



Evidence-Based Intervention: Cued Spelling

1. Introduction

Cued Spelling is a structured intervention developed by Professor Keith Topping. Pupils work in pairs, taking turns as “tutor” and “tutee” to reinforce spelling skills in a collaborative and engaging way. The approach can be tailored to the learner, allowing pupils to select their own cues (such as pictures, sounds, syllables or other mnemonic strategies) that align with their individual learning strengths.

2. Purpose of Intervention

The primary aim of ‘Cued Spelling’ is to improve pupils’ spelling accuracy and fluency through personalised, strategy-based learning. By encouraging pupils to create their own cues, the intervention enables an embedded understanding and long-term retention.

3. Target Audience

‘Cued Spelling’ is suitable for pupils aged 7 to 11 years (Key Stage 2). It has also been successfully used with older pupils (e.g. Year 7) who need additional support to access the curriculum.

Whilst the intervention is most effective for pupils who can read simple words, recognise some letter sounds and names and write legibly, the approach can be adapted to enable accessibility to a wide range of learners (e.g. using a keyboard or letter cards).

The intervention is flexible and can be delivered in mainstream or special education settings, whole class, small group, or 1:1 formats and pairings of either similar or differing spelling skill levels.

4. Who Can Deliver the Intervention

‘Cued Spelling’ can be delivered by peer tutors, teachers, teaching assistants, parents or carers.

5. Session Structure

Each session follows a consistent and structured format designed to reinforce spelling through cue-based learning and peer collaboration.

Session Components:

- **Ten-Step Process:** A multisensory routine that supports memory and recall.
- **Speed Review (Daily):** At the end of each session, the ‘tutor’ reads all words in a new order; the ‘tutee’ writes them quickly and checks accuracy.



- **Mastery Review (Weekly):** All words from the week are reviewed to reinforce retention. Any words spelt incorrectly may be carried forward to the following week.

Ten-Step format for each session:

1. **Choose Word** – Speller ('tutee') selects 5+ words.
2. **Check** – Speller checks spelling word in a dictionary and records it in their spelling diary.
3. **Read** – Both 'tutor' and speller both read word together, then the speller reads the word independently.
4. **Choose Cues** – Speller selects memory aids (e.g. sounds, chunks, mnemonics).
5. **Say Cues** – Pair recite cues together.
6. **Demonstrate** – 'Tutor' writes word while speller says cues.
7. **Cued Try** – Speller writes word with 'tutor' prompting cues.
8. **Self-Cue** – Speller writes word while saying cues aloud.
9. **Test** – Speller writes word quickly from memory.
10. **Read** – Speller reads word aloud.

6. Frequency and Duration

Sessions are recommended three times per week, each lasting approximately 15 minutes. A trial period of 6–8 weeks is suggested to assess effectiveness and can be extended based on pupil progress.

7. Key Principles

Effective delivery of 'Cued Spelling' is supported by the following principles:

- **Quiet, focused environment** – Minimises distractions and supports concentration.
- **Frequent praise and encouragement** – Builds confidence and reinforces effort, especially for self-correction.
- **Use of a spelling diary** – Tracks progress and supports independent learning.
- **Mnemonic cue generation** – Encourages pupils to create personalised strategies for remembering spellings.



- **Pupil autonomy** – Pupils choose their own target words, promoting ownership and motivation.
- **Error-friendly approach** – Mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, with steps repeated as needed.

8. Training and Implementation

‘Cued Spelling’ requires minimal training and is easy to implement across a range of settings. A typical training session lasts around 30 minutes and includes:

- Role-play practice to model the tutor–tutee interaction
- Cue generation techniques to support personalised learning
- Feedback strategies to encourage self-correction and praise

Implementation is supported by:

- Clear session templates and guidance materials
- Informal monitoring using spelling diaries and periodic reviews
- Flexibility to embed within literacy support programmes, SEND provision, or whole-class teaching

9. Evidence and Outcomes

Research indicates that the use of the ‘Cued Spelling’ intervention leads to:

- Significant improvements in spelling accuracy and retention (particularly effective for high-frequency and curriculum specific vocabulary).
- Improvements in reading comprehension, motivation, and self-esteem
- Progress rates up to twice the typical expectation

10. Pupil Feedback

While direct pupil quotes from published sources are limited, general feedback has been summarised in Keith Topping’s *‘Thinking, Reading, Writing’*. Pupils have described ‘Cued Spelling’ as:

- Enjoyable and engaging due to the use of personalised cues
- Helpful for remembering words through peer support
- Motivating when reviewing and seeing progress

These reflections are based on reported pupil experiences in Topping’s work.



11. Further Information and Resources

- 'Thinking Reading Writing' (Keith Topping)- A Practical Guide to Paired Learning with Peers, Parents and Volunteers'
- [Cued Spelling Resources Pack - Discovery - the University of Dundee Research Portal](#)
- [cued-spelling.pdf](#)