

A FRONTIER COLLEGE TUTOR'S GUIDE

Reading and Writing with Children and Youth



Literacy. Learning for Life.

© 2007 Frontier College
All rights reserved
Printed in Canada

The development of this guide was made possible by a grant from the **Ontario Ministry of Education**.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Huehn, Sandra

A Frontier College tutor's guide : reading and writing with children and youth / Sandra Huehn.

ISBN 978-0-921031-41-3

1. Reading (Elementary). 2. English language--Writing--Study and teaching (Elementary). 3. Tutors and tutoring. I. Title.

LB1573.H83 2007

372.41

C2007-904112-4

Written by Sandra Huehn

Edited by Maureen Anglin, Erica Martin, Dave Page

Designed by Lynette Niles

Many thanks to Elaine Benton for sharing her knowledge about reading theory.

Published by

Frontier College Press



35 Jackes Avenue
Toronto, ON
M4T 1E2

Tel: (416) 923-3591 OR [toll free] 1-800-555-6523

Fax: (416) 323-3522

Email: information@frontiercollege.ca

Web: www.frontiercollege.ca

For more resources go to the Frontier College website.

Introduction

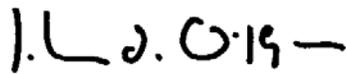
Thank you for making a difference in a child or youth's life. Reading is the foundation of all learning. We are asking all citizens to spend time with a child or a group of children and help them to realize their potential, to pursue their dreams and to improve their skills.

You are needed. There is an important role for all of us. Parents, teachers, volunteers from the community, as well as high school, college and university students are all getting involved by spending time with younger students and providing them with tutoring support, positive role models and lots of encouragement.

Frontier College instructors and volunteer tutors have been providing people with this kind of support for learning since 1899.

The materials and tutoring approaches in this guide are based on our experience in programs we have run across the country. These materials will help you help a child or youth who is learning to read or one who has difficulty understanding and using written materials.

The best way to learn how to tutor is by being a tutor. But to help you start, we have presented in this manual some ideas and strategies you can use to help a child or youth improve their reading and writing skills.



John D. O'Leary

President,
Frontier College



Frontier College

Literacy. Learning for Life.

Frontier College is Canada's original literacy organization. Founded in 1899 by a small group of university students, Frontier College began by sending student volunteers to the frontiers of Canada: logging camps, mining towns and rail gangs. They laboured alongside workers during the day and taught in the evenings and on weekends.

Today, we work with Canadians who have little or no access to other educational opportunities or who need extra learning support to reach their goals. Our volunteers serve on Canada's "new frontiers" — inner-city schools and streets, public housing sites, farms, prisons and reserves.

Low literacy skills are directly linked to poverty, poor health and high unemployment. Literacy is more than just the ability to read and write. It's the ability to understand the printed word and to put it to use. It's about strengthening culture, achieving goals, gaining knowledge and recognizing potential. It's about succeeding in today's world.

Forty-two percent of adult Canadians have trouble with everyday tasks that involve reading. That's millions of Canadians who are not reaching their potential.

Literacy is an essential skill in today's world. At Frontier College, we believe it's a fundamental right. Frontier College provides access to this right by reaching out to people across Canada, responding to their learning needs and encouraging lifelong learning. We achieve our mission for literacy through volunteer mobilization, youth leadership development and community capacity building.

Our philosophy of learning and teaching is guided by the following principles:

- All individuals have a right to learn and a right to literacy so they can better participate in their community.
- We go where people are rather than expecting them to come to us.
- We use a learner-centred approach whereby learners decide what they want to learn.
- We believe that every place is a learning place.
- We value a tutorial partnership where learner and tutor respect and learn from each other.
- We value the contributions learners, volunteers and partners make in the learning experience.

Table of contents

How to use this guide	2
Section 1: Getting started	3
Student Centred Individualized Learning (SCIL).....	4
Your role as a tutor	5
Identifying strengths and learning needs.....	6
Session planning	7
Demonstrating progress.....	9
Child safety issues.....	11
Stages of reading	12
Section 2: Learning to read	13
Beginning readers	14
Word-attack skills	15
Phonics.....	15
Breaking words down	16
Spelling	17
Sight words	18
Tutoring strategies	20
Language Experience Approach.....	20
Reading aloud with beginning readers	21
Reading and writing ideas.....	23
Cloze exercises.....	26
Section 3: Reading to learn	27
Struggling readers.....	28
Reading strategies	29
Choosing good reading materials.....	32
Writing strategies	33
Helping your students with homework	35
Conclusion	38
References	39

How to use this guide

This guide has been developed to help tutors who work with children and youth on homework and/or reading support. This guide provides various techniques and ideas for tutors to use to help their students strengthen reading skills and learning strategies which will also *motivate* the students to learn. It does not provide a set of prescribed lessons for tutors.

The first section in this guide, *Getting started*, will help you decide where to begin and how to keep your tutoring on track. Being an effective tutor starts with building a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. Without this relationship, no learning can take place, especially for an older child or youth who has struggled for years at school.

The tutoring techniques in the second section, *Learning to read*, will help a beginning reader learn how to read. Techniques such as phonics, sight words and the language experience approach will help your students learn the mechanics of reading.

The third section, *Reading to learn*, will help you tutor a child or youth who can read fairly well but who struggles to understand — or to think critically about — what he or she reads. These strategies will help your students to focus on understanding and interpreting what they read.

Although, tutoring a student one-on-one is ideal, it is not always possible. Whether you are working with one student, two students or a small group of students, it is important that you build a relationship with each of your students so that you can meet his or her individual learning needs.

We hope that you find these strategies and techniques useful in helping your students learn!

Additional resources for tutors

There are many factors that can impact how a student learns. You may encounter students who have learning disabilities, who have second language issues, or who are dealing with issues of abuse or violence. For these students in particular, you can play a key role in building their confidence and helping them learn.

In addition to this guide, there are a variety of resources that will help you to work with these students more effectively. To find these resources, talk with other tutors, visit your local library or search the web. Visit the Frontier College website at www.frontiercollege.ca for information about resources for tutors.

Section 1: Getting started



It's about relationships.

Student Centred Individualized Learning (SCIL)

People learn in different ways, so they should be taught in different ways. Student Centred Individualized Learning (SCIL) is Frontier College's teaching philosophy. (Frontier College Press, 1997). SCIL is based on the premise that everyone has unique interests, strengths and learning needs. To be effective, a tutor needs to select the strategies and techniques that work best for a particular student. This guide is designed to help tutors choose the tools to meet the varied learning needs of their students.

*Whether you are working with one, two or a small group of students, it is important to talk with each student about his or her **strengths, goals, needs and learning styles**. Ask:*

- **Strengths:** *What do you do well? What are your interests and skills?*
- **Goals:** *What do you want to do? What would you like to learn?*
- **Learning needs:** *What do you need to learn to be able to achieve your goals?*
- **Styles:** *How do you learn best? How do you gain new knowledge?*

Using a student-centred approach to tutoring

Focus on strengths

Start first with what your students can do and what they already know and do well. When your students know that you are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they are more willing to take risks with you. Success breeds success.

Respect different learning styles

Keep in mind how your students learn. Do they learn by doing or by observing? Do they need lots of activity or a quiet space to learn? Be flexible and use a variety of activities in your tutoring.

Make sure participation is voluntary

Tutoring works best when everyone chooses to participate — tutors and students. It is important that your students meet with you because they want to learn.

Your role as a tutor

Help your students to become better readers, writers and thinkers

Your role is to help your students develop the skills to succeed at reading, writing and homework activities, not to just give them the answers.

Be an equal partner

Both you and your students are responsible for the activities during your sessions and should bring materials to work on. Choose activities based on your students' strengths, needs and interests.

Be committed

Stick with it. Be on time. If you can't attend a session, let your students know ahead of time. Expect the same commitment from them.

Be a mentor

Always have a positive attitude towards books, learning and school. Help your students understand that making mistakes is an important part of learning.

Be a facilitator

You are a resource to help your students achieve their learning goals. You need to help your students develop self-confidence and trust.

Be a motivator

Even the most eager students go through periods when they have trouble getting excited about learning. Help each of your students to focus and stay committed.

Open the world of learning to your students

Help your students to discover new interests and possibilities. Bring poetry, magazines, music and books — anything that may catch their interest.

Remember, it's about relationships

Ensure you get to know each of your students. Nurturing these relationships will allow your students to trust you. Once they trust you, they will be able to take risks with you, such as making mistakes; talking about things they have trouble understanding or discussing their fears about school. Establishing a relationship built on trust and mutual respect is key to learning, which is especially true for youth who may have struggled for many years at school.

Identifying strengths and learning needs

During your first few meetings with your students, your goal is to informally determine each of your student's strengths and learning needs. This will help you decide where you can start working together. You can learn about your students through asking them the following questions, reading aloud together or observing how well your students write.

When you first meet, ask:

- What are your favourite subjects (or activities) in school?
- What subjects do you need help with?
- What are you interested in learning about?
- Why did you join this homework club (or tutoring program)?
- What is your learning style? How do you learn best?

Most students – especially older students – are very aware of the areas where they need help. They are often unaware of their strengths.

Setting goals

It is a good idea to set three to four goals with each of your students when you first start meeting together. If you are working with young children, your goal may simply be to read aloud with your students. Older students may need assistance with reading or they may need help in a particular subject area.

Write these goals down and revisit them several times throughout the year. Adjust these goals to the age and learning needs of the student. For example, young children may not be able to articulate their learning goals. As well, sometimes a student's goals may only become clear as you work together and get to know each other.

Session planning

It is important to provide some structure to your tutoring sessions. If you are working with more than one student, you may work with your students individually or you may work together as a group.

How you work together will depend upon the learning needs of your students and homework they bring. If you have more than one student, it is preferable that your students are approximately the same age and have similar learning needs.

Here are some planning tips for your meetings:

- Choose a place that is comfortable. Avoid loud places or distracting situations.
- Discuss what you will do together each time you meet. Draw up a plan together for the session.
- Dive in! Vary your activities. Every time you work together, spend part of the time doing homework, reading aloud together or working on a project. Make sure your students read and write something during every session.
- Leave some time to talk with your students about what you have read together. This discussion is essential for developing comprehension abilities.
- If you are working with more than one student, you may decide to play a word game or lead a group learning activity near the end of the session.
- At the end of each session, decide together what you will do during your next meeting. This will help you to get the most out of the time that you work together.

It is important for you to bring reading and other learning materials to your tutoring sessions. Over time, you will see how much you need to bring as your students may bring lots to work on or they may arrive without any homework.

Here is an example of how to structure a 45-minute session with a grade two student:

5 minutes — Talk about how each of you has spent the week since you last met. Look at the books and activities you will be working on today.

10 minutes — Read a familiar story book together.

10 minutes — Study some of the difficult words in the book. Play some word games using these words.

5 minutes — Write about how the story could be continued.

10 minutes — Read a new story book together.

5 minutes — Talk about what books your students will read over the week. Discuss what you may read together the following week.

Here is an example of how to structure a 90-minute session with a grade 8 student:

- 5 minutes** – Talk about how each of you has spent the week since you last met
- 5 minutes** – Plan what to work on today
- 20 minutes** – Homework – geography
- 10 minutes** – Finish geography assignment
- 20 minutes** – Homework – math
- 15 minutes** – Read from novel – *The Hobbit*
- 10 minutes** – Work on Sudoku puzzle
- 5 minutes** – Plan what to do together the following week

Take a couple of breaks to get a drink of water or to “stretch” your legs.

If you are working with more than one student, over time you will develop a routine and structure that works for all of your students.

Demonstrating progress

Your students' progress can be demonstrated through keeping a portfolio of their work, maintaining journals and holding regular check-ins with your students.

Portfolios

Keep a file — or portfolio — with samples of the work you have done together to keep a record of your students' progress. This portfolio can also be used to determine what still needs to be done.

You may choose to keep a group portfolio or a portfolio with each of your students. Keep a variety of work that show different skills your students have learned:

- rough notes, outlines, first drafts and final copies of homework
- completed crossword puzzles and word games
- copies of stories or letters you have written together

Student journal

Some students enjoy keeping a journal of their work with a tutor. Journals can include a description of

- activities completed
- the most enjoyable activities
- plans for the next session

If you are working with more than one student, you may wish to keep a group journal or keep a journal for each student. Your students may initially ask you to write in it and they may write in it later or you may share the responsibility from the beginning. Use a method that is comfortable for everyone. Keep the journal in the portfolio.

Keeping on track

Check in regularly with your students about how you work together. Review some of the things you have done together.

Ask:

- What has worked? What hasn't worked?
- What would you like to change? Are there other things we should be doing?
- What have you learned?
- How can we make the boring parts better?
- Have you enjoyed our time together? Why?

You may wish to check in with each student individually or as a group. This process will ensure everyone thinks about *what* you work on and *how* you work together. Remember to praise and recognize each student's progress.

Evaluating progress

Evaluating doesn't mean testing. It means reflecting on your accomplishments together to show you and your students what you have achieved. Think about the work you have done together. With each student, look through examples of work: read through journals, examine materials in portfolios or review past homework assignments. Compare this work to your students' goals — either those you set initially or goals that have emerged as you have worked together. Are your students meeting their goals?

If your students are meeting their goals, congratulate them and ask

- What did you find the most helpful?
- What will we work on next?

If your students aren't meeting their goals, ask

- Can we break your goals into small chunks? It takes time to reach goals!
- Are these goals still relevant? Goals can change over time.
- Is there something I can do to help you meet your goals?

To help motivate your students, show them the ways that they have improved. With each of your students you can

- Compare recent samples of their writing to earlier pieces.
- Look at their schoolwork and note improvements.
- Discuss changes you have noticed in them. Talk about improvements in their knowledge and skills as well as changes in their attitude or behaviour.
- Ask your students about changes that they have noticed.

Don't forget!!

Focus on your students' strengths. What do your students do well?

Child safety issues

In order to protect students, Frontier College screens all volunteers who tutor in its programs. As a volunteer, and indeed as a citizen, your role includes looking out for the safety of students. If in your honest judgment, you believe that a child may not be safe, either because of the child's behaviour or someone else's, it is your legal responsibility to contact Children's Aid to report your concerns. Speak with the teacher or the person who is in charge of the program to help you with this action.

If a child discloses an abusive situation to you:

- Tell the child that you will need to tell someone else if they are being hurt.
- Listen without detailed questioning.
- When the child is finished talking, tell him or her:
 - ▶ You have to tell someone else about what he or she said.
 - ▶ You will try to help him or her.
- Remember that you cannot counsel the child (leave this job to trained professionals).
- Offer assurance to the child that you believe him or her.
- After the child has left, write down everything he or she has told you.
- Speak to the program supervisor, whether it is a teacher, a community member or a Frontier College staff person.
- Call the Children's Aid Society or Family and Children's Services in your area right away. Ask them what you should do next. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They will guide you through the next steps of the reporting process.
- If you cannot contact Children's Aid immediately, let the child go home, unless you believe the child is in immediate danger.

For more information on your responsibilities under the Child and Family Services Act go to www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/programs/ChildProtection/Publications/repChAbuse.htm

To protect yourself and your students:

- *Meet with your students only during the hours of the program.*
- *Always tutor in an open area where others can see you.*
- *Only exchange phone numbers or email addresses with your students with parental written permission and involvement.*
- *Avoid discussing topics (such as sex, drugs or risky behaviours) that might be misunderstood and might place you in a difficult situation.*

Stages of reading

The *learning to read / reading to learn* framework (Chall, 1983) can help you decide when and why to use various tutoring techniques and strategies. This framework does not provide rules about what you should or should not do with your students. It helps you to decide which techniques and strategies make the most sense for your students, based on their strengths and learning needs.

Learning to read — Kindergarten to grade 3	
What students are learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the mechanics of reading• the relationships between letters and sounds (“phonics”)• how to blend sounds to form words• the relationships between word families• using context to figure out meaning
Good activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• reading aloud together• playing word games• writing together
Your role	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• teacher• to help your students learn and strengthen basic reading and writing skills

Although learning to read is the focus of the primary grades, many students do not learn these skills for a variety of reasons that may include disabilities, learning difficulties, poverty, violence, low parental literacy skills or second-language issues.

Reading to learn — Grade 4 and up	
What students are learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• how to focus on meaning• higher-level thinking strategies• how to figure out new words based on the relationships between words
Good activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• building on prior knowledge• developing predicting skills• sharing strategies for interpreting a text
Your role	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• facilitator• role model• share strategies for interpreting a text

Starting in grade 4, the focus of the curriculum changes from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*. Students are expected to read fluently and use their reading skills to learn about geography, about history — about life. If students are still struggling with learning how to read, they will find school work increasingly more frustrating.

Section 2: Learning to read



*Reading is the decoding
of written symbols into
meaningful ideas.*

Beginning readers

Reading is the decoding of written symbols into meaningful ideas.

This section presents techniques for helping beginning readers learn how to read. These techniques are most helpful in tutoring students in kindergarten to grade 3 as well as older students who have not yet mastered the mechanics of reading.

How can you tell if a student is a beginning reader? The student may

- have trouble figuring out how to read unfamiliar or invented words (like *glox*)
- have a lot of difficulty spelling
- read slowly with many pauses
- tell you that he or she has a lot of trouble reading and writing

Beginning readers need to be “glued” to the print in order to learn how to read. They need to pay attention to every letter and every word.

As a tutor, your role is to create situations where your students are “glued” to the print so they can learn about sounds, letters, letter groups and the connections between words. You can do this by reading a variety of texts, doing language activities, writing stories and using flashcards. You should also model fluent reading for your students.

How do children learn to read?

- *Many children learn to read by being read to. Gradually, they notice differences in word patterns and recognize the sounds associated with various letters.*
- *Other children do not notice the differences between words or the sounds of various letters until someone points out the letter-sound relationships. These children may need systematic instruction in phonics to help them understand letter-sound relationships before they can learn to read.*
- *Keep in mind that for all children, fostering a love of reading and books is essential to becoming a successful reader. Don't forget to read with your students for enjoyment!*

Word-attack skills

Successful readers (including beginning readers) use word-attack skills to learn new words. Through developing their knowledge in the following four areas, students are able to become more successful readers:

- **Phonics** – the relationships between letters and sounds
- **Breaking words down** – how words are put together and the relationships and patterns among words
- **Spelling** – to reinforce the students’ knowledge of letter-sound relationships
- **Sight words** – these are words that readers need to know in order to get through a text

Phonics

Phonics (the relationships between letters and sounds) helps beginning readers learn to sound out words according to their spelling. Phonics is one of the cues that people use when reading. Through using phonics, the connections between the spelling of a word, its sound and its meaning are made clear to your students.

Letter-sound relationships are best learned during meaningful reading. Teach your students about phonics as you read and write together. Avoid nonsense exercises or repetitive drilling. Here are some strategies that you can use to practise phonics.

Hearing sounds in words

The first step in learning how to read is being able to hear and identify the sounds in spoken words. Then, your students will learn the association between letters and specific sounds. To help your students strengthen their ability to hear sounds in words:

- Read poems and books with words that rhyme.
- Speak with your students and listen to them speak. Enunciate your words carefully. Ask your students to listen for a particular sound in a group of words – *“Which word has the ssss sound – book, table, sand?”*
- Play games with spoken words. For example, use tongue twisters and limericks.

Initial consonants

When a word starts with a consonant, there is often a clear relationship between the first letter and the sound. Of course, there are many exceptions to this rule (for example, *c* in *cat* and *city* or *ch* in *choir*, *church* and *chute*). Keeping the exceptions in mind, focus on initial consonants to help your students match letters to sounds (for example, *jokel/jump/jam* or *radio/raspberry/road*).

Rhyming word families

When you read together, talk about rhyming words (for example, the *-at* family – *at, cat, mat, etc.*) Focus on the similarities and differences between the sounds and spelling. This discussion will help your students learn about initial consonants and vowels. Once your students understand the relationship between regular rhyming sounds and spelling (*book, cook, took*), talk about words that rhyme but are not spelled similarly (*me, free, tea, etc.*)

Sounding it out

When your students read, help them to strengthen their ability to sound out unfamiliar words. For one-syllable words, look first at the initial letter, then the last letter and finally the middle letters. Afterwards, help your students blend the sounds together. Break longer words into syllables or smaller words. Then help your students sound out the smaller pieces.

Phonetic rules

Explain common phonetic rules to your students. For example,

- the final *e* in short words makes the vowel say its own name, e.g., *mat* becomes *mate*
- when two vowels go walking, the first vowel does the talking and it says its own name, e.g., *boat, beat*

Since many words in English come from other languages, there are almost as many exceptions as rules. Discuss these exceptions with your students to decide how they can remember them. The best way for your students to practise is by using words in a meaningful context.

Breaking words down

Help your students learn how to break large words down into manageable pieces. Here are some strategies:

- Divide compound words [*newspaper = news + paper*]
- Look for root words [*read → reader, reading, reread*]
- Find familiar words within new big words [*continent = con + tin (+ ent)*]
- Isolate prefixes [*mis → misinform, misbehave*]
- Separate suffixes [*able → understandable*]
- Know the forms of contractions [*is not → isn't*]
- Understand plural endings [*grapes, rings, foxes, grasses*]
(The rule for plurals: add *es* to words ending with *s, ss, ch, sh, and x*. Add *s* to all other words. Of course, there are exceptions – *feet, children, fish*)

Also help your students break words into syllables (or “chunks”). Help them practise this by clapping or tapping on the table (e.g., *phar-ma-cy*). Remind them that each

syllable contains at least one vowel. A quick (though not perfect) way to break a written word into syllables:

1. Start at the last vowel in a word (with a letter after it)
2. Place a syllable divider in front of the consonant that is just before this vowel.
3. Continue marking syllables towards the front of the word in this way
[For example, *a / part / ment*]

Spelling

English contains words from many languages, thus it has many irregular spelling patterns. This means a lot of time, practise and memory work for students. Spelling helps students to learn the letter-sound relationships; writing practise helps to reinforce spelling. Working on spelling should fit naturally into other reading and writing activities that you and your students do together.

Some strategies to help with spelling:

Sound out the word

Have your students pronounce the word slowly and write down the letters they hear. Ask your students to try to spell the word in a couple of different ways and have them choose the best one. Tip: ask your students to think about the word families or root words that the word may be related to.

Encourage self-correction

After your students have finished writing something, ask them if they think there are any words in the text that are spelled incorrectly. Check these words together.

Share your personal spelling strategies

For example, some people use mnemonic phrases (“the *principal* is our *pal*”). Others deliberately mispronounce specific words (such as *knife*) to make them sound the way they are spelled.

Look for patterns in your student’s errors

Your students may always have difficulty with certain words (for example, words ending in *-tion* or *-sion* or homonyms such as *their*, *there* and *they’re*). Write a song or a story that includes these words.

Practise using the dictionary together

Practise using a dictionary or compile a personal dictionary (see box on page 18). Try using a spell-check program on a computer — remember that these programs may not catch words that are spelled correctly but misused.

Sight words

Sight words are words that readers can recognize instantly without having to sound them out. They include

- short words that are used frequently in any text and are recognized automatically by fluent readers e.g., *of, it, he, I, the* (see the following page for a list of the 100 most commonly used English words)
- words that can't be sounded out and have to be memorized e.g. *through, tough, though* and *cough*
- words of special interest to readers (depending on the students' interests, these words may include *basketball, hamburger, Costa Rica* or *computer*)

Here are some ideas for practising sight words:

- Use flash cards. Make them together! Each card could include words, symbols or pictures.
- Create crossword puzzles or word searches. (Note: There are websites that allow you to generate your own puzzles such as www.puzzlemaker.com)
- Play word games – jumble, concentration, hangman.
- Make and complete cloze exercises (see page 26).
- Make and use a personal dictionary.

Personal dictionary

Make a personal dictionary (sometimes also called a "word bank") with your students either as a group or individually. Use a notebook, an address book or a recipe box — whatever your students prefer. Ask your students to record new or difficult words in their personal dictionaries. They may want to add pictures, symbols or anything that will help them to remember the sound or spelling of words.

100 most common words in English

Share and discuss this chart with your students. Use it to build sight vocabulary and as a source of encouragement.

I of and this to in is with
as it he was for on are that
you his they the at be a have

These 24 words account for 1/3 of all reading!

from or one had by word but not what there
were we when your can said all use an each
which she do how their if will up other about
out many then them these so some her would make
like him into time has look two more write people
see day no way could go my than first water
been call who oil its now find long down number
did get come made may part

These 100 words account for 1/2 of all reading!

Fry, Kress and Fountoukidis (1993)

Tutoring strategies

This section describes ways to help beginning readers practise their word-attack skills. These strategies include

- Language Experience Approach
- Reading aloud with your student
- Reading and writing ideas
- Cloze exercises

Language Experience Approach

The Language Experience Approach is especially useful for developing texts to use for reading practise with older students. Although children's books may seem ideal as they have a limited simple vocabulary, often these books are not appropriate for use with high school students.

When beginning readers read, they need to do many things at once: sound out words, understand words *and* grasp the overall idea of a text. This can be very frustrating for beginning readers. One solution is the Language Experience Approach (Stauffer, 1980). This approach creates stories using a student's own words and ideas. When students read a text that has been written using their own words and ideas, they need to focus only on the word-attack skills.

How to use the Language Experience Approach

The following is a description of how to use the Language Experience Approach with one student; however, this approach can be used very successfully with a group of students.

- Ask the student to choose something to write about. The student may wish to write a letter, a story or a poem or simply about activities of the previous weekend.
- Brainstorm with the student a few ideas about the piece. If it is a story, for example, who are the characters? What kind of story will it be — a mystery, an adventure, a romance? Discuss the main events. The student may find it useful to begin with an outline.
- Have the student dictate the piece to you. Print the student's words precisely. Say each word aloud as you write it down. Do not correct the student's grammar or change the words. After the story is written, you can edit it together.
- When the student is finished dictating the piece, read it back. At this point, the student may want to edit the text by changing the wording, fixing grammar errors or adding ideas. Give positive feedback.

- Ask the student to read the piece back to you. If you keep it short enough, the student should be able to read all the words. Give lots of praise!
- The student may wish to hand-write the piece or enter it on the computer. Make sure each draft has the date on it. Keep a copy so the student can read it in the future.

Activities using the Language Experience Approach

Later in the tutoring session (or during the next week), use the piece of writing as the basis for additional exercises. For example,

- Write some of the words from the piece on separate cards. Then ask the student to match the words on the cards to the words in the text.
- Write each sentence from the piece on a separate card. (If the piece is long, use only one section.) Ask the student to put the cards in order.
- Reinforce the spelling of difficult words by asking the student to:
 - ▶ use these words in a new sentence
 - ▶ put them into a personal dictionary
 - ▶ do a cloze exercise with these words (see page 26)

For beginning readers

The Language Experience Approach is useful to help beginning readers develop their word-attack skills. A few weeks after having written a language experience piece, the student may have difficulty reading a number of words in the text. At this point, the text provides a great opportunity for the student to practise sounding out these words, using knowledge of phonics and the structure of words. Since the student understands the meaning of all the concepts and vocabulary in the text, the student can focus all his or her attention on word-attack skills!

Reading aloud with beginning readers

Reading aloud with beginning readers has two major purposes. First, reading aloud allows beginning readers to gain fluency by practising reading words that they already know and helps them to strengthen their word-attack skills i.e., a focus on reading skills. Secondly, reading aloud helps beginning readers improve their language skills and develop a love of reading and knowledge i.e., a focus on comprehension.

If you are working with more than one student, you may choose to read together as a group, or you may read with one student while the other students work on another

activity. Before reading with a student or a group of students, talk about why you are reading a particular text. Decide what you want to focus on: reading skills or comprehension.

Ways to read aloud with a student

- *The tutor reads aloud to the student.*
- *The tutor reads a sentence or phrase. The student repeats the same sentence or phrase.*
- *Both read aloud at the same time — the tutor and the student — when the student does not know a word, the tutor continues to read in order to maintain the flow.*
- *The tutor and student take turns reading either by line, paragraph or page.*
- *The student reads aloud to the tutor.*

The method you choose to read together will depend on each student's reading ability and comfort level at reading aloud. If you are reading with more than one student, taking turns reading is the most popular method for reading aloud. Often younger students are more open to reading as a group than older students. When you read aloud to your students, they hear and learn about fluent reading. But remember that your long-term goal is to have all your students reading independently.

Strengthening word-attack skills

- Allow your students to choose reading materials that interest them.
- Make sure the text is short and predictable.
- Glance through the text to pick out words that your students may not know. Read these words aloud with them and discuss their meanings.
- Ensure you have several texts to choose from in case interest wanes.

Helping with difficult words

When your students encounter a word they cannot read, encourage them to practise the skills described in the word-attack section of this guide (see page 15). For example, if your students have trouble reading the word *went*, talk about phonics (initial and final consonant sounds and word families [*bent, sent, lent*]). Or, if the difficult word is *hockey*, ask your students to look for a smaller, familiar word (*key*) within the larger word or to break the word into chunks.

Use short prompts to help your students remember specific decoding strategies such as “break it down,” or “begins with.” Over time, you will discover which prompts are useful for your students. Review the words that your students had difficulty reading. Look for patterns.

Strengthening comprehension abilities

- Choose books that interest your students. Your students may choose books to read with you that may be too difficult from them to read independently. But remember, especially for older students, interest and motivation are key to developing successful readers.
- Start by looking together at the cover, the title or the pictures.
- Read with enthusiasm. Ham it up! Change your voice to reflect the personalities of the different characters. You are a storyteller!
- When you read poetry, songs or stories with repetitive words, read with rhythm.
- Take turns predicting what will happen next. Discuss the title, photographs, diagrams and illustrations. As you read through the story, confirm your predictions.
- Encourage your students to ask questions as you read together.
- Give your students positive feedback whenever you read together.
- Discuss the story and characters. For example, talk about why characters behaved in a certain way or what the moral of the story was.
- Every time you read together, also try to write. For example, use a written conversation (see page 25) to discuss what you read. Or, based on what you have read, have your students write a journal entry or a letter to the editor.

Refer to page 29 of this guide for more information on helping students become successful readers.

Remember: Whether you are focusing on practising word-attack skills or on comprehension, all texts need to be read for meaning. You may wish to read the same text more than once – the first time at the *word level* and the second time at the *text level*.

Reading and writing ideas

Choose books and other reading materials at the right level for your students

Stay away from materials that are too long or complicated. And, don't use children's books for older students; although the language level may be appropriate, the content is not.

Choose relevant reading materials

Connect reading and writing to the activities that your students do every day. Your students will learn best through literacy activities that are meaningful to them.

Use all of your students' senses

Talk about it, read about it, do it! Be creative.

Vary your reading materials

Choose different kinds of materials, based on your students' interests. Consider novels, magazines, poetry, non-fiction books and online materials. Vary the purpose of the reading too.

Choosing books for young readers

- *Alphabet books*
- *Picture books – the illustrations help tell the story.*
- *Funny books or scary books*
- *Books with rhyming words – reading and listening to rhymes helps children learn about the connections between words.*
- *Books with characters from various cultures – children need to see themselves – and other cultures! – in the books they read.*
- *Books with repetition – repetition makes books easier to read.*
- *Books based on a television series – children love to read books with familiar characters, such as Arthur or The Magic School Bus.*
- *Your favourite children's books – students are often interested in knowing what their tutors read as children.*

Hobbies and games

- Play word games, for example, *Scrabble*, *Boggle*, hangman, concentration, crossword puzzles or word searches.
- Do crafts. List materials and write instructions. Then make the crafts together.
- Read magazines, including comic books. Collect and read sports cards.
- Write your own stories. Keep a journal.

Life skills

- Order from menus. Read and write recipes. Create shopping lists.
- Look up something in the Yellow Pages.
- Compile a personal address/telephone book.

Mail and newspapers

- Read and write flyers and catalogues.
- Read and write cartoons, sports articles, horoscopes or photo captions.
- Write a letter to a sports figure, music personality or politician.

Movies and television

- See the movie/read the book. Role-play a story and then write a script.
- Read the TV listings, watch the program (at home) and then critically discuss it.
- Meet with others to discuss books, magazines, movies, music, etc.

Written conversation

Have a written conversation with your students on paper. Take turns writing to one another. Focus on the meaning of what you are writing rather than grammar or spelling mistakes. You can use the misspelled words as the basis for another exercise. Written conversation keeps the focus of meeting together on reading and writing while giving you the opportunity to discuss an issue or event.

Music and poetry

- Read and write song lyrics or poetry. Rap and read. Talk about music.
- Record each other reading and listen to your recordings.

Computers

- Publish your students' writing.
- Use computer software or the internet to help your students with skill development. Visit the Frontier College website for information on websites you can use on-line with your students or resources you can print and use with your students.

Reading Buddies

Find opportunities for your students to read aloud to younger children. The younger children benefit from the reading practise and positive role modeling, but it is the older students who benefit the most from this activity. Reading aloud with younger children is one of the best ways older students can improve their reading abilities.

Cloze exercises

Cloze exercises are passages with certain words deleted. They are fill-in-the-blank exercises that you create for a student. They are useful because cloze exercises allow a student to focus on a particular difficulty in his or her reading and writing. However, because teachers regularly use cloze exercises in the classroom, some students may not want to do them with a tutor. If you plan on making a cloze exercise with one of your students, make sure that he or she wants to do a cloze exercise with you.

How to make a cloze exercise for a student

Use a text that interests the student, for example a journal entry, a favourite song or a story written through the language experience approach. Delete some of the words (or some parts of words) in the passage. Choose words (or parts of words) that the student often has difficulty with. Don't delete too many words — leave enough words to supply a context. You may need to list the deleted words at the bottom of the page.

You can design a cloze exercise to help one of your students practise almost any aspect of language. For example, you could focus on:

- **spelling** – choose several important or difficult words in a passage. Delete all the letters in these words except the initial letters.
- **consonant sounds** – remove the initial consonants from some words in the passage.
- **prediction** – delete some of the content words. List the deleted words at the bottom of the page. For more advanced students, *don't* supply the deleted words on the page. Instead, ask them to come up with words that make sense according to the context.
- **suffixes (word endings)** – remove suffixes from several words in the passage.
- **letter order** – choose words that are difficult for your students. Delete these words and provide several similar words for them to choose from (for example, *boot/boat*, or *there/their*). This exercise also encourages students to focus on meaning.

Section 3: Reading to learn



*Reading is thinking
guided by print.*

Struggling readers

Reading is thinking guided by print.

This section presents strategies to help your students to become successful readers — readers who go beyond decoding words and who focus on understanding the meaning of a text. The strategies in this section are most helpful in tutoring students in grade 4 and up who can read but have difficulty understanding what they read.

Children learning to read go through several stages. Initially, children learn to decode written symbols i.e., how to recognize words and sound words out. Gradually, they learn to be fluent readers. Fluent readers are able to decode words, understand a text, and discuss what they have read.

Many children and youth who struggle with reading are able to read many of the words they see. However, they focus all their energy and attention on decoding individual words. This limited focus means that they have difficulty understanding or thinking critically about what they have read. In other words, they are still reading at the *word level* rather than at the *text level*. They are not beginning readers, nor are they successful or fluent readers.

As a tutor, your role is to help your students become “unglued” from the words and to focus on understanding the meaning of the text. By sharing your own ideas, experiences and strategies about how you make meaning out of print, you can help your students learn these critical skills.

If you are working with an older student who is having trouble recognizing words, you may need to devote part of your time to helping this student learn “how to read” (see Section 2 of this guide) as well as helping this student focus on making meaning out of print.

Reading strategies

Before reading

The more you prepare your students before reading, the greater the chance they will understand what they read!

Prior knowledge

Make connections between what your students already know and what they are about to read. Ask your students to tell you what they know about the subject of a text. As they talk, probe for more detailed information. If there are gaps in their knowledge, supply the necessary information.

Skim through the text. Look for unfamiliar words or phrases. Explain these words or phrases to your students using concepts and words they are familiar with.

Context clues

All readers find it difficult to read and understand information on an unfamiliar topic. Help your students learn how successful readers predict the content of a text.

To predict the content of:	Look at these clues:
a novel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• front and back covers, including the “blurb”• first paragraph
a non-fiction book	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• title, table of contents and index
a newspaper article	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• headline• photograph and caption• with more advanced students, discuss the potential bias of an article based on where it was published

Provide a focus for your students

Review the questions of a homework assignment before you start reading, or ask your students to focus on specific areas i.e., plot, characters, information gained, etc.

While reading

Always give your students lots of positive feedback.

Watch and listen

From your students' facial expressions and intonation, you may be able to tell if they are unsure about the meaning of what they are reading. Stop and discuss a sentence or paragraph that is giving them trouble.

Use context to predict meaning

Successful readers can figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word using its context. If a student is unsure of a word, ask him or her to predict its meaning using words around it.

Ask questions and discuss the text

Encourage your students to ask questions about what you are reading together. Discuss the roles of various characters in a novel, the concepts in a textbook or the meaning of new words. As you read through a story, take turns asking each other what you think will happen next. Then, continue reading and confirm your predictions.

Do your thinking out loud

Successful readers constantly check that the text makes sense by pausing, re-reading sentences and referring to earlier information. As you read with your students, explain your thinking process. Have your students think out loud as well.

Enjoy reading together

Maintain the flow of the reading by helping with difficult words. If your students lose interest in the story, move on to something else. Use your voice to emphasize key words and ideas. Read dramatically and in different voices!

Read silently or out loud

Read silently or out loud depending on your students' goals and reading comfort level. For example, if your students find it difficult to read aloud (they may have trouble focussing simultaneously on meaning and pronunciation), have them read silently. After you have finished reading a text silently, discuss what you have read.

Practise reading for speed

- *Discuss the strategies you use to read quickly or to search for specific information.*
- *Skim through a newspaper article together to look for general information. Then, read the article more slowly to understand it more fully.*
- *Browse through a magazine, reading only the articles of interest.*
- *Scan a recipe book looking for a particular food.*
- *Highlight key points as you read a text together.*
- *Practise alphabetical order using a telephone book or dictionary.*
- *Read the titles of the various chapters in non-fiction books to get the general idea of the content of the book.*

After reading

The more you and your students discuss a text after reading it, the greater the chance your students will remember what they have read.

Always discuss what you have read together. This will help your students to understand and remember what they read. A good discussion will also encourage them to think critically about the materials. Use the “Four R’s of Reading” (Adapted from Schwartz and Bone, 1995):

- Retelling** What were the events, the main ideas and the characters of the story? Talk about the “5W’s” – who, what, where, when and why.
- Reflecting** Why was a particular decision made in the story? Who was the true villain? Interpret the text together.
- Relating** How do characters or information in the story relate to you or your students? Are they similar to your ideas or experiences?
- Rewriting** How could the story be changed? What might happen next? How could the story have been written more clearly?

Choosing good reading materials

The only way to become a successful reader is by reading. The main reason that many older students do not read is a lack of motivation. Thus, materials that are appropriate and relevant can help reluctant readers become successful readers. To find the right material to read with your students, first ask which books and magazines they have enjoyed. Find other books by the same author or on the same subject. Ask a librarian or bookstore staff for titles of popular books and magazines. Visit a library with your students and select reading material together. Discuss what you like to read, and bring books, magazines, etc. to your tutoring sessions.

When choosing reading material, think about

- Is it relevant to your students? Does the topic interest your students?
- Does it have information that will be useful to your students?
- Will your students be able to identify with the characters in the novel?
- Is the book or magazine well laid out and well illustrated?
- And, for older students: Does it look too much like a children's book? Are the words at the right level? Is the tone of the book appropriate for youth — not condescending or overly juvenile?

Remember, reading non-fiction is just as important as reading fiction! Some older students who are not eager to read a novel are very interested in reading non-fiction about cars, music or sports.

Choosing books for independent reading

Books that you read with your students can be more challenging, as you can help your students figure out difficult vocabulary. However, books for your students to take home must be at your students' "independent reading level."

Use this process to determine if a book is too difficult your students to read independently at home: Ask your students to keep track of the words they have trouble reading using their fingers. If they have trouble reading more than 10 words on a page, encourage them to choose a different book to read independently. Explain that this particular book may be too frustrating without support.

Writing strategies

Good writers don't produce a perfect work on their first try. Explain to your students that it is important for them to learn and practise the steps involved in writing. You may help your students learn about the writing process by writing a story, a letter, an essay, a journal entry or an article for a newspaper.

Before writing

Brainstorm

Your students may not know where to start writing. Help them brainstorm.

- What do you want to write about?
- What do you already know about the topic?
- What would you like the essay to say? In what order?

After they decide, have them write down a few points about the topic. Discuss how the essay could be written from these ideas.

Organize the ideas

Have your students write down all their ideas in point form. Using these ideas, create an outline, and discuss how they can use it to organize their research.

Research

Work together to determine what kind of additional information is needed. Then decide together where to find this information: in a library, through resource people or on the internet. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each source.

While writing

Create a first draft

Encourage your students to write down their ideas without worrying about spelling or grammar. Explain to them that they can correct their spelling and grammar during the editing stages. If this process creates a writing block for your students, help them to spell the word so that they can move on to the ideas of the essay.

Edit

Review the first draft together. Encourage your students to fine-tune their writing.

Discuss the first draft

- Are the main ideas stated clearly?
- Is any information missing?
- Could a sentence (or paragraph) be written more clearly?

Editing

Work on spelling

Help your students develop their spelling skills by using the strategies on page 17 of this guide. Discuss the strengths and limitations of these strategies.

Work on grammar

Encourage self-correction. Have your students tell you where they think there may be errors in a text. Help the students to identify incorrectly used words by asking them, “does this sentence make sense?” or “does this sound right?”

Proofread

Remind your students that successful writers always proofread their writing. Share your proofreading strategies with your students. These may include:

- Reading the text aloud
- Rereading the text a few days after you have written it
- Developing (and using) a checklist of your common errors
- Asking someone else to read the text
- Use a dictionary and/or thesaurus

Grammar

When editing, it is important to discuss grammar and grammatical rules. Grammatical rules can help writers by telling them how their written language is normally put together. However, because different language styles — formal, informal, dialects — have their own grammar, many people are confused by grammatical rules.

If your students speak English as a second language, they may be very interested in grammar. However, students who speak English as their first language often do not like talking about grammar. If it is appropriate, bring grammar into your discussions by talking about the flow of writing, word order, or the form of language in the students’ writing.

Helping your students with homework

Whether your primary role is helping with homework or being a reading tutor, you can use homework effectively to help your students strengthen their reading and writing skills. However, homework can also get in the way of learning, especially if your students just want to get it done and want you to supply the answers!

There is a real art in helping students to complete their homework and to learn effectively. First, you need to make sure that the students understand the questions and the text that they are reading. Then, your role is to help the students to develop strategies to complete their own assignments.

How to help with homework

Tutoring one-on-one is ideal but not always possible. The following process describes how to help a student with homework. However as you may be working with more than one student at a time, you will need to juggle the help that you give between your students.

Read the homework instructions together

Make sure that you both understand the instructions. Many students are frustrated by homework because they do not understand the questions that they are to answer. If possible, break an assignment into smaller pieces to help the student to focus.

Build on prior knowledge

If you can, skim through the passage of the textbook before you read it with the student. Ask the student to tell you what he or she knows about the subject of the text. Then, ask the student to predict the content of the text by looking at the diagrams or headings. Fill in any gaps in the student's knowledge about the subject.

Read the text with the student

You can read the text to the student, have the student read it to you, take turns reading or read it at the same time. (Make sure that the student is able to read fairly fluently and does not become bogged down by sounding out words.) Talk about the text as you read it together. Encourage the student to think aloud and ask questions about what was read. Show how you check your own understanding.

Discuss the text

Discuss key points that relate to the homework instructions. Help the student to organize his or her thoughts either verbally or on paper. Encourage the student to do his or her own thinking. Be patient and give the student time to organize his or her thoughts and think through an answer, but give help if he or she seems stuck.

Completing the homework

Help with the writing process. After the student has written an answer to a question, encourage him or her to edit the answer for spelling and grammar.

It is important that each of your students learn homework and study skills through completing their homework. To achieve this, you should focus on these skills as well as completing the assignment. For example, if you don't know an answer, this is a great opportunity to demonstrate to your students how to work through a problem.

Sometimes your students will have the same homework assignment. Working as a group on an assignment can work well if your students have similar learning needs. This process can put some students into a 'teaching' role. However, sometimes the same students always complete the homework for the other students. If you are working with two or more students on the same homework, you need to establish a routine that works for all your students.

Help your students get organized

Many students have difficulty getting organized to complete their homework. Help your students develop or improve their skills by talking about possible strategies they can use and figuring out which ones work well for them:

- Use a school planner and a wall calendar to write down all tests and deadlines for homework.
- Think about which assignments need research or preparation.
- Prioritize. Figure out what needs to be completed right away and what can wait.
- Make lists of what needs to be researched, read or completed.

Homework tips to share with your students

- *Pick a quiet, well-lit place to work. Turn off the TV and other distractions.*
- *Work on homework at the same time every day. Let your family know that this is your homework time.*
- *Before you start, make sure you have all the tools (pencils, pens, paper, dictionary, etc.) nearby.*
- *Eat a nutritious snack before working. Avoid junk food.*
- *Do the most difficult homework first.*
- *Give yourself a specific amount time to complete the homework.*
- *Reward yourself with short breaks.*

Be a homework mentor

Share your strategies with your students on how you complete homework or work projects:

- How you organize your time, materials and workspace.
- How you study for exams and tests.
- How you get help when you have trouble understanding concepts or information.

Whenever you meet with your students, talk about your positive attitude towards school. Discuss and bring in the books (including textbooks!) you are currently reading. Share stories with your students on how knowledge and learning have made a difference in your life.

Challenges in helping with homework

- Teachers, students and parents may be more concerned about raising grades than about improving reading, writing and learning skills. As a tutor, you may feel pressured to focus only on improving your students' marks. Make sure you define your role, with your students, as well as their teachers and parents.
- Your students may want to complete their assignments regardless of whether they understand the concepts or information. They may not be interested in thinking critically. To address this challenge, use your students' learning goals to determine what to focus on during the tutoring sessions.

Some final (but important) thoughts about homework

It can be tempting to supply — or correct — the answers for your students. This does not help your students to learn! Instead of doing it for them, make sure that they have all the information and tools they need to complete the homework. Then, stand back and let your students do the work on their own.

Don't change your students' words as they write. If you need to spell a word for your students or explain a concept on paper, don't write in their notebooks or binders. Instead, use a separate piece of paper for any explanations. Remember, you are a facilitator for your students' learning. *The more your students do on their own, the more they will learn.*

Allow your students to complete the assignment on their own.

Conclusion

Key factors for successful tutoring

- *Listen to your students. What do they want to learn? How do they learn? Ensure they want to meet with a tutor.*
- *Structure the time that you meet with your students. Develop a routine that works for all of your students.*
- *Vary the activities. Choose the strategies that best meet your students' learning needs: Are they beginning readers? Are they struggling readers?*
- *Remember, beginning readers need opportunities to practise their reading but they also need to be able to read for fun and for relevant information.*
- *If your students can read, but struggle to understand what they read, make sure that you focus on "the thinking process" with your students.*
- *Finally, effective tutoring can only happen when tutors and students develop a relationship built on trust so the students can take risks with their tutors. Start first with connecting with your students and learning about their strengths and interests. Armed with this knowledge, you can truly help your students with their learning needs.*

We hope that you find the information in this guide useful. Remember to use the strategies that work best for your students. Don't follow this guide step by step! Just as people learn in different ways, they should be taught in different ways — according to their unique interests, strengths and learning needs.

You may be a pivotal person in your students' lives, opening up a new world of opportunity. Or you may be a smaller part of the greater "learning puzzle" for the students you work with. Whatever your role, remember that you can make a difference. Your presence tells your students that you believe learning and knowledge are important and liberating.

Good luck with your tutoring!

References

Chall, J. (1983). Stages of Reading Development. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Frontier College (1997). Frontier College Tutor's Handbook: A Guide to Student Centred Individualized Learning, Toronto: Frontier College Press.

Fry, B., Kress, J. and Fountoukidis, D. (1993). The Reading Teachers Book of Lists, Third Edition. Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Schwartz, S. and Bone, M. (1995) Retelling, Relating, Reflecting - Beyond the 3 R's. Toronto: Irwin Publishing.

Stauffer, R.G. (1980). The Language Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading. New York: Harper and Row.



Frontier College Press

www.frontiercollege.ca