell English this way, taking, at most, six half hour sessions. At the end of this time they have become a 'natural' speller, and reader, and writer. Then what could we do in the literacy hour?

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Cricket Kemp is an NLP trainer, managing NLP Northeast for 18 years. Cricket and Caitlin can run Magical Spelling workshops for schools, and have a **Magical Spelling booklet for £3**. She expects to complete a PhD next year, demonstrating that Magical Spelling works,



and also how it works to change the way the brain processes language. Reading is the next target. She thinks it could be as easy as Magical Spelling. Could you read before you were taught? Would you be happy to have that skill modelled? She'd like to hear from you.

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