

A Toolbox of Terms for Tutoring

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Paired reading is a remarkable tool to use with early readers or with readers who lack fluency and struggle with nearly every sentence. It is simply the tutor reading the first sentence, paragraph or page and then the child reading the next sentence or paragraph or page. You may use paired reading with any book, taking turns reading by sentence, paragraph, page or chapter.

Guided reading is a method by which children learn to use independent reading strategies successfully. In other words, the child performs most of the reading and the tutor only intervenes when the child is unable to pronounce a word or gets lost in the sentence. The only caution in using this technique is not to let the student rely on the tutor to fill in any word that seems difficult or have quick answers spoon-fed to them. There is a place for inserting unknown words quickly so the fluency of the reading isn't disturbed but most of the time tutors need to let children work it out and apply strategies they are learning to help them resolve their problem independently. Otherwise the child becomes dependent on the adult for guidance (have you ever seen a child look at an adult when s/he is reading for recognition as to whether s/he pronounced the word correctly?). My response to this behavior is always "the answer isn't with me; it's on the page" and then I encourage her/him to remember a rule or a mnemonic tip s/he has learned. When the child encounters an unfamiliar word, the tutor can use clues to help the child figure out the word so the next time s/he can do it on her/his own.

Good approaches to use include:

Asking "Do you know any part of that word?"

Asking "Is the word similar to any you already know?"

Breaking the word into syllables and having the student decode each syllable

Having the student read the rest of the sentence and return to the unknown word to ask, "What would make sense here?"

Discussing the book's illustrations or graphs to help the child determine unfamiliar text

Modeled reading gives the tutor a chance to model good pronunciation and fluency while the child listens. If a child has struggled mightily to complete a reading, this gives her/him a chance to rest and turn on her/his comprehension. Whenever this type of reading is used, be sure to find ways to keep the student engaged and an active listener. One of my favorite techniques is to tell the student s/he will "be the teacher". S/he is to listen to the tutor read, and ask questions when s/he is finished to make sure s/he understood what was read. Children love being the one in charge but are often unaware that they are practicing comprehension strategies in the process.

Repeated Reading can give a great deal of confidence to your struggling reader. Keep a book read in one of the earlier sessions and let the student "re-read" the book during part of each subsequent session. As s/he practices, s/he will become quite fluent in reading this book, that is, the delivery will sound more like talking than stilted, one-word-at-a-time pronunciation of words. As an element of this technique, the tutor can also read a sentence and then let the child re-read that same sentence. Emphasis should not be on memorizing the sentence but on sounding out the words and looking at each word in the sentence for correctness.

Visualization is a series of steps to help a student become an active, thinking reader. Many students see reading as a passive activity and that affects their comprehension. Begin is with a familiar fiction read-aloud. As you, the tutor, read aloud, insert comments about the story, describing the image you see in your mind as a result of the words (without sharing the illustrations). Direct modeling of the active thought process for visualization is the first step. Try a simple quote from Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak: "That very night in Max's room a forest grew and grew and grew until his ceiling hung with vines and the walls became the world all around."

Then select a reading at the level of your student's listening vocabulary (could be as many as 24 months above reading vocabulary). You want words to create images in the mind and, to do so, a student must have ready understanding of what these words mean. If necessary, introduce unfamiliar terms your student will hear. Choose a short scene with obviously descriptive language.

Before reading, introduce visualization like this:

"Remember what I did when I began to read earlier? I thought about what the author's words said and I tried to imagine what the characters looked like, what they were doing and their surroundings. While I read this story, close your eyes for a few moments and listen carefully to the words as I read. Think about what is happening in the story. See if you can imagine the scene the words describe. Pretend you are making a movie; what would you see from behind the camera? When you hear describing words or adjectives (use whichever terminology is familiar), use those to help paint a picture in your head (cold, blue, dusty, rambunctious)."

For students already identified as "at-risk", discuss what it feels like to be cold, or what shade of blue a favorite ribbon might be or how dusty your room gets when you forget to clean. Give concrete ideas and connect to background knowledge. Turn on the thought process and you'll encourage your student to do the same when s/he reads. Remind the student to think about what characters smell, taste, feel, hear and think. Tell her/him that is what good readers do and that it will help to remember what the story is about.

Sight Words -- Approximately 50-75% of the words used in everyday reading (school books, newspapers, magazines, etc.) are called "sight words" simply because in

order to be a good reader, you must be able to name them "on sight" (as soon as you see them). They are to be processed so automatically that no conscious effort must be made in order to quickly identify the word and its meaning. This concept was first published in 1948 by Edward William Dolch, Ph.D. in his book, Problems in Reading. Dr. Dolch's premise was that if children could readily read these words in isolation and in context, they would be well on their way to being good readers. Many schools have either lists or flash cards containing the Dolch sight words (which exclude nouns). They are also available from many sources on-line by entering "Dolch sight word list" in the search engine. The key to using the sight word lists effectively is to find ways to take the "drill and kill" out of learning these words and instead have fun with them. You can play games, including word matches or "quick flash" in which each person has a stack of Dolch sight word cards and take turns slapping them down and reading them quickly-make it a fun race. See if the student can beat her/his own record for how quickly s/he can say a given number of words.

Common Letter Patterns --Two of the most common letter patterns in beginning reading are CVC (consonant, vowel, consonant) and CVC-silent e (consonant, vowel, consonant followed by a silent e). If you teach beginning readers these two simple rules, they can read many words quickly. Begin this with children who know their letters (and perhaps the distinction between consonants and vowels).

If you see the CVC pattern, the vowel in the center almost always has a short sound (cat, run, top). If you try the short vowel sound and it doesn't sound like a word you know, try the long vowel instead.

If you see the CVC-silent e pattern, the first vowel almost always says his name (is long) and the second vowel (the e) is quiet. Examples: take, same. This same rule applies most of the time when there are two vowels in a word, even if they are together (examples: rain, seed) - the first one says his name and the second one is quiet.

Just teaching these two beginning pattern rules will have your student reading many simple words quickly. You can also combine one-syllable words that follow these patterns to have your students reading compound "big" words in no time. Examples of those include pancake, footwear, mailman, or sunshine (note even this last one is CVC & CCVC-silent e combined).

Armed with an understanding of these terms, you can help your student learn to read and connect to the skill-based techniques s/he is learning in the classroom. Never forget that your goal is to have her/him enjoy reading and find a purpose in it for her/his life.