Walking or Walked? How -ing and -ed Show When Something Happens in Year 1

In Reception, children start to understand that different verb endings tell us when something happens. Adding -ing shows an action is happening now ('jumping'), while -ed shows it already happened ('jumped'). This isn't mainly about spelling – it's about learning to think about time through language. At home, you can strengthen this with everyday chat and play.

What it is

A suffix is a small group of letters added to the end of a word. In Reception, children learn to add -ing and -ed to action words (verbs without changing the root word). Adding -ing shows something is happening right now – like 'jump' becomes 'jumping'. Adding -ed shows something already happened – like 'jump' becomes 'jumped'. The real learning here isn't spelling rules; it's noticing that words change shape to tell us about time. Children work with simple, everyday verbs like walk, jump, help, play and clap so the pattern becomes clear through play and conversation, not memorisation.

What happens

In Reception, children encounter -ing and -ed words through everyday classroom talk, stories and physical activities. A teacher might say, 'You're jumping so high!' or 'You jumped over the puddle!' Children gradually notice the pattern through repetition in games, songs, and actions. They may be asked to show actions ('Can you show me jumping?') or sort picture cards by whether something is happening now or already happened. The focus is always on meaning – does this word tell me about *now* or *already*? – rather than rules. As children progress, they begin to use these endings in their own speech and early writing, encouraged through play and celebration rather than correction.

What it means for your child

Learning about -ing and -ed helps your child start to notice how language works. It's an early step towards understanding time and how we talk about actions. In Reception, most children are learning this alongside speaking, listening and early reading – it all fits together. Your child doesn't need to be perfect at it; they're simply beginning to notice the pattern. Some children grasp it quickly, others need longer. Both are completely normal. This understanding will make storytelling easier – 'I'm building' versus 'I built' – which helps your child share what they're doing or what happened, now and as they grow.

How you can help at home

Chat casually about actions as they happen. When your child runs to the door, say, 'You're running!' When they've finished painting, say, 'You painted that.' Make it a natural game during everyday moments – no special materials needed. Sing action songs together where the words change – 'If you're jumping, jump up high' – then 'We jumped so high!' Play 'I spy' with actions: 'I'm looking for someone who is skipping' or 'Who has skipped before?' Read stories aloud and pause to notice how words change: 'The cat is sleeping... the cat slept.' Your tone should be playful and celebratory. When your child notices the pattern or uses it, that's brilliant – but there's no pressure to get it right every time. It's all about enjoying language together.

Questions parents often ask

Should I correct my child if they say 'I goed'? No – gently model the right way back in conversation. 'You went to the park!' rather than pointing out a mistake. **Will this confuse them with spelling?** Not if the focus stays on *meaning* first. Spelling patterns come later. **My child hasn't mastered -ing and -ed yet – is that normal?** Completely. Reception is just the beginning. Children progress at different rates. **Do I need to use grammar words like 'suffix' or 'verb'?** No. Just talk naturally about actions and when they happen. **What if my child mixes them up?** That's expected. Keep modelling gently. Repetition and play will gradually make the pattern familiar.

Sources

- Department for Education: 'National Curriculum in England: English appendices – Spelling, pronunciation and grammar' (2014)
- GOV.UK: 'EYFS areas of learning and development' – Communication and Language