

Changing prices on Real Spelling Online Subscriptions

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Hello to anyone interested in deepening your understanding of how English orthography works, especially to improve literacy instruction.

My name is Pete Bowers. I am an educator/researcher who has been working with Real Spelling resources since 2001. Building on that reference I introduced “Structured Word Inquiry” (Bowers & Kirby, 2010). I’m also part of a team of people supporting Matt, the webmaster of all things to do with Real Spelling online. In this message, I explain why we have lowered the cost, and provide some background on this remarkable, unique resource for understanding English orthography.

We are currently in the midst of another wave of heated public debates around literacy instruction. Establishing an instructional approach that permanently escapes these repeated pendulum swings is a complex puzzle. Logically, however, there should be wide agreement that an accurate reflection of how English orthography works would be a necessary “puzzle piece” of any such instruction. This makes the Real Spelling resources invaluable for the long-term improvement of literacy instruction.

The author of Real Spelling, Michel Rameau, passed away last year. For those who are interested, you can view [this tribute](#) to Michel and Real Spelling that I published recently. That tribute shares the story of my first encounter with Michel, Real Spelling and the matrix at an education conference in 2001 when I was a Grade 4 teacher. It traces the steady growth of orthographic understanding from Real Spelling and SWI since then and includes links to many orthographic resources that Real Spelling subscribers will find helpful.

When I first encountered the Real Spelling Tool Box in 2001, it was a physical resource. The blue box next to Michel in the image at right is the set of drawers with the Real Spelling Themes. The binder on the table in front of him is the Real Spelling Manual that came with the themes.



The Tool Box 2 was not just a change of medium from hard copy to CDs (image at right). Most themes were revised substantially to reflect Michel’s evolving thinking and the fact that there was now an audience ready for more advanced linguistic terminology and concepts. He also added new resources like the 70 Matrices disk, two discs on orthographic phonology and more.



Eventually changes in technology rendered those CDs hopelessly out of date. By this time Michel had already started to present his online Spellinars; so when health issues prevented him from traveling, he was happy to focus on creating films for those Spellinars and allow access to the Tool Box 2 to fade away.

The loss of access to this invaluable reference was a cause of great concern to those like me who understood its import. Matt, a major supporter of this work, had long been trying to find a way to make the content on the Real Spelling Tool Box 2 CDs available in a sustainable online format. He made a mock-up of a Real Spelling Theme so Michel could see what he had in mind. Michel happily gave his blessing and was delighted to know his work was still important to people. Matt got started with the massive job of transforming all the Toolbox 2 content to an online format.

The first goal of this coordinated effort was to ensure that this massive, linguistically valid reference for understanding orthography would be available for future generations. A second goal, however, soon became apparent. Increasing health issues meant Michel could no longer host his Spellinars. With the Spellinars over and the old Tool Box 2 unavailable, Michel had no source of income from his orthographic work. Subscriptions to the online Tool Box 2 provided a way to get Michel some income as he dealt with health concerns.

Despite the many hundreds of hours Matt had to put in to make the website work, he refused to take any money from registrations and even paid significant out-of-pocket expenses to get the website going. A team of editors helping with the process also worked voluntarily. With Michel's passing, the motivation of helping Michel financially disappeared. However, it takes a great deal of work behind the scenes to complete the website and keep it running. Some technical issues after Michel's passing were not straightforward.

Since Michel's passing, the only motivation left is to make this orthographic information as accessible as possible for as long as possible. As a result, we have lowered the cost of these resources. There are still substantial costs for server maintenance, etc., so the resource cannot be free, but its cost can be substantially reduced. See the new prices we are just announced at the top of the next page.

As you can see the annual Tool Box 2 subscription has only decreased a bit. The Annual subscription provides an ongoing income supporting the website, and the price is already quite low for the content. Once the Manual is completed, probably later this year, both Annual and Lifetime subscribers will have access to all the same content.

The lifetime cost is an even more significant reduction. (Prices that were on the site were in Euros – the numbers have now been converted to US dollars).

Online Tool Box 2	Old price (in USD)	New Price (in USD)
Annual	\$50	\$45
Lifetime	\$270	\$220
Orthographica	Old price (in USD)	New Price (in USD)
Annual	NA	\$25
Lifetime	\$410	\$150

For Orthographica, we now sell access only to the entire archive, whereas previously people subscribed to individual parts. In addition in the past there was no option for an annual subscription. We now offer a \$25 annual full-site subscription option. The lifetime subscription for Orthographica is dramatically lowered. This pricing is logical given that most of those who purchased that subscription likely worked directly with Michel. The content is very rich, but not as vast as the Tool Box 2, so the lower price makes sense there too.

We are pleased to be able to make this resource more accessible financially. However, if you are a current subscriber and you feel this change is unfair for you, especially for those who may have purchased a subscription very recently, please email me <peterbowers1@mac.com>. We will work it out.

I do hope you consider reading my tribute to get a sense of the man who created this amazing reference that we are working hard to keep available for future generations. We hope the lower prices will make sure more people gain access to it and that we earn enough to keep the lights on.

Sincerely,
Pete Bowers