

TBLM OLE.2#2: Using the Spell-Checker

Overview

The **Spell-Checker** tool is available with most word-processing software. It allows the user to verify proper spellings of words. Teachers need to model its appropriate use in order for students to use it efficiently and effectively.

Advantages

The Spell-Checker tool can support student learning because it

- identifies most spelling and typing errors
- identifies where a space between two words may have been omitted during typing by suggesting that the word is a spelling mistake
- offers a list of suggested spellings, one of which may be the correct one

Disadvantages

Students cannot rely exclusively on the Spell-Checker in editing spelling errors because it

- does not differentiate homonyms (e.g., by – buy, their – there – they're, too – to – two), and so does not identify incorrect spelling of homonyms
- may identify proper nouns as spelling mistakes (proper names of persons or places are not in the Spell-Checker dictionary, just as they are not usually found in a conventional dictionary). In such an instance, students should select “Skip” or “Ignore” in the dialog box.
- identifies words as mistakes if they are spelled using a language form different than the program default—for example, Canadian spelling (e.g., colour) in an American default (e.g., color). In this case, inquire whether a Canadian dictionary can be installed as the default dictionary on the word processor application.
- may not offer any alternative spelling if the student-written word contains too many errors
- may not offer any alternative spelling if the error is at the beginning of the word

Considerations

To make the most appropriate use of the Spell-Checker, consider the following:

- Teach the use of the Spell-Checker in the context of editing during the writing process. Encourage students to proofread their writing for spelling mistakes before using the Spell-Checker.
- Dictionary skills are essential. When using the Spell-Checker, students may have to look up words to verify the computer's suggestions in order to select the appropriate word.
- The first word in the list provided by the Spell-Checker is not necessarily the appropriate choice.
- Students may be taught how to add a word to the Spell-Checker dictionary. Verify that the word to be added is spelled correctly.

Variations/Extensions

Explain and show students how to use the following tools or functions of the word processor:

- **Grammar Checker:** Use of this function of the word processor helps identify grammatical errors such run-on sentences, problems in subject-verb agreement, or other mistakes.
- **Thesaurus:** This tool of the word processor (or an online Thesaurus) can be used to choose more descriptive words for written text.