



**A Tutor's Guide for Supporting  
Ontario's Student Success Strategy:  
Reading and Writing with Youth**

Frontier College

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As part of the Ontario Homework Club Institutes project, Frontier College has also developed the following resources to support Ontario's student success strategy:

- A Student Success Leader's Resource – Homework Clubs: How to Set Them Up/ How to Run Them
- How to Train Homework Club Volunteers to Support Ontario's Student Success Strategy
- Working with Teens to Build Student Success
- Final Research Report – The Keys to Success for Setting Up an Effective Homework Club

Frontier College was commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Education to develop these resources.

### **A Tutor's Guide for Supporting Ontario's Student Success Strategy: Reading and Writing with Youth**

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## PREFACE

Thank you for getting involved with one of Ontario's greatest projects for this century – student success for all!

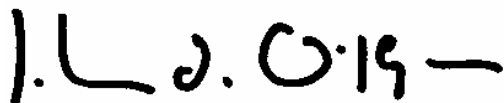
In order to achieve this great vision we are asking all citizens to spend time with a child or a group of children and help them to realize their potential, to pursue their dreams and to improve their skills.

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, encouragement and lots of praise.

Frontier College instructors and volunteer tutors have been providing people with this kind of support for learning since 1899 – for 107 years!

The materials and tutoring approaches in this handbook are based on our experience in programs we have run in every part of Ontario. 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 high school student improve their reading and writing skills.

Thank you for being a part of this great project – student success for all. Together, we are achieving wonderful things for the lives of Ontario students and for the future of our province.



John D. O'Leary  
President  
Frontier College

(Note: throughout this guide, students are called *he* or *she* interchangeably.)



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## SECTION 1: GETTING STARTED

People learn in different ways, thus they should be taught in different ways. Every student has unique interests, strengths and learning needs. It is important to use the strategies and techniques that work best for your student. Please use this guide to meet the needs of the student or students you are working with.

This guide does not include a set of lessons for you and your student to work on. Instead, you will work together on learning activities that interest and motivate your student. This philosophy of teaching is called “Student-Centred Individualized Learning”, or S.C.I.L. (Frontier College Press, 1997).

### STUDENT-CENTRED INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING (S.C.I.L.)

Talk with your student about her **strengths**, her **goals** and her **needs**.

*Strengths:* What does she do well? What are her interests and skills?

*Goals:* What does your student want to do? What would she like to learn?

*Learning needs:* What knowledge, skills or abilities does she need to reach these goals?

### Using a Student-Centred Approach to Tutoring

*Focus on strengths.*

Build on what your student can do and what he already knows. Start with what your student does well to meet his learning needs. Success breeds success. Praise your student when he does something well and when he makes progress.

*Respect different learning styles.*

Your student may learn by doing or by observing. He may need a lot of activity or a quiet space to learn. Be flexible. Use a variety of activities in your tutoring.

*Make sure participation is voluntary.*

One-to-one tutoring works best when the tutor and student choose to participate. It is important that your student meets with you because he wants to learn.

*Remember: it's about relationships.*

Being an effective tutor is not just about imparting knowledge or helping someone develop certain skills. Without a relationship built on trust and mutual respect, no learning can take place. This is especially true with a high school student who may have endured years of failure at school.

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## SESSION PLANNING

It is important to provide some structure to the time that you meet with your student. Here are some hints about planning your meetings:

- Choose a place that is comfortable for both of you. 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 student reads and writes something during every session.
- Leave some time to talk with your student about what you have read together. This is essential for developing her comprehension abilities.
- At the end of each session, decide together what you will do during your next meeting. This will help both of you to get the most out of the time that you work together.

It is important to prepare for your meetings by bringing reading and other learning materials. Over time, you will learn how much you need to prepare for your sessions, based on (a) your student's needs, (b) your student's goals and (c) whether your student brings homework or other reading materials to your sessions.

To help you visualize meeting with your student,  
here is a sample 90-minute session:

5 minutes:	Talk about how each of you has spent the week since you last met
5 minutes:	Plan what to work on today
15 minutes:	Homework - geography
5 minutes:	Break - get something to drink
10 minutes:	Finish geography assignment
15 minutes:	Read article on front section of newspaper and discuss its meaning and implications
15 minutes:	Read from novel - <i>The Hobbit</i>
5 minutes:	Washroom break
10 minutes:	Work on Sudoku puzzle
5 minutes:	Plan what to do together the following week

## IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS AND LEARNING NEEDS

During your first few meetings with your student, your goal is to *informally* determine his strengths and learning needs. This will help you decide where the two of you can start working together. We recommend that you use informal methods to assess your student rather than using a formal test. When you first meet with your student ask him:

- What are your favourite subjects (or activities) in school?
- What subjects do you need help with?
- What are you interested in learning about?

High school students are usually very aware of the areas where they need help. They are often unaware of their strengths.

You will learn a lot about your student's literacy needs when you read aloud or write with him during your meetings.

## SETTING GOALS

Some students may have very specific goals, for example, getting help in math or French. Other students may not be able to articulate their learning goals so clearly. Sometimes your student's goals will only become clear as you work together and get to know each other.

## **DEMONSTRATING PROGRESS**

Keep a file – or “portfolio” – with samples of the work you have done together. Choose different kinds of work, representing different skills, for example:

- 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

This portfolio will show your student’s progress. It will also suggest what still needs to be done.

### **Student Journal**

Some students enjoy keeping a journal of their work with a tutor. The journal could describe:

- What you did together
- What the most enjoyable activity was
- What you will work on the next time you meet

You and your student might both want to write in the journal right from the beginning. Or your student may initially ask you to write in it and he may write in it later. Use a method that is comfortable for both of you. You can include the journal in your student’s portfolio to demonstrate how much he has learned from your sessions.

## **KEEPING ON TRACK**

Check in regularly with your student about how you work together. Review some of the things you have done together. For example, ask your student:

- What has worked? What hasn’t worked?
- 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?
- What would you like to change?

Checking in will make you and your student think about what you work on and how you work together. It will help you to work better in future sessions. Be open to new ideas. And remember to praise your student throughout this process.

## ASSESSING PROGRESS

Assessment doesn't mean testing. It means reflecting on your accomplishments together to show you and your student what you have achieved.

Think about the work you have done together. With your student, look through examples: read through journals, examine materials in portfolios or review past homework assignments. Compare this work to your goals – either those you set initially or goals that have emerged as you have worked together. Are you meeting your goals?

*If you are meeting your goals*, congratulate each other. Talk about:

- What is the most helpful
- What you will work on next

*If you haven't met your goals*, ask why. Talk about:

- Whether these goals can be broken down into smaller chunks. It takes time to reach goals!
- Whether the goals are still relevant to your student. Goals can change over time.

To help motivate your student, show her the ways that she has improved. Together you can:

- Compare recent samples of her writing to earlier pieces
- Look at her schoolwork and note improvements
- Discuss changes you have noticed in her. Talk about her knowledge and skills, but also talk about changes in her attitude or behaviour
- Ask your student about changes she has noticed

**DON'T FORGET!!**

Focus on your student's strengths.  
What does your student do well?

## **YOUR ROLES**

*Help your student become a better reader, writer and thinker.*

At times, it may seem that your student's goal is to get you to do his homework for him. However, your role is to help your student develop the skills to be able to succeed at activities – including homework – that involve reading and writing.

*Remember: it's about relationships.*

During each session, allow some time to get to know your student. Nurturing this all-important relationship will allow your student to trust you. Once he trusts you, he will be able to take risks with you, such as making mistakes; talking about things he has trouble understanding or discussing his fears about school.

*Be an equal partner.*

Both you and your student are responsible for the activities during your sessions. Both of you should bring materials to work on. Even if your student always brings homework, have some activities ready to work on just in case he forgets. Choose activities based on your student's strengths, needs and interests.

*Be committed.*

Stick with it. Be on time. If you can't meet with your student, let him know ahead of time. Expect the same commitment from him.

*Be a mentor.*

You are a role model for your student. Always have a positive attitude towards books, learning and school. Help your student understand that making mistakes is an important part of learning.

*Be a facilitator.*

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

*Be a motivator.*

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

*Open the world of learning to your student.*

Help your student to discover new interests and possibilities. Bring poetry, magazines and books – anything that may catch your student's interest.

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## CHILD SAFETY ISSUES

In order to protect students, Frontier College screens all volunteers who tutor children and youth 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 student discloses an abusive situation to you:

- Listen without detailed questioning
- When he is finished talking, tell him:
  - You have to tell someone else about what he said
  - You will try to help him
- Remember that you cannot counsel your student. Leave this job to trained professionals
- Offer assurance to your student that you believe him
- After he has left, write down everything he has told you
- Speak to the teacher or supervisor of the homework club or tutoring program
- 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. These services will guide you through the next steps of the reporting process
- Even if you cannot contact Children's Aid immediately. Let your student go home, unless you believe he is in immediate danger

For more information on your responsibilities under the Child and Family Services Act, visit [www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/programs/ChildProtection/Publications/repChAbuse.htm](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/programs/ChildProtection/Publications/repChAbuse.htm)

To protect yourself and your student:

- Meet with students only during the hours specified by your program.
- Always tutor your student in an open area where others can see you.
- Do not exchange telephone numbers or email addresses with your student unless his parents give you written permission to do so
- Avoid discussing topics (such as sex, drugs or risky behaviours) that might be misconstrued and might place you in a difficult situation

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## LEARNING TO READ vs. READING TO LEARN

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 student. Rather, it helps you decide which techniques and strategies make the most sense for your student, based on your student’s strengths and learning needs.

### Learning to Read

WHAT STUDENTS ARE LEARNING	GOOD ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mechanics of reading</li> <li>• The relationships between letters and sounds (“phonics”)</li> <li>• How to blend sounds to form words</li> <li>• The relationships between word families</li> <li>• Using context to figure out meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading aloud together</li> <li>• Playing word games</li> <li>• Writing together</li> </ul>

These skills form the basis of the curriculum from kindergarten to grade three. However, many students do not learn these skills during this period for a variety of reasons including disabilities, learning difficulties, poverty, abuse, low parental literacy skills or second-language issues. If you are tutoring a student who is learning to read, your role is to be a teacher, and to help your student learn and strengthen basic reading and writing skills.

### Reading to Learn

WHAT STUDENTS ARE LEARNING	GOOD ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to focus on meaning</li> <li>• Higher-level thinking strategies</li> <li>• How to figure out new words based on the relationships between words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building on prior knowledge</li> <li>• Developing predicting skills</li> <li>• Sharing strategies for interpreting a text</li> </ul>

In grade four, the focus of the curriculum changes from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”. Students are expected to use their reading skills to learn about geography, about history – about life. In high school, students need to be able to read fluently and to understand multiple perspectives, weigh evidence, evaluate arguments and make judgements. However, for students who are still struggling with the mechanics of reading, this can be extremely frustrating. If you are tutoring a student who is reading to learn, your role is to be a facilitator and role model, and to help your student develop and strengthen learning and reading strategies.

## SECTION 2: LEARNING TO READ

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

### BEGINNING READERS

This section presents techniques for tutoring a high school student who is a beginning reader – one who has difficulty with the building blocks of reading and writing. In every high school, some students are beginning readers.

How can you tell if your student is a beginning reader?

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

When they are learning how to read, beginning readers are “glued” to the print. They need to pay attention to every letter and every word. While some beginning readers notice differences between words, others need help to be able to do this.

As a tutor, your role is to create situations where your student learns to pay attention to letters, letter groups and the connections between words. You can help your student practice his reading skills. You should also model fluent reading for your student.

#### **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.
- Still other children need systematic instruction in phonics to help them understand letter-sound relationships before they can learn to read.
- Fostering a love of reading and books is essential to becoming a successful reader. Don't forget to read with your student for enjoyment!

## WORD-ATTACK SKILLS

Successful readers (including beginning readers) use word-attack skills to learn new words. These skills include:

- Phonics – the relationships between letters and sounds
- Breaking words down – how words are put together and the relationships and patterns among words
- Spelling – this skill reinforces a student’s knowledge of letter-sound relationships
- Sight words – words which 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. However, reading and understanding a word depends on the connections between its spelling, its sound and its meaning within a text.

Letter-sound relationships are best learned during meaningful reading. Teach your student about phonics as you read and write together. Avoid nonsense exercises or repetitive drilling.

### Hearing Sounds in Words

Before your student can learn which letters make which sounds, she needs to be able to hear and identify the sounds in spoken words. Help your student strengthen her ability to hear sounds in words by:

- Reading poems and books with words that rhyme
- Speaking with your student and listening to your student speak. Enunciate your words carefully. Encourage your student to do the same.
- Play games with spoken words using tongue twisters

### 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 student match letters to sounds (for example *joke/jump/jam* or *radio/raspberry/road*).

### **Rhyming Word Families**

When you are reading together, talk about rhyming words (e.g. the *-at* family – *at, cat, mat*, etc.) Focus on the similarities and differences between the sounds and spelling. This will help your student learn about initial consonants and vowels.

Once your student understands 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 student reads, help him strengthen his 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 student blend the sounds together. Break longer words into syllables or smaller words. Then help your student sound out the smaller pieces.

### **Phonetic Rules**

Explain common phonetic rules to your student. 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*

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

**BREAKING WORDS DOWN**

Help your student learn to break large words 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* → *doable*
- 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 student break words into syllables (or “chunks”). Help him practice this by clapping or tapping on the table (e.g. *phar-ma-cy*). Remind him that each syllable contains at least one vowel. A quick (though not perfect) way to break a written word into syllables:

- a. Start at the last vowel in a word (with a letter after it)
- b. Place a syllable divider in front of the consonant that is just before this vowel.
- c. Continue marking syllables towards the front of the word in this way

For example: *a / part / ment*

## SPELLING

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

Some strategies to help with spelling:

### *Sound out the word*

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

### *Encourage self-correction.*

After your student has finished writing something, ask her if she thinks there are any words in her 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 student 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*

Find a dictionary you both like. Compile a personal dictionary (see box on page 14). Or 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 a reader can recognize instantly without having to sound them out. They include:

- Short words that are used frequently in any text and need to be recognized automatically for fluent reading e.g. *of, it, he, I, the* (See following page for a list of the 100 most commonly used words in English.)
- Words that can't be sounded out and have to be memorized e.g. *through, tough, though* and *cough*
- Words of special interest to a reader. Your student's sight words may be *basketball, hamburger, Costa Rica* or *hard drive*, depending on his interests.

Here are some ideas for practising sight words with your student:

- Use flash cards. Make them together! Each card could include words, symbols, or pictures
- Create crossword puzzles or word searches (visit [www.puzzlemaker.com](http://www.puzzlemaker.com))
- Play word games – Jumble, Concentration, Hangman
- Make and complete cloze exercises (see page 22)
- Make and use a personal dictionary with your student

### **Personal Dictionary**

Make a personal dictionary (sometimes also called a “word bank”) with your student. Use a notebook, an address book or a recipe box – whatever your student prefers. Ask your student to record new or difficult words in his personal dictionary. He may want to add pictures, symbols or anything that will help him to remember the sound or spelling of words.

Page 15 contains a chart of the 100 most commonly used words in English. Share and discuss this chart with your student. Use it to build sight vocabulary and as a source of encouragement for your student.

## 100 Most Common Words in English

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 practice their word-attack skills. These strategies include

- Language experience approach
- Reading aloud with your student
- Reading and writing ideas
- Cloze exercises

### LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

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 a student reads a text that has been written using his words and ideas, he needs to focus only on the word-attack skills.

#### How to use the language experience approach

- Ask your student to choose something to write about. She may wish to write a letter, a story or a poem. Or she may just want to write about what she did last weekend.
- Brainstorm with your 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. Your student may find it useful to begin with an outline.
- Have your student dictate the piece to you. Print her words exactly as she says them. Say each word aloud as you write it down. Do not correct your student's grammar or change the words. After the story is written, you can edit it together.
- When your student is finished dictating the piece, read it back to her. At this point, she may want to edit the text by changing the wording, fixing grammar errors or adding ideas. Give her positive feedback.
- Ask your student to read the piece back to you. If you keep it short enough, your student should be able to read all the words. Praise her!
- Your student may want to copy the piece in her own handwriting or onto the computer. Make sure each draft has the date on it. Keep a copy so your student can read it in the future.

**Activities with Language Experience Writing**

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

- Write each sentence from the piece on a separate card. (If the piece is long, use only one section.) Ask your student to put the cards in order.
- Write some of the words from the piece on separate cards. Then ask your student to match the words on the cards to the words in the text.
- Reinforce the spelling of difficult words by asking your student to:
  - Use these words in a new sentence
  - Put them into her personal dictionary
  - Do a cloze exercise with these words (see page 22)

**For Beginning Readers**

The language experience approach is useful to help beginning readers develop their word-attack skills.

A few weeks after you have written a language experience piece with your student, she may have difficulty reading a number of words in the text. At this point, the text provides a great opportunity for your student to practice sounding out these words, using her knowledge of phonics and the structure of words. Since she understands the meaning of all the concepts and vocabulary in the text, she can focus all her attention on her word-attack skills!

## **READING ALOUD WITH YOUR STUDENT**

Reading aloud with your student helps him to practise reading words that he already knows. It also helps him to strengthen his word-attack skills.

### **Before Reading**

- Choose reading materials that interest your student. For example, read about her favourite sport or music group. Or use something that you have written together using the language experience approach.
- Make sure the text is short and predictable. Try to select a text in which your student understands all the ideas so that she can concentrate on sounding out the words.
- Glance through the text to pick out words that your student may not know. Read these words aloud with her and discuss their meanings.
- Ensure you have several texts to choose from in case your student's interest wanes.

### **Ways to Read Aloud Together**

1. You read to your student.
2. You read a sentence/phrase and then have your student repeat the sentence/phrase.
3. You and your student read at the same time. When your student does not know a word, you continue reading to maintain the flow.
4. You take turns reading with your student: she reads one line, paragraph or page then you read one line, paragraph or page.
5. Your student reads to you.

The method you choose will depend on your student's reading ability and comfort level at reading aloud with you. Reading to your student lets him hear and appreciate fluent reading. But remember that your long-term goal is to have your student reading independently.

### While Reading

- Talk with your student about the purpose of the reading. Are you practising reading for fun or reading for information? Note: choose only one of these tasks for each piece of reading. (And don't forget to read for pleasure. Students who have difficulty reading often read only what they have to. They rarely read for pleasure. Help your student to develop this skill.)
- Start by looking together at the cover, the title or the pictures. Try to predict what the story will be about based on what you see.
- 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 photographs, diagrams and illustrations. As you read through the story, confirm your predictions.
- Encourage your student to ask questions as you read together.
- Give your student positive feedback whenever you read together.

### Helping with Difficult Words

When your student encounters a word he cannot read aloud, encourage him to practice the skills described in the word-attack section of this guide (see page 10). For example, if your student has trouble reading the word *went*, talk about phonics (initial and final consonant sounds and word families – *bent*, *sent*, *lent*). If he cannot read the word *hockey*, ask him 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 student remember specific decoding strategies. For example, say “break it down” to remind him to divide a long word into smaller parts, or “begins with” to remind him to focus on the initial consonant of a word. Over time, you will discover which prompts are useful for your student.

### After Reading

- Discuss the story and characters. For example, talk about why characters behaved in a certain way or what the moral of the story was.
- Review the words that your student had difficulty reading. Look for patterns.
- Every time you read together, also try to write. For example, use a written conversation (see page 21) to discuss what you read. Or, based on what you have read, have your student write a journal entry or a letter to the editor.

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## READING AND WRITING IDEAS FOR BEGINNING READERS

*Choose books and other reading materials at the right level for your student.*

Stay away from materials that are too long or complicated. 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 student does every day. Your student will learn best through literacy activities that are meaningful to him.

*Use all of your student's senses*

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

*Vary your reading materials.*

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

### **More suggestions for reading and writing:**

#### *Hobbies, Interests and Games*

- Play word games, for example: Scrabble, Boggle, Hangman, Concentration, Wheel of Fortune. Do word chains, 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.
- Enter (or invent entry forms for) sweepstakes contests.

#### *Mail*

- Read and write junk mail 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 Guide, watch the program (at home) and then critically discuss it.
- Meet with others to discuss books, magazines, movies, music, etc. Take notes about your discussion during (or after) the meeting.

*Music and Poetry*

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

**Written Conversation**

Have a conversation with your student on paper. Take turns writing your responses to each other's questions and answers. (This keeps the focus on reading and writing while giving you the opportunity to discuss an issue or an event.)

## CLOZE EXERCISES

Cloze exercises are passages with certain words deleted. They are fill-in-the-blank exercises that you create for your student. They are useful because they allow your student to focus on a particular difficulty in her reading and writing. However, because teachers regularly use cloze exercises in the classroom, many students will not want to do them with a tutor. Make sure your student wants to do cloze exercises before you plan to do them together.

### How to make Cloze Exercises

Use a text that interests your 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 your 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 your student 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 a more advanced student, don't supply the deleted words on the page. Instead, ask her 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 student. Delete these words and provide several similar words for him 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

This section presents strategies to help your student become a successful reader – one who goes beyond decoding words and focuses on understanding the meaning of a text.

At a basic level, reading is the process of decoding written symbols: recognizing words and sounding words out. Fluency depends on the ability to recognize and manipulate the building blocks of reading. If your student is having trouble decoding words, please refer to the “Learning to Read” section of this guide (see page 9).

Many teenagers who struggle with reading do not have trouble with the basics. These teens can read most of the words they see. However, they focus all their attention on decoding individual words. This 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 helping your student become “unglued” from the words and to focus on making meaning from the text. By sharing your own ideas, experiences and strategies about how you make meaning out of print, you can help your student learn these critical skills.

## READING STRATEGIES

### BEFORE READING

The more you prepare your student before reading,  
the greater the chance he will understand what he reads!

#### Prior Knowledge

Make connections between what your student already knows and what he is about to read. Ask your student to tell you what he knows about the subject of a text. As he talks, probe for more detailed information. If there are gaps in his knowledge, supply the necessary information.

Skim through the text. Look for unfamiliar words or phrases. Explain these words or phrases to him using concepts and words he is familiar with.

#### Context Clues

All readers find it difficult to read and understand information on an unfamiliar topic. Help your student 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"> <li>• Front and back covers, including the “blurb”</li> <li>• First paragraph</li> </ul>
A non-fiction book	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Title, table of contents and index</li> </ul>
A newspaper article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headline</li> <li>• Photograph and caption</li> <li>• With more advanced students, discuss the potential bias of an article based on where it was published</li> </ul>

#### Provide a Focus for Your Student

Help to focus your student’s attention before she starts reading through a text. For example, go through the questions of a homework assignment before you start reading the corresponding passage of a textbook. Or ask your student to focus on the relationships between specific characters in a novel. Talk about the purpose of reading this text.

**WHILE READING**

Always give your student lots of positive feedback.

*Watch and listen*

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

*Use context to predict meaning*

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

*Ask questions and discuss the text*

Encourage your student 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 aloud*

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

*Enjoy reading together*

Maintain the flow of the reading by helping with difficult words. If your student loses 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 aloud*

Depending on your student's goals, you may want to practise reading aloud and reading silently. However, if your student finds it difficult to read aloud (she may have trouble focussing simultaneously on meaning and pronunciation), have her read silently. After both of you have finished reading a text silently, discuss what you have read.

*Practise reading for speed or specific information*

Discuss the strategies you use to read quickly or to search for specific information. Make opportunities for your student to practise these skills.

**Practise Reading for Speed**

- 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 student discuss a text after reading it, the greater the chance your student will remember what she has read.

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

- Retelling      What were the events, the main ideas and the characters of the story?  
Talk about the “6 W’s” – who, what, where, when, why and how.
- 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 student? 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 high school 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 student, first ask your student which books and magazines she has 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 student and select reading material together.

When choosing reading material, think about:

- Is it relevant to your student? Does the topic interest your student?
- Does it have information that will be useful to your student?
- Will your student be able to identify with the characters in the novel?
- Is the book or magazine well laid out and well illustrated?
- Does it look too much like a child'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 high school 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

When choosing books to read with your student, you can help your student figure out difficult vocabulary. However, books for your student to take home must be at the independent reading level for your student. To choose a book for your student to read independently, use the “greasy finger test”: read a couple of pages together and ask your student to keep track (on her fingers) of the number of words she has trouble reading. If there are more than 10 difficult words on a page, encourage her to choose a different book. Explain that this particular book may be too frustrating for her to read by herself.

Finally, remember that you are a role model. When you go to your tutoring sessions, always bring books, magazines or newspapers that you are currently reading. Talk about what you are reading, about your love of reading or about your love of knowledge.

## WRITING STRATEGIES

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

### BEFORE WRITING

#### *Brainstorm*

Your student may not know where to start writing. Help him brainstorm.

What does your student want to write about? After he decides, have him write down a few points about the topic. Discuss how the essay could be written from these ideas.

- What does he know about the topic already?
- What would he like his essay to say? In what order?

#### *Organize the ideas*

Have your student write down all his ideas in point form. Using these ideas, create a list or an outline. Then discuss how the essay could be written from the information in the outline.

#### *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 student to write down her ideas without worrying about spelling or grammar. (If she has trouble spelling a word, ask her to try to spell it. Even if it is spelled incorrectly, leave it and come back to it during the editing and proofreading stages. If this process creates a writing block for your student, help her to spell the word so that she can move on to the ideas of the essay.)

#### *Edit*

Remind your student that writing is a process that takes time. Encourage your student to reread and reword her writing to fine-tune it. Then reread the first draft together.

#### *Discuss the first draft*

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

**AFTER WRITING***Work on spelling*

Help your student develop her spelling skills by using the strategies on page 13 of this guide. Discuss the strengths and limitations of these strategies.

*Work on grammar*

Encourage self-correction. Have your student tell you where he thinks there may be errors in a text. Help your student identify incorrectly used words by asking him “Does this sentence make sense?” or “Does this sound right?”

**Grammar**

Grammatical rules can help writers by telling them how their written language is normally put together. However, because different kinds of languages – formal, informal, dialects – have their own grammars, many people are confused by grammatical rules.

If your student speaks English as a second language, he may be 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 form or the order of words in your student’s writing.

*Proofread*

Remind your student that successful writers always proofread their writing. Share your proofreading strategies with your student. 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

## **HELPING YOUR STUDENT WITH HOMEWORK**

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

There is a real art in helping a student to complete his homework and to learn effectively. First, you need to make sure that your student understands the questions and the text that he is reading. Then, your role is to help your student to develop strategies to complete his own assignments.

### **HOW TO HELP WITH HOMEWORK**

#### *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 your student focus.

#### *Build on prior knowledge*

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

#### *Read the text with your student*

Read the text to your student, have your student read it to you, take turns reading or read it at the same time. (Make sure that your student is able to concentrate on the meaning of the text and that she is not bogged down by sounding out words.) Talk about the text as you read it together. Encourage your student to think aloud and ask questions about what she has read. Show how you check your own understanding.

#### *Discuss the text*

Discuss key points that relate to the homework instructions. Help your student to organize her thoughts either verbally or on paper. Give your student time to organize her thoughts and think through an answer, but give her help if she seems stuck.

*Completing the homework*

You are not expected to know all the answers. Being unsure of an answer or how to proceed provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate to your student how to work through a problem. Avoid focusing only on completing the assignment; learning how to learn is an important experience for your student.

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

**HELP YOUR STUDENT GET ORGANIZED**

Many students have difficulty getting organized to complete their homework. Help your student develop or improve her skills by talking about possible strategies she can use and figuring out which ones work well for her. For example, she could:

- 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

**BE A HOMEWORK MENTOR**

Share your strategies with your student on how you complete homework or work projects, including:

- 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

When you meet with your student, talk about your positive attitude towards school. Discuss and bring in the books (including textbooks!) you are currently reading. Share stories with your student 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 student's marks. Make sure you define your role, with your student, his teachers and his parents.
- Your student may want to complete his assignments regardless of whether he understands the concepts or information. He may not be interested in thinking critically. You may want to negotiate with your student to spend half of each session on homework and half on other reading or writing projects. Be creative! Working together to meet a deadline provides a wonderful opportunity for real learning to occur!

**Homework tips to share with your student**

- 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.

**SOME FINAL (but important) THOUGHTS ABOUT HOMEWORK**

It can be tempting to supply – or correct – the answers for your student. This does not help your student to learn! Instead of doing it for her, make sure that she has all the information and tools she needs to complete her homework. Then, stand back and let her do it by herself.

**Allow your student to complete the assignment herself.**

Don't change her words as she writes them down. If you need to spell a word for your student or explain a concept on paper, don't write in your student's workbook or binder. Instead, use a separate piece of paper. Remember, you are a facilitator for your student's learning. *The more she does for herself, the more she will learn.*

## **CONCLUSION**

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

Good luck with your tutoring!



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## **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:

### **What We Do**

- Volunteer mobilization
- Youth leadership development
- Community capacity building

### **Homework Club Institutes Project**

In April 2005, the Ontario Ministry of Education provided funding to Frontier College to set up the Homework Club Institutes project. Through this project, Frontier College established demonstration Homework Clubs; conducted research on how Homework Clubs benefit students; organized training workshops for community organizations; and developed resources for tutors and homework club organizers.

## TESTIMONIALS

The Frontier College's Tutor's Guide is an invaluable tool, as it clearly outlines effective strategies for both tutoring and teaching reading. Tutors will learn to plan effectively and become more informed about reading strategies, thus will be better able to facilitate struggling students' progress.

Jennifer Lewis-Lawson  
High School Teacher, Hamilton  
March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006

This guide has been such a help to me, giving me great ideas on how to encourage early learners to want to read. Having never tutored before, this guide gave me the confidence to help a struggling learner, which made my whole tutoring experience so much better. Any tutor entering a school for the first time would profit immensely from these great ideas, and so would any learner!

Leanne Edwards  
Tutor, North Bay  
March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006

Throughout this experience, I have found the Tutor's Guide to be a very useful tool to get me thinking about how to approach my role as a tutor and, in particular, how to tailor my approach to my student and sometimes to vary my approach as the tutor/student relationship develops. The guide highlights the need for "Student-Centred Individualized Learning" and offers suggestions on how to structure and develop my role. It also offers strategies for approaching a weak or reluctant reader with word-attack skills and activities with language experience.

Christopher Moffitt  
Tutor, Toronto  
February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006

The Frontier College Tutor's Guide is well laid out and easy to follow. It thoroughly prepares tutors to help students in many respects, from the planning of tutoring sessions all the way to evaluating and assessing students' achievement. Also, there is an abundance of tutoring strategies to assist the tutor with students who are considered struggling readers. Through techniques such as breaking down words and reading aloud, every comfort level is covered. The techniques that this guide provides are invaluable to any tutor. In fact, it should be required reading for anyone who plans to work with students in any educational capacity.

Chris Burke  
Volunteer Organizer, Thunder Bay  
Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006

