

Introduction to the Spelling Profile Assessment (SPA):

A new spelling test for English primary school children

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Being a competent speller and writer is key to success in school, university, and the workplace, making early intervention crucial for those with spelling difficulties. Despite the prevalence of spelling difficulties, research on spelling lags behind that on reading. Standardised tests often fail to pinpoint specific spelling challenges, and teachers/assessors acknowledge these limitations. To address this, we have developed an assessment that identifies strengths/weaknesses in phonological encoding, whole-word processing, and morphological rules in spelling.

The Spelling Profile Assessment (SPA) identifies the key processes used for spelling (phonology, orthography, and morphology) in a single battery and can be useful for teachers, SENCos, specialist assessors, and researchers alike. To the best of our knowledge, it is one of the few tests that encompasses all of these spelling components and maybe even the only one with normative comparison data for the entirety of primary. We report the psycholinguistic characteristics and standardisation of the items in the SPA, together with reliability and validity measures obtained for data from UK children in Reception year to Year 6 (N:1053).

Analysis indicates that the test is a valid and reliable measurement of spelling. We report single cases of individuals with phonological, lexical, and mixed deficit profiles, demonstrating the power of the SPA tool to identify particular areas of spelling difficulty. We also map the tool across the new dyslexia definition (Carroll et al., 2024).

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