FERNALD METHOD FOR READING

The Fernald Method is a systematic, multisensory instructional approach that incorporates use of the visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile (VAKT) modalities simultaneously. The association of sensory and perceptual cues reinforces the mental image of words as well as the association between printed words and their oral representations. Use of this approach also improves memory for printed words and word parts. The Fernald Method is intended for individual or small-group instruction.

Purpose

The Fernald Method improves sight word acquisition and word identification skill in students who have failed to learn to read through other instructional methods or who have particular difficulty learning exception or phonetically irregular words (e.g., once). Using this method, students are expected to retain reading recognition of the words learned. A different procedure is used to teach the written spelling of words for long-term retrieval.

Procedure

The Fernald Method consists of four stages through which the student progresses as reading and writing proficiency increase.

Stage I

1. Solicit the student’s interest and involvement. Tell the student that you will be showing him or her a new way to learn words. Explain that while the method requires concentration and effort, it has been successful with students who have had problems remembering words.
2. Select a word to learn. Have the student select a word to learn. Discuss the meaning of the word.
3. Write the word. Sit beside the student and model these steps: (a) say the word, (b) use the word in large manuscript, a crayon or marker to write or cursive (depending upon which the student uses) in a 5" x 8" index card, and (c) say the word again as you run your finger underneath the word.
4. Model word tracing for the student. Say: “Watch what I do and listen to what I say.” Use the following steps: (a) say the word; (b) trace the word
using one or two fingers, saying each part of the word as you trace it; (c) say the word again while underlining it with the tracing fingers in a fluent motion; and (d) have the student practice tracing until the process is completed correctly.

5. *Trace the word until learned.* Have the student continue tracing the word until the student is sure he or she can write the word from memory with no errors.

6. *Write the word from memory.* When the student feels ready, remove the model and have him or her write the word while saying it. If at any point the student makes an error, stop the writing immediately, cover or erase the error, and have the student use the tracing procedure again before proceeding.

7. *File the word.* After the student has written the word correctly three times without the model, have the student file it alphabetically in a word bank.

8. *Type the word.* Within 24 hours, type each word the student has learned that day. Reading the typed word will help the student establish the link between handwritten and typed words.

As soon as a student can write words, begin story writing. The student selects a topic. Have the student trace any words that he or she does not know how to spell. Type the story within 24 hours so that the student has an opportunity to read newly learned words in context.

*Important points.* During stage one instruction, observe the following:

§ Finger contact is important in tracing.
§ After tracing, the student should write the word without looking at the model.
§ The word should always be written as a unit from the beginning. In the case of an error, cover or remove the mistake and start over from the beginning.
§ Always use words in context to provide meaning.
§ Encourage the student to say each part of the word while tracing and writing.

**Stage II**

During Stage II the student no longer needs to trace words to learn them and the stories increase in length. The student learns a word by looking at it, saying it, and writing it. The teacher writes requested words, saying each part of the word while writing it while the student listens and watches. The student looks at the word, says the word, and then writes the word
without looking at the copy.

As in Stage 1, select the words to be learned from the stories that the student is writing. Continue to write the learned words.

**Stage III**
By Stage III the student learns directly from the printed word without having it written. Pronounce the word for the student, have him or her look at the word and pronounce it before writing it. At this stage, introduce books. Select interesting books and tell the student any unknown words. After reading, have the student review and write the new words.

**Stage IV**
At this stage, the student recognizes known words in print and also begins to notice the similarities between parts of unknown words and known words. The student begins to recognize many new words without being told what they are. Provide enough assistance with unknown words at Stage IV so that reading proceeds smoothly.

One helpful technique at this stage is to have the student glance over a paragraph and lightly underline any unknown words. Tell the student the words and have the student write them before beginning to read. Using this technique, the student can read the new material smoothly without interruption.