

Guide to Online Tutoring

Innovations for Learning



Online Tutoring

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I. INTRODUCTION

Thank you for volunteering to tutor a young student who is learning to read. We hope you will find this to be a highly satisfying endeavor as you participate in your student's reading struggles and achievements during this school year.

You will be working with a 6- or 7-year-old student, who is in first or second grade. The central focus of the first grade curriculum is learning how to read; the second grade curriculum builds on the reading skills taught in first grade. Students at these ages are interested in learning about their world and how it works and are usually fascinated by interesting and novel information. Most 6 and 7-year-olds are openly proud of their achievements when they do or learn something new. They are appreciative of, and responsive to, adults who give them encouragement and support when they are trying to learn a new skill.

The student who you will be tutoring is in the early stages of literacy acquisition as he or she progresses through first and second grade. Typically, we expect tremendous growth in learning to read during the first school years. However, students enter school at differing stages of reading readiness and progress at different rates. Students whose reading skills are a poor match with their classroom curriculum are often at risk for long-term school failure.

You are part of an intervention program designed to "jump start" your student's chances for reading success. Your role as a volunteer is two-fold: encouragement and direction. The job of the volunteer is unique. You have the privilege of watching and encouraging a new reader. At times, you will give your student lavish praise for his or her accomplishments. At other times, you will support your student's struggle with new concepts. However, your main role is to share with your student the excitement of learning to read.

Most students come to school eager to learn to read, and most learn how to read in the context of general classroom instruction. Since your student may need additional support and direction, he or she will benefit from having you as a personal advocate on the journey to literacy.

We have developed a plan that will help you direct your student's progress by observing your student's reading skills, deciding when to introduce new stories and concepts to your student, and coaching your student on developing independent reading skills and strategies.

II. A TYPICAL 30-MINUTE SESSION consists of the following:

- 1) Reading a story with your student
- 2) Asking comprehension questions
- 3) Playing word games and activities

A. Reading a Story with Your Student

1. Starting a New Story

Read and discuss the title, look at all the pictures, and help your student make a prediction as to what the story is about. Use the vocabulary of the story and supply any difficult words, including hard vocabulary words. For example, if the story is about an inchworm, you might say, "Yes, that is a worm, and it's very small, so that's why its called an inchworm in this story." Depending on your student's comfort and skill level, you can:

- **Echo read** the story with your student page by page; you read a page, then s/he reads the same page.
- **Partner read:** you read one page, then s/he reads the next page. and/or
- Have your **student read** the story independently.

2. Listening to Your Student Read

While listening to your student read a story aloud, you should be:

- **Focused** – and focus your student on the task at hand.
- **Patient** – students need time to read even the simplest passages, and you should not be too quick to correct mistakes or offer assistance; let them do the work.
- **Friendly and supportive** – always reward hard work or success with oral praise. For example, you might say, "You must be very proud of yourself. You did a great job reading that story."

3. Tutoring Tools

You can help your student read the story using these 3 tutoring tools built right into the Online Tutoring program:

- a) **Pointing tool:** When you place your cursor over or near a word in a story and click, a green dot appears. When your student does the same, a purple dot appears. This allows you to point out words or parts of words to your student.

b) Writing tool: When you click on “Text Box” in the yellow circle, a white box appears. You and/or your student can type words or phrases in the white box and click “Show” so that each of you will see what the other has entered.

c) Colored words: Words in the stories appear in different colors to help you understand what words your student needs to learn:

- **RED** words are **sight words**. A **sight word** is a word that appears so often in early literature that the student should recognize it instantly when s/he encounters it in a sentence. Examples of sight words are “goes” and “the.”
- **GREEN** words are **phonogram-family words**. A **phonogram-family word** has a common word ending that can easily be “sounded out” by the student. For example, “sun,” “fun,” and “bun” are all members of the “un” phonogram family. Students should recognize words that are members of the most common phonogram families and sound these words out while reading a story. (Please note that some phonogram words also may be sight words. In that case, the word will be highlighted in red.)
- **BLACK** words are **high interest words**. A **high interest** word is more challenging, and early readers are not expected to learn these words. They are included in order to make the stories more interesting and natural sounding than they would be if they only contained beginning sight and phonogram-family words.

4. Tutoring Strategies

While reading a story with your student, you should provide your student with strategies for reading new text, comprehending the text, and ultimately, reading the text fluently. To that end, you should:

- a) Encourage Self-Correction for Sense.** When we read, our ultimate goal is to make sense of the text that we are reading. Skilled readers usually realize when something they have read does not make sense, but beginning readers often don’t automatically do this type of monitoring. One of your goals as a tutor will be to help your student learn to automatically monitor his or her reading so that it makes sense. You should praise your student when he or she self-corrects errors so that the reading make sense. If your student does not realize that s/he made an error, please draw attention to this. The following conversation is an example of how you can help your student use a contextual clue to correct a mistake:

“Ellie, you just read, ‘The girl rode her *book*.’ That doesn’t make sense to me. Does that make sense to you? Let’s read it again and see if we can figure out where the trouble is. Before you start to read, look at the picture for clues that will help you.”

- b) Encourage Self-Correction for Syntax.** Your student should be able to hear when he or she reads something that does not *sound* correct. The conversation below is an example of how you could help your student use a syntactical clue to correct a mistake:

“Jesse, you just read, ‘He like the car.’ That doesn’t sound right to me; let’s try it again.”

Remind your student that what s/he is reading needs to sound right. You also may need to actually focus your student on the part of the word that caused the difficulty. For example:

“Jesse when you read the second word (place a dot next to that word to point it out), you said: ‘like’. Look at the end of the word. What letter is at the end of the word? How do you say that word with an “s” on the end of it?”

You may find that students have various dialects, which impact their pronunciation of words and the verb tenses that s/he may use. You should avoid criticizing your student for the way he or she speaks. Instead, either model the standard form of the word(s) or help your student analyze how the word should be pronounced.

- c) Use Phonics Clues.** By the beginning of first grade, your student should know the sounds that each individual letter makes. If the child is having difficulty reading a word, he or she should use the sound of the first letter as an important clue to what the word is.

If your student does not know the sounds that all the letters represent, you should spend part of the session working with letter sounds. Tic-Tac-Toe With Letters would be helpful - and fun. And you can use the text box to type a letter and ask your student to tell you what sound it makes. Also, when your student makes reading mistakes that indicate a problem with identifying the first sound of a word, you should point that out and help them to correct themselves.

- d) Incorporate Concept of Phonogram-Family Words.** There will be words in the stories that your student must decode because he or she doesn't recognize them instantly. Your student should be able to sound out words from the common phonogram families, which are highlighted in **green**. (There is a list of phonogram families in Tutor Resources, which can be accessed from the Tutor Homepage.) If your student misreads a phonogram family word, you should determine where the difficulty lies. Is your student misreading the entire word, the end of the word, or the middle vowel of the word? Focus your student on the area of difficulty. Help your student separate the word into its two parts: (i) the phonogram and (ii) the "onset" (the letter or letters before the phonogram). It would be helpful to type the word in a text box, along with other words from the same phonogram family that your student already knows, and point out the similarities. After reading the story, you will work with these words in the Word Sort game.
- e) Incorporate Concept of Sight Words.** When students read, they should not have to decode each word in a passage. If this happens, most of their cognitive energy will be spent on this task rather than comprehending the meaning of the text. The words highlighted in **red** should be recognized instantly by your student. If not, you should point to the word after your student reads the sentence and have your student re-read the word.

Try to let your student finish a sentence before correcting mistakes, unless he or she clearly is struggling or asks for help. If your student is stuck on a word, but you feel confident that he or she knows many of the other words in the sentence, encourage your student to give it an initial sound, read to the end of sentence, and then come back to the word (e.g., "The bird "l..." an egg."). This will help your student use what s/he knows in terms of phonics, sight vocabulary, grammar, and how the world works, to figure out what the word is. If your student figures out the word, say something like, "Good for you, you used everything you know and you figured that out!" If your student doesn't figure it out, supply the word and have your student keep reading.

It is not crucial that your student read every single word correctly. As we read aloud, even experienced readers make occasional unimportant changes in the text that we don't correct. The time to intervene is when a student makes errors that alter meaning, affect grammar, or reflect a failure to apply skills.

f) **Take Your Student Beyond the Page.** When working with your student, it is important to try to actively engage him or her in a discussion about the story to help develop critical thinking skills. Sometimes we forget how much is involved in this process and assume that students are automatically thinking this way. Students who have difficulty reading often focus on the written word, as if they have tunnel vision. As tutors, we need to lead the students beyond the text; to think in terms of their own lives and actively predict what will happen next and make deductions about the characters in the story.

I. Connect The Story to Your Student's Life. For example, a line in a story says "Sarah has a little brown dog." You might ask your student if s/he has a dog or if friends or family members have a dog. If yes, ask a couple of simple questions about the pet.

II. Actively Predict What Will Happen Next. Ask your student what s/he thinks might happen next based on the text and pictures. It is helpful to do this exercise several times during a story. These questions help your student begin to develop their own stories, and move reading from a passive activity to an active exchange between you and your student.

III. Make Deductions About Information That is Not Explicitly Stated in the Story. Ask your student what s/he thinks about the characters beyond what they know from the text and pictures. Students sometimes have trouble with thinking beyond the story.

g) **Praise Your Student.** When encouraging your student, help him or her to appreciate that they are not working to please you, but rather, themselves. In this spirit, when your student does well, it is best to say, "**That must make you feel proud.**" rather than, "Oh, I'm so happy." This type of remark builds the child's self-esteem. Similarly, be as specific as possible in your praise, such as "**Great job sounding out letters today!**"

B. Asking Comprehension Questions

Following the last page of each story, you will find a page with sample questions to ask your student about the story. The purpose of these is to make sure that s/he understood content of the story. Sometimes early readers get bogged down with the mechanics of reading and miss the meaning. Feel free to ask these or your own questions, including what your student liked or didn't like about the story. The ultimate goal of reading is to understand, personalize, and expand upon what is read.

C. Playing Word Games and Activities

After you've read a story and have asked your student some comprehension questions, it's time for activities and games. You can also use these to get a tutoring session started on a day when your student seems distracted or disinterested. Since the activities incorporate words specific to the student's reading level, your student is working on reading skills while playing the games and engaging in the activities. You will find directions for the games/activities right on their specific screens.

III. HOW A CHILD LEARNS TO READ

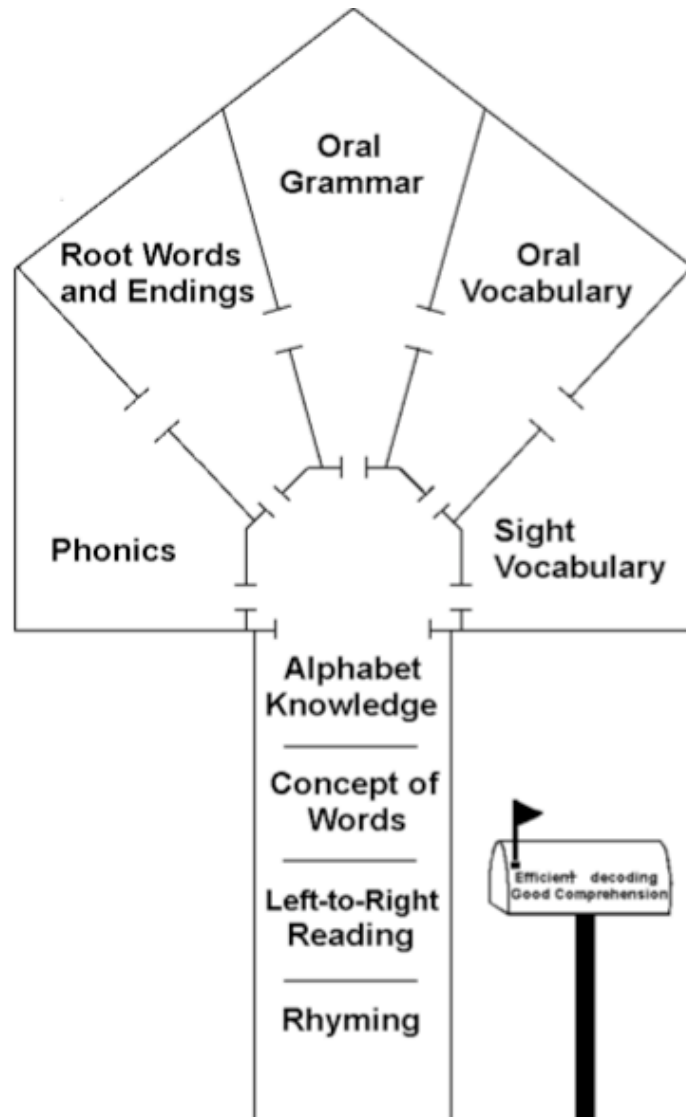
To accomplished and experienced readers, the job of learning to read seems deceptively simple. One of the wonderful things about teaching young students to read is that it increases our own awareness of the strategies we use to move smoothly through written language. This awareness makes us better mentors to our students.

The following section of the manual, "The Reading House," is intended to help you gain a better understanding of how to deal with different kinds of words that appear in written language. While your students likely won't know what "the reading house" is, this description is designed to better help you conceptualize how children learn to read.

THE READING HOUSE:

Think of reading as a house that has five basic rooms, each of which opens to the others, as in the **DIAGRAM BELOW**. In order to be comfortable in the house, you need to be able to move freely from room to room. During your tutoring sessions, your goal is to provide students with access to each room of the "reading house." Some students will be more comfortable entering the house from one room, some from another. As tutors, your job is to guide your students up the front stoop, welcome them into the house in whichever way they choose to enter, and then help them utilize the rooms that they have not yet discovered.

THE READING HOUSE



At the beginning of the school year, some students will just be approaching the FRONT WALK. There are some basic concepts that students need to master before they are ready to begin exploring the house:

- They must know how to make RHYMES
- They must know how to read words and sentences LEFT TO RIGHT.
- They must understand the CONCEPT OF WORDS -- the notion that oral speech flow can be divided into units and that these units are represented in print as groups of letters separated by white spaces. This may be a complex concept for a student who *hears* words as running together (ie. gonna, woulda, wantsome, gimme).
- They must be able to recognize most lower case LETTERS OF THE ALPHABET and know their sounds.

Having mastered these basic concepts, it is now time to begin exploring the house itself.

The first room most people think of, in terms of teaching reading, is the **PHONICS** room. This is where we learn the rules of letter-sound correspondence that help us to decode the words we see. Students learn this system little by little. They first learn beginning consonants, then ending consonants, and, then, the sounds in the middle of words, including vowels. Whether it comes easily or not, it is important for all readers to learn the vowel patterns because no one has a sight vocabulary good enough to memorize all the words in the English language, and we can actually learn more words by sight if we categorize them by pattern.

The second main room of the reading house is where we build **SIGHT VOCABULARY**. Sight vocabulary includes the words we memorize and know automatically as soon as we see them. Experienced readers recognize many words immediately, but young readers need to build their bank of familiar words from the ground up. As a student learns to read, s/he develops a sight vocabulary with words that turn up frequently and which typically do not follow the rules of phonics. Sight words include: *the, was, of, come, and would*.

A third room of the house, **ORAL GRAMMAR**, contains knowledge of how our language works, including the way we order words in a sentence. For example, take the sentence: *The cat chased the _____*. Experienced English speakers would know that the word that fills the blank needs to be a noun. As a second example, take the sentence: *The cat chased the _____ _____*. Fluent speakers of the language would know that the first word needs to be an adjective and the second word needs to be a noun in order for the sentence to be both grammatically correct and complete. Although we rarely think consciously of this as we read, this information nevertheless helps us limit options when figuring out a word in contextual reading. So it is for young students who speak fluent English and automatically use grammar correctly, even before they learn about nouns and adjectives. To the extent that students have trouble with the oral grammar either because English is their second language, because of dialect differences, or because of developmental language delays, reading will be more difficult. Conversely, to the extent that students can use their growing knowledge of spoken English to help them figure out correct grammar options, reading will be progressively easier.

A fourth room of the house, **ORAL VOCABULARY**, is where knowledge about the world, and the vocabulary that comes with that knowledge, are engaged in the reading process. Knowing how the world works helps us to figure out what makes sense in a sentence. For example, take the sentence: *The pig was rolling in the mud in his sty.* A rural student might be able to easily figure out the words *rolling* and *mud* because he or she knows that pigs live in sties and roll in mud. An urban student, however, who knows little about pigs and may never have heard the word *sty*, is likely to get stuck on that word. In fact, even if the student read the word *sty* correctly, he or she might not know its meaning or even be sure it is an English word. If a student reads a word that you think might be outside of his or her vocabulary or experience, it is helpful to explain the meaning of the word quickly and simply (e.g., "A pig sty is a place with a fence around it where pigs live.") so the student understands that all reading should make sense.

All of the stories in the Online Tutoring program are constructed to help students use their knowledge of English grammar, along with information about the world, to get meaning from printed text. Nevertheless, there might be times when the vocabulary and/or language abilities of a student could be a mismatch with a particular story. If you find this to be the case, discuss vocabulary first, read with your student, and, then, move on without too much concern. You also can choose to skip this particular story.

The last room in the house is the one that enables you to see the relationship between words that have the same **ROOT WORD** (e.g., *do, does, doing, doable, undo, redo*). Young readers are in the process of learning the simplest and most frequently used **WORD ENDINGS** that indicate change in tense, mark plurals, or conjugate verbs (e.g., *-ed, -ing, -s*). Knowledge of simple word endings prevents students from having to memorize multiple words separately (e.g., *look, looked, and looking*) and makes learning and memorization more efficient.

Reading is a complicated process. If you reflect upon your own reading, you will realize that, in order to be an efficient reader with strong comprehension skills, you must use all of the above concepts simultaneously. This can be difficult for a new reader to achieve, and you may notice that your student prefers one strategy over the others. This preference probably represents the room where the student entered "the reading house" and likely indicates the student's greatest strength in reading. As a tutor, part of your job is to encourage your student to use multiple strategies and concepts so that s/he will see which works best in different situations. Try to put yourself in your student's place and think about how he or she might go about figuring out a word or sentence. Think about what they know about language and the world. Exploring "the reading house" from your student's perspective will take you on a fascinating journey through the reading process.

If you have questions or would like help, please email:
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