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ABSTRACT

The fourth of seven booklets on adults with learning disabilities, this manual examines the assessment and remediation of written language problems. Spelling assessment activities are described, including lists of questions designed to investigate auditory skills, tactile skills, and visual skills. Also considered is assessment of punctuation, capitalization, syntax, organization, and ideation. Remediation activities are proposed for spelling errors caused by auditory and visual deficits, as well as errors in punctuation, capitalization, written syntax, organization, and ideation. Publications on specific topics, a brief list of materials, and a list of references conclude the booklet. (CL)

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Academic Assessment and Remediation
of Adults with Learning Disabilities:

A Resource Series for Adult Basic Education Teachers

ASSESSMENT AND REMEDIATION OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Five County Adult Education Program
(Barrow, Clarke, Jackson, Oconee, and Oglethorpe Counties)
Clarke County Board of Education
Athens, Georgia 30601

1984

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Preface.....	i
Assessing Written Language Difficulties.....	1
Assessment of Spelling Deficits.....	2
Tasks for Assessing Spelling Error.....	2
Questions to Investigate Auditory Skills.....	3
Questions to Investigate Tactile Skills.....	3
Questions to Investigate Visual Skills.....	3
Observations that Indicate Spelling Defects.....	3
Patterns of Spelling Errors.....	4
Assessment of Punctuation, Capitalization, Syntax, Organizational and Ideation.....	4
Remediating Written Language Difficulties.....	9
Spelling Error from Auditory Deficits.....	9
Spelling Error from Visual Deficits.....	12
Spelling Error from Both Auditory and Visual Deficits.....	13
Punctuation and Capitalization Error.....	14
Written Syntax Error.....	15
Organization and Ideation Error.....	17
Progress and Circumvention.....	19
Materials.....	21
References.....	24

PREFACE

i

All adults who have not completed high school are potential clients for our Adult General Education Program and are aggressively recruited. Most of them with motivation proceed normally through our instructional program until they reach their goal. While following the progress of our students, we observed that some of them made slower progress and gained lower than expected achievement levels. These students did not reach their goal or our goal for them, although many had good motivation, seemed alert and bright, and occasionally made excellent progress in one or more skills. An awareness grew that a significant number of the students might be learning disabled.

Assistance was at hand from the University of Georgia, Department of Special Education, in the persons of Dr. Cheri Hoy and Dr. Noel Gregg, who met with the staff of the project for planning, worked with our adult education teachers in workshops, as well as wrote our project publications. Our appreciation is also expressed to the teachers of the five-county program for their participation, to Mrs. Betty Westbrook, Athens, for her extra-hours typing of the manuscripts, to Ms. Shelby Johnson, Snellville, for editorial assistance, and to Dr. Edward T. Brown, Stone Mountain, for facilitating the development and production processes.

Dr. Janie Rodgers
Project Director

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ASSESSING WRITTEN LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Written language involves the organization and structure of ideas as well as the mechanics of writing. Many adults, most of them not learning disabled, have difficulties in one or both of these aspects. Difficulty integrating subject, text, and reader can be due to poor instruction or lack of adequate experience in manipulating language structure (Litovitz, 1981). If learning disability is involved, there are underlying processing problems which restrict attention, perception, memory, or reasoning. Similarly, adults may have poor handwriting because of poor instruction in penmanship, carelessness, or a disregard for the reader. When a cognitive processing deficit is involved, the person frequently dislikes and avoids handwriting. Identifying the learning disabled is difficult but there are observations and tasks which can provide the adult education teacher with information on which to base instruction.

Written language requires an individual to integrate the skills of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, syntax, organization, and ideation. The adult education teacher must be sensitive to the "intra" versus "inter" system errors within each of these skill areas. Breakdowns in processing abilities underlying any one of the skill areas can result in underachievement, in written language. In addition, difficulty in manipulating multiple variables might also produce written language problems even when the individual demonstrates average skill ability within the isolated areas.

Tasks generally used for the assessment of written language can be used with a student suspected of having a learning disability. The difference in assessment lies in the attention the teacher pays to the systematic manipulation of the input/output, level of response, and task demands.

Assessment of Spelling Deficits

Spelling can be quickly remedied in the adult education student who has no learning disability; materials for instruction in this widespread academic deficiency are readily available. Persistent non-progress in a student can also be quickly assessed by the adult education teacher through the following tasks and through investigation into the skill areas critical to spelling performance.

Tasks for assessing spelling error

1. Can the individual write single letters to dictation?
2. Can the individual write one syllable words to dictation?
3. Is there a discrepancy between the performance on a multiple choice versus a dictation spelling test?
4. Is the individual aided when all the words to spell come from same word family (can, man, fan)?
5. Can the individual quickly identify identical words from groups of similar looking words?
6. Is there a discrepancy between the performance on an oral spelling test versus a written spelling test?
7. Is there a discrepancy between the performance on a spelling dictation test of single words versus the spelling ability on a free writing exercise?
8. Is there a pattern to the types of words spelled incorrectly (i.e., rule-based, phonetic, etc.)?
9. Does the individual demonstrate spelling errors when simply asked to copy written information?
10. Can the individual monitor his/her own spelling on a written essay and find the errors?

In addition to the preceding tasks, these activities will identify inefficiencies in the skill areas:

Questions to investigate auditory skills:

1. Can the individual associate all the phonetic sounds of all the letters of the alphabet?
2. Can the individual blend sounds to form a word when given one sound at a time (c-a-t)?
3. Can the individual break down an unknown word into its component sounds?
4. Can the individual listen to an orally presented word and identify the number of syllables?
5. Is the individual's auditory memory normal on a digit span or sentence repetition test?
6. How many words can the individual produce in one minute? (The number of words is not vital -- observe for the organization or strategy used.)
7. Does the individual have any articulation problems interfering with spelling?
8. Is the individual's auditory sequencing within normal range?

Questions to investigate tactile skills:

1. Can the individual trace letters and then write them correctly?
2. Can the individual write while blindfolded or with his hand obscured?
3. Can the individual identify words and/or letters written on his or her palm or back with a stylus?
4. Can the individual recognize and name objects placed in his or her hand while blindfolded?

Questions to investigate visual skills:

1. Can the individual read all the letters of the alphabet?
2. Can the individual write all the letters of the alphabet?
3. Can the individual read the word he or she is being asked to spell?
4. Can the individual copy single words and sentences without making an error?
5. Does the individual demonstrate any difficulties with right or left orientation?
6. Is the individual's visual sequencing within normal range?

Observations that indicate spelling deficits:

1. Difficulty in consistently spelling common sight words.
2. Difficulty spelling the quantitative words needed to write a check.
3. Discrepancy between words utilized in oral language and words used in written language.
4. Hesitation to participate in any activity or task that will require written language.
5. Reversals, transpositions, dropped endings, omitted syllables are frequently apparent in spelling.

Patterns of spelling errors

The spelling errors of the learning disabled usually follow observable patterns although there frequently seems to be no logic or rationale for the peculiarity of some of the errors. The following patterns seem to be most frequent:

HEARING SOUNDS IN WORDS:

appunatime for once upon a time
eley for early
dest for dressed
opied for opened

SEQUENCING ERRORS:

saw for was
ni for in
woh for who
whaer for where

SOUND/SYMBOL ERRORS:

cunterea for country
fother for father
peresients for presents

RULE BASED ERRORS:

makeing for making
hiting for hitting
niether for neither
recieve for receive

Assessment of Punctuation, Capitalization, Syntax, Organization and Ideation

Errors in each of these language areas are common among all adult education students, but those without disability can overcome them with instruction. Those with disability can usually be identified through use of the following task pattern. Input/output, modes of response, and the task stimuli must be carefully controlled in order to determine the exact nature of the problem. The adult education teacher should systematically proceed through the following tasks observing especially the patterns of errors both within and between tasks:

1. Copy a sentence.

2. Generate a sentence:
 - a. from a topic
 - b. from a word
 - c. from a picture
 - d. from a sentence starter
(phrase or group of words)
3. Create a paragraph:
 - a. orally
 - b. from a topic
 - c. from a picture
 - d. from a sequence of pictures
 - e. from a topic sentence
4. Create a story or essay:
 - a. orally
 - b. from a topic
 - c. from a picture
 - d. from a sequence of pictures
 - e. from a topic sentence

Individual errors and error patterns identified through the above tasks can be the result of different types of learning disabilities. The next step is to search for the error source by examining each written language product, noting especially any concomitant or sequential effect in several areas.

Errors when the underlying source is an auditory language disorder:

Oral Syntactic/Formulation
Disorders

Omission of Words

Omission of Word Endings

Auditory Memory/Discrimination

Sound Confusions (them, then)

Poor Phonetic Analysis/Synthesis

Oral Syntactic/Formulation Disorders, con't.

Improper Verb Tense
 Improper Pronoun Use
 Distortion of Order of Words
 in a Sentence

Auditory Memory/Discrimination con't.

Poor Syllabication
 Omission of Syllables
 Dropped Endings
 Transposition of Letters
 Recapitulating/Anticipating
 Limited Vocabulary/Word Meaning
 Concreteness
 Sequencing
 Topic Sentence Problems
 Metalinguistic
 Organizational

Errors when the underlying source is specific learning disability affecting reading (dyslexia):

Visual Processing Problems

Letter Confusion (B-D, M-N)
 Rate of Perception Slow
 Inversions
 Internal Detail Errors
 Word Configuration Errors
 Visual Sequencing (pial/pail)

Auditory Processing Problems

Sound Confusions (them/then)
 Poor Phonetic Analysis/Synthesis
 Poor Syllabication
 Omission of Syllables
 Transposition of Letters
 (Sequence of Sounds)
 Dropped Endings
 Limited Vocabulary (≠ Word Meanings)
 Concreteness
 Sequencing

Auditory Processing Problems,
con't.

Metalinguistic

Organization

Cohesion

Errors when the underlying source is comprehension processing defects:

Text Organization: (Relevant/Irrelevant Information)

Limited Vocabulary

Metalinguistics

Cohesion

Errors when the underlying source is dysgraphic (relationship of size, form, spacing, and arrangement):

Spatial Arrangement

Letter Formation

Clustered Sequence of Letter Formation

Errors when the underlying source is written syntax formulated by the student:

Word Omissions

Word Order

Incorrect Verb and Pronoun Use

Word Endings

Lack of Punctuation

Lack of Capitalization

Discrepancy Between Oral and Written Language

Metalinguistics

Cohesion

Errors when the underlying source is revisualization (changed order):

Spelling

Discrepancy between Reading/Spelling

Errors when the underlying source is a specific learning disability in the area of nonverbal learning:

Rewriting

Organization

Letter Formation

Sequencing of Ideas

Topic Sentences

Metalinguistics

REMEDIATING WRITTEN LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

The teacher who suspects that an adult student has a specific written language deficit must be able to take information gained during formal and informal assessment and translate it into instructional practices. Appropriate materials and teaching strategies must be found to match the student's specific strengths and weaknesses. A mismatch between the student's abilities and the instructional approach will result in tremendous frustration for both the teacher and the student. Since many of the adults who come to adult education classes have experienced failure and frustration in the past, it is extremely important that the teacher use all of the available information to make the current experience a successful one.

This section is designed to help the adult education teacher use assessment information to plan instruction which will match the student's strengths and weaknesses. The organization of this section, therefore, parallels the organization of the first section. So if the adult education teacher feels that the answers to the assessment questions indicate that the student has problems with spelling because of auditory deficits, then the teacher can look here under the heading of Spelling-Auditory Deficits Noted and find some specific teaching suggestions. A word of caution: The suggestions in this section are only meant to help the teacher get started. For additional help, the teacher is referred to the list of materials which appears at the end of this booklet.

Spelling Errors From Auditory Deficits

Auditory deficits make it difficult for the individual to discriminate between similar sounds, blend sounds, associate sounds with symbols, and gain

all the available information from oral instruction. Therefore, teaching spelling skills through a phonetic approach is often difficult and becomes very frustrating for the student. Approaches which rely on the visual processing of information are recommended in these cases. Here are a few specific suggestions:

1. Instruction in spelling should parallel work on word recognition in reading. The sight words chosen should be functional to the adult's daily living, using the same words and context for both reading and writing instruction.
2. A patterned approach to spelling is very useful to reach attention to the internal letters of a word.

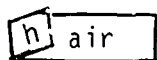
<u>pair</u>	<u>pat</u>	fash <u>ion</u>
<u>fair</u>	<u>cat</u>	vis <u>ion</u>
<u>hair</u>	<u>bat</u>	miss <u>ion</u>

3. Allow the student to discover the pattern in a new group of words given each week.
4. Color code the pattern or group of letters to help heighten the student's awareness of letter sequence.

fair
vision

5. Color code the prefixes and/or suffixes which can be added to create new words with slightly different meaning.
6. Have the student type the word patterns first in lists and then in meaningful sentences. (A spelling/typing program useful with learning disabled adults is listed in the materials section.)
7. Use anagrams to help the student combine letter patterns.

8. Use flip cards to build recognition of word patterns. Print the word pattern in one color and the initial letter(s) in another color.



9. Use block configuration fill in exercises. Give the student a series of words that he/she must match to their configuration.

. hair . go . that
 . sit . bat . west



10. Use shapes as a key to help the student identify letter order.

Write different letters or shapes made from colored paper.

Have the student build words from the shapes.



11. Help the student form a visual image of the word by asking him to copy the word while saying it slowly and then writing the word from memory. Have the student compare his word written from memory with the model. Repeat the procedure until the student can write the word from memory without errors.
12. Give the student exercises containing several spellings of a word and ask him or her to select the correct spelling.


bear because
 baer becsaue

13. Fading techniques are very useful to help students build awareness of letter patterns. Words are first written in order to heighten the student's recognition of letter order. Gradually letters are omitted and the student must fill in the blank. The whole word should be covered until the student has completed the exercise.


Then the student should be given the opportunity to self-correct any errors.

experience
 ex_erience
 e_perience
 exp__ ience
 exper__ nce
 experie_ _ _

Spelling Errors From Visual Deficits

Visual deficits make it difficult for the individual to see the difference between words which look similar, to follow a line of print without losing his or her place, and to match words to their configurations (i.e., hotel = ). The individual will have trouble associating meaning with the printed word, and their oral reading comprehension skills are often superior to their silent reading skills. These individuals tend to have more success with a highly phonetic and/or rule-based approach to learning how to spell. Specific suggestions follow:

1. Instruction in spelling should parallel work on word recognition in reading. Sight words chosen should be functional to the adult's daily living.
2. Use of anagrams, fading techniques, and block and shape configuration exercises recommended for auditory deficits can also be used.

However, in the case of a student with visual deficits the techniques are being used to build visual scanning skills, not as a strategy to aid spelling. Thus when using these techniques, every visual stimuli should be accompanied by an auditory stimulus. For instance, when presenting word configurations (home = ) have the student

say the letters out loud. The auditory-visual match will aid the student's visual recognition and memory.

3. Since a student with visual deficits will always have difficulty remembering the visual configuration or letter sequencing of words, it is imperative to build their knowledge of phonetic and syllabication rules extra strong. Therefore, the adult education teacher must:
 - a. teach specific phonetic rules and provide extensive opportunities to use these rules.
 - b. teach specific syllabication rules and provide extensive opportunities to use these rules. (Specific materials for phonics and syllabication are listed in the Spelling section of materials.)
4. Provide opportunities for the student to listen to the teacher spell words out loud and direct the student to watch the teacher's lips.
5. Have the student spell words orally, naming letters in succession. Longer words should be spelled in syllables, pausing between syllables. The teacher should declare oral spelling wrong if correct letters are not grouped in syllables.

Spelling Errors From Both Auditory and Visual Deficits

Some students may have both auditory and visual deficits which are interfering with the development of spelling skills. Generally, these students are nonreaders. Often, the most effective instructional approach for these students is a multisensory approach. However, the teacher should not proceed to utilize a multisensory approach until it is established that the student has adequate tactile and kinesthetic skills. If the student appears to have strengths in the tactile modality, then combining aspects of structural and

phonetic approaches with the tactile is suggested. Some specific suggestions follow:

1. Use words which the student is very interested in learning or which are needed for survival.
2. Have the student watch the teacher write the word while the teacher says it slowly.
3. Have the student look at the word and say it.
4. Have the student trace the word the teacher wrote and say the word while he or she is writing.
5. Have the student write the word without looking at the model. The student should then check his copy against the model.
6. Have the student write the word while his eyes are closed. The student should concentrate on the "feel" of the word.
7. Have the student use the newly learned word in a meaningful context.

Punctuation and Capitalization Errors

The teacher must recognize the fact that errors in punctuation and capitalization may be indicative of a significant disorder in any of the following cognitive processes: the understanding or use of language; processing visual information; visual-motor; visual perceptual; or visual memory. Therefore, a careful diagnosis of a student's auditory, visual, and motor skills must be completed. The adult education teacher must also consider the level and quality of instruction in writing which the student has received.

A student's ability to utilize correct punctuation and capitalization is a response to sentence structure. Therefore, simply studying the rules of punctuation and capitalization in isolation of sentence structure appears to be an unfounded approach. Implicit rule learning allows a student the opportunity to discover what is going on in a sentence so that the rules of

punctuation and capitalization can be applied. Therefore, the adult education teacher should embed his or her objectives for learning punctuation and capitalization into lessons which deal with written syntax and text organization. While detecting mechanical errors is a useful technique, there is little evidence that this ability is related to producing written text free of such errors. The teacher should also integrate written language objectives with reading and oral language experiences. Selected suggestions include:

1. Do not teach the rules of punctuation and capitalization in isolation.
2. Integrate objectives for punctuation and capitalization into other written language objectives (syntax and organization) and other areas of language experiences (reading and oral language).
3. Use sentence-combining to teach the implicit rules governing punctuation and capitalization. (The Written Syntax section which follows provides a detailed description of sentence combining.)
4. Use rewrite passages to teach the implicit rules governing punctuation and capitalization. (The Written Syntax section also provides a detailed description of the rewrite paragraph.)
5. Use the activities suggested for oral Grammar and Form in the booklet titled Assessing and Remediating Oral Language Problems to help improve knowledge of sentence structure.

Written Syntax Errors

A student can have a specific learning disability that interferes only with the area of written syntax and not oral syntax. However, often a student's written syntactic problems are the result of deficits in the area of oral syntax. Careful diagnosis of both oral and written syntax must be completed prior to the development of remediation objectives. The teacher should also

integrate written syntax objectives with reading and oral language experiences. The booklet in this series Assessing and Remediating Oral Language Problems has many activities that could help develop written syntax skills. Additional activities are listed below.

1. Provide an atmosphere that promotes a student's desire to learn to write. Make the audience specific and functional to the student writer.
2. Develop an awareness of errors.
 - a. Write a sentence containing errors and ask the student to locate the error. If error cannot be found, read the error out loud.
 - b. Provide a checklist of several types of sentence errors for the student to use as a guide. If the student cannot identify them, point them out.
 - c. Have the student read his or her own errors into a tape recorder and then see if they can be detected on replay. (Although these three items may not be good pedagogy, they have great value as a basis for establishing compensatory behavior.)
3. Provide the student rewrite passages (controlled stimulus passages). These passages are simply paragraphs made up of short choppy sentences. Ask the student to rewrite the paragraphs by combining and eliminating unnecessary information.
4. Provide the student with sentence combining exercises to develop syntactic complexity and to implicitly work on punctuation and capitalization rules. The following different types of sentence combining exercises should be provided:
 - a. Embedding - A sentence set is combined by inserting one part of a sentence into the base sentence.

1. The plane flew out of the hangar.

2. The plane was silver.

(The silver plane flew out of the hangar.)

b. Substitution - Given a non-grammatical cue (e.g., a specific connective such as how or why) use it to help or combine a sentence set.

1. The balloonist tried to explain.

2. He had drifted so far off course.

(The balloonist tried to explain how he drifted so far off course.)

c. Free modifiers

1. Jean wanted to be in style.

2. Jean wore Sassoon jeans.

3. Jean ate natural foods.

(Wanting to be in style, Jean wore Sassoon jeans and ate natural foods.)

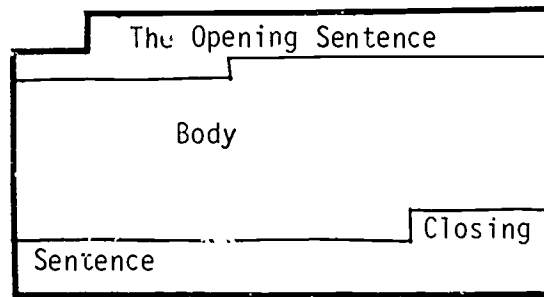
Organization and Ideation Errors

Ideation and organizational errors frequently occur in tandem. Their correction should usually begin by developing some fluency in the flow of ideas, using these ideas to establish the concepts of organization, and then generalizing to the strategies of writing.

1. Teach the student brainstorming activities where he learns how to generate words or ideas about a topic. If spelling is a problem, tape these ideas.
2. After brainstorming, work with the student to find an organizational network for his or her ideas. From this work, develop an essay.
3. Provide the student different audiences to write for (i.e., teacher,

employee, friend). Discuss the ways in which each of these letters will be changed because of its audience.

4. Provide "Free Writing" exercises. The student is given ten minutes to write and is told not to lift his pencil off the paper. The purpose is to generate ideas. This assignment should not be graded; it is simply a productivity exercise.
5. Provide visual diagrams to illustrate different types of organizational strategies in writing.



6. Color code the beginning, middle, and end of paragraphs to illustrate organizational strategies.
7. Use sentence-combining exercises to develop skill with cohesive ties.

The boy ran down the street.

He was my friend.

The boy who ran down the street was my friend.

He in sentence 2 refers to _____.

8. Help the student circle specific cohesive ties (grammar, transitional, and/or lexical) in a paragraph.
9. Provide the student with different types of stimulus to aid in the productivity of ideas.
 - a. Pictures
 - b. Story starter
 - c. Words in isolation

PROGRESS AND CIRCUMVENTION

The adult education teacher will notice that the remediation strategies suggested in the previous section will help students progress but at very different rates. Adult students having difficulty writing due to poor instruction will begin to show good progress once well-sequenced instruction is initiated at his or her level. The adult student whose writing skills might be attributed to low intelligence will make progress commensurate with his or her cognitive ability. Learning disabled students will show little or no progress if inappropriate instructional strategies are used. If the instruction is matched to the strengths and weaknesses of a learning disabled student some progress will be noted. However, the adult education teacher might also notice that the student's progress will frequently plateau at a level that seems inconsistent with normal instructional progress in other areas. Inconsistent performance between instructional sessions is often characteristic of the progress made by the learning disabled.

The learning disabled person's inability to write is due to inefficient neurological functioning. Unfortunately, teaching cannot repair abnormalities in cell structure. The adult education teacher will need to concentrate on developing the learning disabled adult's compensation strategies rather than directly trying to improve specific writing skills. Some suggested compensation strategies include the following.

1. Have the student maintain an individual spelling/vocabulary dictionary. Keep a record of words that he or she did not understand or know how to spell. Review these words frequently. Use them in speaking and writing for practice.

2. Have the student monitor his or her own written papers for errors.
The student should learn how to ask a friend or teacher to review his or her written papers before handing in an assignment.
3. Have the student keep a secretary's list or dictionary with him or her at all times and use it for spelling development. If this is too difficult to use, purchase the Perfect Speller (where all the ways you could spell a word are written in red and the real way in black).
4. Emphasize an auditory means of presenting information and obtaining answers.
5. Have the student keep a list of "number words" in his or her checkbook that might be needed in writing checks.
6. Reduce the amount of materials the adult must write.

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The following materials, often found in adolescent and adult remedial learning centers, have been found to have utility for instructing the learning disabled. Most of them are of the card, sheet, or work book type.

Barnell Loft, Ltd.	Specific Skill Series: Language Specific Skill Series: Reading
Allyn and Bacon	Study Skills for Information Retrieval
Benefic Press	Thinking Skills Development Program II
Bowmar	Language Lab
Curriculum Associates	Dictionary Skills Thirty Lessons in Notetaking The Outlining Kit Outline Building Thirty Lessons In Outline Classification and Organization Skills Sequences and Exercises Organization Skills
Curriculum Associated, Inc.	Following Direction Series Activities for Dictionary Practice
Ebsco Curriculum Materials	Study Skills
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