

By MARGARET MORABITO

Spelling is one of those skills that is a basic requirement for effective communication, and it can be a very telling sign by which others judge you. In business, in school, and even at home, your bad spelling can stereotype you.

Computers can help to improve spelling skills. The problem for the user is to decide what kind of spelling program is needed and which one will be most effective in a given case. There are programs for all ages, using a wide range of methods. Some provide instruction and advice on how to learn to spell better, while others only provide practice.

I recently evaluated six different spelling programs for the C-64: Stickybear Spellgrabber, AEC Spelling Grade 2, Whole Brain Spelling, Word Scrambler/Spelling Tutor, SPELLBOUND and MECC's Spelling Bee.

#### Word Lists

The best way to make your investment count is to get a program that has a large built-in vocabulary, but also lets you add or change words. Of the six programs I tested, the number of built-in words ranged from a dozen (in SPELLBOUND) to 4233 (in AEC).

Because there are always some words your child is learning at school that are not already built into the program, you'll want to be able to customize the program yourself. You can add or change words in all of the tested programs except AEC and Whole Brain. These two have large, built-in vocabularies, however. AEC has an entire series of programs for grades 2-8, each of which has over 4000

*Put your children on a bee-line to spelling improvement with the many Commodore tutorial programs available.*

words. Whole Brain offers a six-part series, with 2000 words each.

Stickybear gives you the best of both worlds by providing over 4000 words in one program (for grades 1-4) and by letting you add your own.

#### Do They Teach?

The spelling programs on the market fall into three general categories: those that teach, those that drill, and those that do both.

The majority of the programs tested give you practice in spelling but don't teach you how to spell better. Memory skills are utilized, the premise being that practice makes perfect. The lack of instruction may or may not be important to you. If your child is in school and already receiving spelling instruction, then the computer is best used as a practice tool to supplement the formal teaching. This is what most users probably need.

#### Computer-Based Instruction

Someone who is not in school would probably benefit most from getting computer-based instruction, such as that offered in AEC and, to a certain degree, in Whole Brain.

AEC provides programs that really teach, employing the traditional "test/teach/test" approach. This means that it gives a pretest to diagnose problem areas, then provides a variety of study

activities and ends with a posttest to measure the extent of learning.

The program tells the student general rules for spelling. For example, it will provide a generalization stating that the short *a* sound is found in the word *man*. Then, it will test the student on short *a* words.

Testing is closely tied in with word meaning. A sentence with a word missing appears on the screen, and the student has to type in the correctly spelled word that completes the thought. Help is given in the form of a correct answer quickly flashed upon the screen before and after the sentence appears.

AEC provides an eight-step study guide, which tells students how to go about learning a new word. It also provides four different word activities, involving sentence completion (both fill-in and multiple choice), alphabetizing and memorization.

There's only one other program in the test group that utilizes sentences. MECC uses sentence completion with multiple choice answers as its method of practice. Out of three shown, students must be able to recognize the correctly spelled word. Then they have to type in the word correctly before proceeding.

Of all the spelling programs tested, only MECC, AEC and Stickybear tie the meanings of words to their spelling activities. The others require only that the student spell out the words correctly.

#### Flash the Word

Flashing the word is a predominant method used for providing practice

**Table 1.** Names, prices and sources of spelling programs.

**Wizard of Words** (grade 1 and up)  
Addison-Wesley; available from J. L. Hammett Co.  
Hammett Place, Box 545  
Braintree, MA 02184  
\$34.95.

**AEC Spelling** (grades 2-8)  
American Educational Computer, Inc.  
801 Northwest 63rd St.  
Oklahoma City, OK 73116  
\$39.95.

**Word Scrambler/Spelling Tutor** (K-12)  
Avant-Garde Publishing Corporation;  
available from J. L. Hammett Co.  
Hammett Place, Box 545  
Braintree, MA 02184  
\$34.95.

**Spellers Duel** (grades 5-8)  
Bobco (distributor)  
200 7th Ave., Suite 111  
Santa Cruz, CA 95063  
\$19.95.

**Flash Spell Helicopter** (grades K-6)  
**Wordfinder** (grades 5-12)  
CBS Interactive Learning  
One Fawcett Place  
Greenwich, CT 06836  
\$39.95 and \$34.95, respectively.

**Spell It!** (grade 5 and up)  
Davidson & Associates; available  
from J. L. Hammett Co.  
Hammett Place, Box 545  
Braintree, MA 02184  
\$49.95.

**Spellagraph** (grades 2-9)  
**Spellakazam** (grades 2-8)  
**Spellcopter** (grade 6 and up)  
Designware; available  
from J. L. Hammett Co.  
Hammett Place, Box 545  
Braintree, MA 02184  
\$39.95, \$29.95 and \$39.95, respectively.

**Spelling Wiz** (grades 1-6)  
DLM  
One DLM Park  
Allen, TX 75002  
\$44 (school version).

**Sea Speller** (ages 7-12)  
Fisher-Price Learning Software  
PO Box 1327  
Cambridge, MA 02238  
\$19.95.

**Magic Spells: Spelling/Reading** (grades 1-5)  
The Learning Company, available  
from J. L. Hammett Co.  
Hammett Place, Box 545  
Braintree, MA 02184  
\$34.95.

**Words in Context Spelling Series**  
(grades 2-6)  
MicroEd  
PO Box 444005  
Eden Prairie, MN 55344  
\$49.95.

**MECC Spelling Bee** (ages 8-13)  
Minnesota Educational Computing  
Corporation  
3490 Lexington Ave. North  
St. Paul, MN 55126  
\$39.  
Also available by mail order from:  
Commodore Business Machines  
1200 Wilson Drive, C2655  
West Chester, PA 19380  
\$19.95.

**SPELLBOUND** (all ages)  
Roberts Information Systems, Inc.  
PO Box 666, 152 W. 4th  
Prineville, OR 97754  
\$15.

**Spell Diver** (grade 1 and up)  
Scholastic Software  
730 Broadway  
New York, NY 10003  
\$29.95 (consumer version)  
\$49.95 (school version).

**Whole Brain Spelling** (age 5 and up)  
SubLOGIC Corp.  
713 Edgebrook Drive  
Champaign, IL 61820  
\$29.95.

**Cave of the Word Wizard** (grade 1 and up)  
Timeworks  
444 Lake Cook Road  
Deerfield, IL 60015  
\$49.95.

**Stickybear Spellgrabber** (grades 1-4)  
Weekly Reader Family Software  
245 Long Hill Road  
Middletown, CT 06457  
\$29.95.

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RUN JANUARY 1987 / 99

in all these programs. The only one that doesn't use some sort of flash method is MECC.

Flashing the word on the computer's screen is one way to overcome the problem of not being able to vocalize the words. Traditional testing methodology involves a teacher saying the word, using it in a sentence and then repeating the word. Computer programs flash the word rather than say it.

Of the flash-type programs, Whole Brain is the most developed. In fact, Whole Brain teaches spelling by focusing on the visual aspects of words. It provides instruction in accord with research findings that claim that good

spellers use a mental image to see if a word they've spelled "looks right."

On the other hand, this program totally bypasses the need for a student to understand word meanings, and it classifies words according to levels of actual spelling difficulty.

The flash method is used with a new twist in Whole Brain. Words are displayed in varying colors and sizes, in upper- and lowercase, and with highlighting of double letters. This makes the exercise more interesting, prolonging the user's attention span and creating a vivid image in his mind.

For practice, a word is displayed, then erased, and you have to type in

the correct spelling. If you make a mistake, the computer analyzes your error and then redisplayes the word with the wrong letters highlighted. If you've omitted a letter, the program places an arrow where the missing letter should be.

Other programs use the flash method only for presenting the word to the user. AEC uses this in conjunction with sentence completion and as a stand-alone activity. Word Scrambler, SPELLBOUND and Stickybear also offer flash words, but they're used in conjunction with word-unscrambling activities.

A good example of the flash approach is the accompanying program, Spelling, by Don Ferguson.

### Unscrambling Words

Of the three programs that offer word-unscrambling, Stickybear is by far the most imaginative and captivating, especially for younger students. It offers two such activities. The first provides a picture to convey the meaning of the word. Students then use the joystick to select the correct sequence of letters, which are scattered throughout a maze. The second game is a combination of flashing the word and then unscrambling the letters in the maze. A third Stickybear activity is a game modeled on "hangman."

SPELLBOUND and Word Scrambler have unscramble word activities that are keyboard-controlled and more appropriate for older students.

**Table 2.** Index to 1986 Resource Center articles.

January	—Introduction to column
February	—Computer networking; 3 multiuser systems reviewed
March	—Shopping for educational software; table of sources
April	—Word processing in education
May	—Computers for music instruction; table of music software and hardware
June	—Commodore's support services for schools; list of education dealers
July	—Parent volunteers in schools; list of recommended educational software
August	—Telecommunications in schools
September	—New educational products for Commodore computers
October	—Public library uses Commodore
November	—Traveling computer lab
December	—Questions and answers; more sources of educational software

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word lists, I recommend getting the broader programs that provide large word lists and a combination of activities. Of the programs I tested, AEC, Stickybear, Whole Brain and MECC meet these criteria. 

If you're using Commodore computers for educational purposes (at home or in school) and would like to share your expe-

riences through The Resource Center, write me a letter detailing the equipment you're using, subject areas being taught, grade level or age of your students, software that you're using, and any other information you feel like including.

Also, if you'd like to donate public domain educational programs to The Resource Center for sharing with other educators and parents, please send along a disk

with a brief description of the program. Send correspondence and disks to:

Margaret Morabito  
The Resource Center  
c/o RUN magazine  
80 Elm St.  
Peterborough, NH 03458

You can also leave mail in my on-line mailboxes: CompuServe (70616,714) or QuantumLink (MARGM).

### Listing 1. Spelling program for the C-64.

```

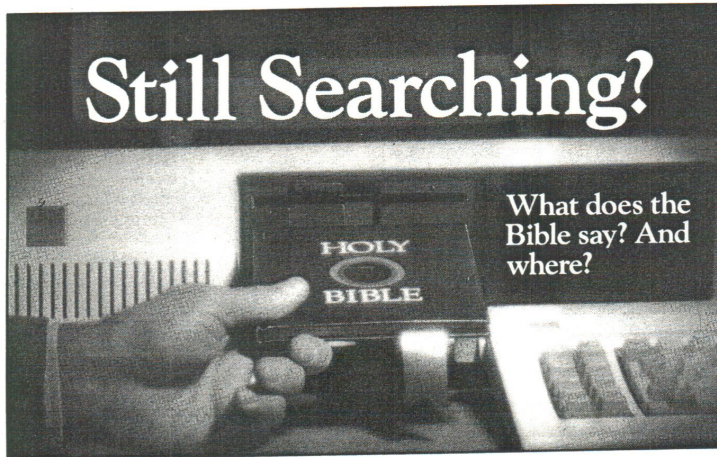
1 REM PROGRAMMER: DON FERGUSON      :REM*155
2 REM{13 SPACES}901 HACKNEY         :REM*186
3 REM{13 SPACES}ST.MARYS, OHIO 45885:REM*27
5 REM{2 SPACES}WORDS ENTERED INTO DATA STATEMENTS BEGINNING WITH LINE 100000 :REM*209
6 REM{2 SPACES}BE SURE TO END DATA STATEMENTS WITH * :REM*54
7 REM PUBLIC DOMAIN PROGRAM        :REM*233
10 POKE53280,2:POKE53281,1:POKE53272,23
                                     :REM*128
100 PRINT"{SHFT CLR}"                :REM*90
200 PRINT"{8 CRSR RTs}{8 CRSR DNs}{8 SPACES}{CTRL 9}{CTRL 1}{SHFT S}{CTRL 3}{SHFT P}{CTRL 4}{SHFT E}{CTRL 5}{SHFT L}{CTRL 6}{SHFT L}{CTRL 8}{SHFT I}{SHFT N}{CTRL 6}{SHFT G}" :REM*214
225 FORI=1TO2000:NEXT:PRINT"{SHFT CLR}" :REM*169
                                     :REM*252
261 PRINT"{SHFT CLR}"

```

```

262 RESTORE                          :REM*57
265 REM: MENU ROUTINE                :REM*108
267 PRINT"{7 CRSR RTs}{8 CRSR DNs}{SHFT S}{SHFT T}{SHFT U}{SHFT D}{SHFT Y}{SHFT SP ACE}{SHFT W}{SHFT O}{SHFT R}{SHFT D}{SH FT S} (1)" :REM*116
268 PRINT:PRINT"{8 CRSR RTs} {SHFT T}{SHFT A}{SHFT K}{SHFT E} {SHFT T}{SHFT E}{SH FT S}{SHFT T} (2)" :REM*17
270 GETCHOICE$:IFCHOICE$=""THEN GOTO 270 :REM*1
                                     :REM*1
275 IF CHOICE$=""1"THEN GO TO 2000 :REM*158
276 IFCHOICE$=""2" THEN GOTO2500 :REM*29
277 IFCHOICE$<>"1"ANDCHOICE$<>"2"THENGOTO270 :REM*66
                                     :REM*14
279 PRINT"{SHFT CLR}"                :REM*14
280 PRINT"{SHFT CLR}":PRINTTAB(12)"{6 CRSR DNs}{SHFT T}{SHFT E}{SHFT S}{SHFT T} {SH FT B}{SHFT E}{SHFT G}{SHFT I}{SHFT N}{SH FT S}" :REM*117
                                     →

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Listing 1 continued.

```
281 FOR X=1TO2500:NEXT :REM*200
290 SUM=0 :REM*81
300 READ A$ :REM*151
310 COUNT=0 :REM*127
350 IF A$="*"THEN GOTO 10050 :REM*95
395 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)":FORZ=1TO500:NEXT :REM*128
396 FORI=1 TO 10 :REM*33
397 PRINT"(15 CRSR RTs){10 CRSR DNs}";A$ :REM*142
398 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)" :REM*133
400 NEXT :REM*155
500 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)":FORI=1TO 300:NEXT :REM*185
610 INPUT "(CTRL 9){CTRL 6}{SHFT C}{SHFT O}
{2 SHFT Rs}{SHFT E}{SHFT C}{SHFT T}{SHF
T SPACE}{SHFT S}{SHFT P}{SHFT E}{2 SHFT
Ls}{SHFT I}{SHFT N}{SHFT G}";B$:REM*44
650 COUNT=COUNT+1 :REM*54
700 IF B$=A$ THEN SUM=SUM+5:GOSUB5000:GOTO3
00 :REM*30
705 IF B$<>A$THENGOSUB 6000 :REM*57
710 SUM=SUM-1 :REM*210
750 IF COUNT=3 THEN 950 :REM*110
800 GOTO 395 :REM*29
925 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)" :REM*150
930 GOTO261 :REM*231
940 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)" :REM*165
950 PRINT "{6 CRSR DNs}{4 CRSR RTs}{SHFT C}
{SHFT O}{2 SHFT Rs}{SHFT E}{SHFT C}{SHF
T T}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT S}{SHFT P}{SHFT E}
}{2 SHFT Ls}{SHFT I}{SHFT N}{SHFT G}{SH
FT SPACE}{SHFT I}{SHFT S}":A$:REM*191
955 INPUT "{5 CRSR RTs}{2 CRSR DNs}{SHFT T}{
SHFT Y}{SHFT P}{SHFT E}{SHFT SPACE}{SHF
T C}{SHFT O}{2 SHFT Rs}{SHFT E}{SHFT C}
{SHFT T}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT W}{SHFT O}{SH
FT R}{SHFT D}";B$ :REM*92
956 IF B$<>A$THEN GOTO940 :REM*113
960 PRINT"(5 CRSR RTs){7 CRSR DNs}{SHFT P}R
ESS ANY KEY TO CONTINUE" :REM*65
980 GET Q$:IFQ$=""THEN GOTO980 :REM*101
990 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)" :REM*215
1000 GOTO300 :REM*181
1200 PRINT"(8 CRSR RTs){2 CRSR DNs}{SHFT T}
{SHFT A}{SHFT K}{SHFT E}{SHFT T}{SHFT
E}{SHFT S}{SHFT T}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT A}
}{SHFT G}{SHFT A}{SHFT I}{SHFT N}; {SH
FT Y}/{SHFT N}" :REM*150
2000 REM: STUDY WORD ROUTINE :REM*77
2050 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)" :REM*0
2100 READA$ :REM*166
2200 PRINT"(15 CRSR RTs){8 CRSR DNs}";A$ :REM*40
2250 IF A$="*"THEN GOTO261 :REM*244
2300 PRINT:PRINT:PRINT:PRINT"(5 CRSR RTs){S
HFT P}{SHFT R}{SHFT E}{2 SHFT Ss}{SHFT
SPACE}{SHFT A}{SHFT N}{SHFT Y}{SHFT S
PACE}{SHFT K}{SHFT E}{SHFT Y}{SHFT SPA
CE}{SHFT T}{SHFT O}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT S}
}{2 SHFT Es}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT N}{SHFT
E}{SHFT X}{SHFT T}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT W}
{SHFT O}{SHFT R}{SHFT D}" :REM*174
2310 GETL$:IFL$=""THEN GOTO2310 :REM*17
2312 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)" :REM*7
2400 GO TO 2100 :REM*45
2500 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)":PRINT"(11 CRSR RTs){
6 CRSR DNs}{SHFT P}{SHFT O}{SHFT I}{SH
FT N}{SHFT T}{SHFT A}{SHFT W}{SHFT A}
{SHFT R}{SHFT D}{SHFT S}" :REM*229
2510 PRINT:PRINT:PRINT"(7 CRSR RTs){SHFT C}
{SHFT O}{2 SHFT Rs}{SHFT E}{SHFT C}{SH
FT T}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT F}{SHFT I}{SHFT
R}{SHFT S}{SHFT T}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT T}
}{SHFT I}{SHFT M}{SHFT E} = +5{SHFT SP
ACE}{SHFT P}{SHFT O}{SHFT I}{SHFT N}{S
HFT T}{SHFT S}" :REM*29
2520 PRINT:PRINT"(10 CRSR RTs){SHFT W}{SHFT
R}{SHFT O}{SHFT N}{SHFT G}{SHFT SPACE}
}{SHFT E}{SHFT A}{SHFT C}{SHFT H}{SHFT
SPACE}{SHFT T}{SHFT I}{SHFT M}{SHFT E}
}{SHFT SPACE} = -1 {SHFT P}{SHFT O}{SHF
T I}{SHFT N}{SHFT T}" :REM*41
2530 PRINT:PRINT"(8 CRSR RTs){5 CRSR DNs}
{SHFT P}{SHFT R}{SHFT E}{2 SHFT Ss}{SH
FT SPACE}{SHFT A}{SHFT N}{SHFT Y} {SHF
T K}{SHFT E}{SHFT Y}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT
T}{SHFT O}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT B}{SHFT E}
{SHFT G}{SHFT I}{SHFT N}" :REM*89
2540 GET A$:IFAS$=""THEN2540 :REM*13
2610 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)":GOTO279 :REM*8
5000 REM{2 SPACES}BELL SOUND :REM*221
5010 POKE54296,15:POKE54277,0:POKE54278,247
:REM*77
5020 POKE54276,17:POKE54273,40:POKE54272,0
:REM*57
5030 FOR T=1TO500:NEXT:POKE54276,6 :REM*63
5040 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)":FORX=1TO6:PRINTTAB(1
7)"{10 CRSR DNs}{SHFT R}{SHFT I}{SHFT
G}{SHFT H}{SHFT T}!":FORY=1TO80:NEXT:P
RINT"(SHFT CLR)" :REM*147
5050 FORZ=1TO80:NEXT:NEXT:RETURN :REM*209
6000 REM BUZZER :REM*3
6010 POKE54296,15:POKE54277,45:POKE54268,16
5 :REM*95
6020 POKE54276,33:POKE54273,6:POKE54272,5
:REM*171
6030 FORT=1TO500:NEXT:POKE54276,32:POKE5427
3,0:POKE54272,0 :REM*225
6040 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)":FORX=1TO6:PRINTTAB(1
7)"{10 CRSR DNs}{SHFT W}{SHFT R}{SHFT
O}{SHFT N}{SHFT G}!":FORY=1TO80:NEXT:P
RINT"(SHFT CLR)" :REM*39
6050 FORZ=1TO80:NEXT:NEXT:RETURN :REM*189
10000 DATA ACCIDENTALLY,ATTENDANCE,BENEFIT,
CHARACTERISTIC,DENY,DOUBLE,ELABORATE
:REM*1
10001 DATA MISSPELL,* :REM*190
10020 REM*****MESSAGE ROUTINE***** :REM*103
10050 IF SUM<75 THEN MSG$="(SHFT Y)OU NEED
TO STUDY YOUR WORDS" :REM*101
10051 IF SUM>75 AND SUM<84 THEN MSG$="(SHFT
P)RETTY GOOD JOB" :REM*222
10052 IF SUM>84 AND SUM<94 THEN MSG$="(SHFT
R)EAL GOOD" :REM*191
10053 IF SUM>94 AND SUM<100 THEN MSG$="(SHF
T A)LMOST PERFECT" :REM*234
10054 IF SUM>99 THENMSG$="(SHFT P)ERFECT SC
ORE!! {SHFT H}OORAY!!!" :REM*239
10055 PRINT"{6 CRSR RTs}{6 CRSR DNs}";MSG$
:REM*182
10058 PRINT:PRINT:PRINT"(2 CRSR RTs){SHFT Y}
{SHFT O}{SHFT U}{SHFT R}{SHFT SPACE}
{SHFT S}{SHFT C}{SHFT O}{SHFT R}{SHFT
E}{SHFT SPACE}{SHFT W}{SHFT A}{SHFT
S}{SHFT SPACE}";SUM :REM*177
10060 PRINT:PRINT:PRINT"(5 CRSR RTs){4 CRSR
DNs}{SHFT T}AKE TEST AGAIN? Y/N" :REM*201
10350 GETZ$:IFZ$=""THEN 10350 :REM*136
10400 IF Z$="Y" THEN 261 :REM*148
10500 PRINT"(SHFT CLR)":PRINT"(15 CRSR RTs)
{SHFT S}EE YOU LATER." :REM*155
10600 END :REM*147
```