University of Florida Literacy Initiative
Tutoring for Beginning Readers

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Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill for success in school and in life. Reading ability affects a student's performance in every other aspect of school. In addition, expectations for post-school outcomes—educational, economic, and social—are bleak for individuals with poor reading skills. Clearly, learning to read is the most critical accomplishment in a child's school career.

Unfortunately, too many children fail to learn to read independently during the early grades due to inadequate reading instruction. Because learning to read well is so important for children, every teacher in the primary grades must be prepared to be an excellent teacher of reading.

Fortunately, recent research in reading has provided much needed direction. A report from the National Research Council's Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) synthesizes what we know about the reading process and how children learn to read. It is essential that every teacher of young children understand what to do to help all children become independent readers.

The Tutoring Program

As a part of the University of Florida Literacy Initiative, this tutoring program was developed as a tool to help preservice and inservice teachers develop an in-depth understanding of the reading process and how a child learns to read. The reading process is complex, and a thorough knowledge of how children learn to read is a prerequisite to exemplary classroom reading instruction. Tutoring an individual child is an excellent way to develop this in-depth knowledge.

The National Research Council's (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) report provides the impetus for the development of this program. Seminal research by Marilyn Adams (1990) and Marie Clay (1991, 1993) provides the foundation for the structure and the procedures of the tutoring session. Drawing on their work and other current research on
reading instruction, the tutoring program is designed to help children in the primary grades who are struggling to learn to read.

In this program, the tutor meets with the student each day for a 35-40 minute session. Tutoring sessions are typically held at the child’s school during the school day. The time and location for tutoring will be arranged with the help of the child’s teacher.

Tutoring Sessions

Materials. The tutor uses books that have been leveled by Reading Recovery® during each session. These books will be available at the school site. In addition to the leveled books, the following materials are required for tutoring:

- a session notes book
- a sentence writing book
- two pencils
- a pair of scissors
- a glue stick
- a digital timer
- a set of lowercase magnetic letters and a magnetic board.

The tutor may also use other optional materials (e.g., index cards, highlight tape, correction tape).

Methods. Throughout the tutoring program, the tutor will use the same basic session format. The session comprises five steps:

1. Gaining Fluency (5-8 Minutes)
2. Measuring Progress (3-4 Minutes)
3. Writing for Reading (10 Minutes)
4. Reading a New Book (10 Minutes)
5. Extending Literacy (2-8 Minutes)

During each step in the tutoring session, the student learns and applies skills and strategies essential to independent reading. The procedures for each session step are described in detail in subsequent sections of this handbook. The sequence of the session steps provides a logical progression for the student from confidence-building activities to challenging, critical-thinking activities. Students enjoy both the
predictable routine of the session and the variations that the tutor designs based on the individual needs of the student.

During each tutoring session, the student is actively engaged in problem-solving. Each unknown word is a problem to be solved, and the tutor helps the student develop the strategies he needs to solve the problems he encounters on a page. Through carefully designed instruction, the tutor helps the student become an active, independent reader.
Step 1: Gaining Fluency

Purpose

The student reads familiar text to gain word reading accuracy, to increase reading rate, and to develop prosody. Accurate word identification and decoding, quick and effortless reading, and appropriate use of punctuation and inflection are all essential to skilled reading and strong comprehension.

Rereading familiar text with increasing fluency also improves the student’s confidence. When the student is able to use strategies in familiar text, he becomes comfortable using those strategies independently. The tutoring session begins with this activity to provide the student with immediate success.

Method

Tutor selects appropriate text. The tutor selects text that the student has read during previous tutoring sessions and that the student is able to read with between 90% and 98% accuracy. Books selected should provide the student with sufficient challenges without causing frustration. Typically, the book is one or two levels below the student’s current new book level. Books that are too easy provide no valuable practice, and books that are too difficult do not contribute to fluency development. Each book selected should provide the student with a challenge (e.g., decoding, reading rate).

Student reads text with tutor's coaching. The student reads for approximately 3 to 5 minutes with minimal assistance from the tutor. During the early levels of tutoring, while the student acquires strategies and skills, he will need more explicit help from the tutor. The tutor may model strategies or tell the student which strategy to use. The tutor may choose to use magnetic letters to demonstrate how a challenging word is formed or to demonstrate how a word read correctly may form the base for other words (e.g., change and to sand, stand, standing, etc.).

As the student begins to build automaticity in decoding and becomes adept at monitoring for meaning, the tutor should provide less and less explicit coaching. The tutor should begin to ask the student to identify which strategy would be appropriate to figure out an unfamiliar word. Eventually, as the student gains control of the strategies, the tutor should begin to ask the student to explain what strategies he used to figure out difficult words.
Throughout the tutoring sessions, the tutor should notice which strategies the student is using and which strategies he is failing to use. The running record provides the tutor with information necessary to promote continued strategy development.

Timed readings. Once the student becomes fairly confident reading familiar text, the tutor should begin timed readings to increase reading rate. Most students are ready for timed readings about the time they reach Level 8. The tutor may elect to use a variety of reading materials for this part of the session. The student may read directly from the familiar book, or the tutor can provide a copy of the book’s text printed on a single sheet of paper. Most students seem to prefer the latter method—once they understand that the printed text is exactly the same as in the book.

During a timed reading, the tutor and the student each have a copy of the text. The student reads for one minute while the tutor listens and records errors. Following the reading, the tutor and the student record the student’s progress on the timed reading chart (see Resources section). To record the student’s progress, chart the number of words read correctly as a dot and the number of errors as an X. Connect the dots from one day to the next, and connect the Xs, as well.

The tutor and the student set rate goals together (average fluent rate for a first-grade student is 60-100 words per minute). When the student reaches the predetermined goal, the tutor and the student may increase the target rate or attempt a new passage at the same rate. This decision should be based on individual student needs.

Working with familiar words. Once the student learns a new word well, his familiarity with the word can serve as a starting point for learning more new words and for reinforcing what he knows about letters and sounds. The tutor may use manipulative letters to show how the letters come together to form the word and then to show the similarities and differences between the familiar word and other words.

Each session should include opportunities for the student to decode (read) and encode (spell) words at the onset-rime and phoneme levels. The word work should also include nonsense words and challenge words. For example, start by finding the word “fall” in one of the books the student has already read. After finding the word “fall,” ask the student to spell the word using magnetic letters. From this starting point, ask the student . . .

1. If we change the “f” to an “m” at the beginning of that word, what word would we have? (mall)
2. Now, change the “m” to a “c” and tell me what word you get. (call)
3. Show me how to change call to ball . . . ball to wall . . . wall to hall . . . hall to tall.
4. Now, change tall to tell . . . tell to bell . . . bell to zell.
5. If you change the “z” to an “sp,” what word would you get? (spell)
6. Now for your challenge of the day. Who can change the word “spell” to “spelling”? How about “spelled”? How about “spilled”?

    Students who are acquiring strategies are developing their sight vocabulary. Building, scrambling, and rebuilding sight words with magnetic letters can promote sight word recognition. Forming word families using the rime as a base will promote the student’s phonological awareness development and decoding skills. As students build the use of strategies, word family work using words with more complex spellings becomes possible (e.g., could, would, should). When students begin to gain control of the strategies, the tutor should begin to introduce prefixes (e.g., return), suffixes (e.g., raining), and other morphographic features of words (e.g., changing man to men, changing keep to kept).

**Considerations**

    As the tutoring session begins and the student begins reading for fluency building, the tutor can set up the materials for the remainder of the session. It is important, however, that the tutor pays careful attention to the student’s reading and provides coaching or feedback as needed.

    Building fluency is usually the student’s favorite part of the tutoring session, because he feels comfortable and confident with the activities. If the tutor presents the activities as challenging and fun, the student will continue to enjoy them. If the tutor ignores the student while he is reading, selects text that is too easy or too difficult, or provides too much or too little assistance, then this part of the tutoring session may become tedious.
Step 2: Measuring Progress

Purpose

The tutor is responsible for planning individualized instruction to accelerate the student’s reading achievement. A running record is a method of assessment that allows the tutor to identify reading strategies the student uses and which strategies the student fails to use.

The tutor takes a running record during each tutoring session to determine the appropriate level for the new book and to identify areas for coaching and instruction. The student uses available reading strategies to reread independently the new book that was introduced at the end of the previous tutoring session. As the tutoring sessions progress, the tutor will note and document changes in the student’s active and independent search for clues to identify a word or verify reading accuracy.

Method

Preparing for the running record. The tutor presents the student with the new book from previous tutoring session saying, “Remember our new book from last time? While you are reading, I will be listening and taking notes. Please remember that I can’t help you read this book. When you come to a tough spot use everything you know how to do to figure out the word. When you are finished, we will talk about the story.”

Taking the running record. The tutor sits beside the student with the Session Notes out of the child’s view. With minimal interaction with the student, the tutor watches and carefully records the student’s reading of the book using the following marking system:

✓ Student read the word correctly

Attempt Text Student’s attempt is written over the word in the text

Attempt Text (word added) After attempts to read the word, the student self-corrected

^ Student added a word

text Student omitted the word

text Student rereads line/word

G Tutor Gave the word

P Tutor Prompted the student
Providing feedback. Immediately following the running record the tutor gives the student brief and encouraging feedback. This is not the time to point out or correct errors. If the student self-corrected during the running record the tutor can point out where the self-correction took place and ask, “How did you figure out that word?” The tutor might also point out where the student used multiple strategies to figure out a difficult word and ask, “I noticed you were thinking about different things while you were figuring out this word. What were you thinking about?” This type of feedback promotes the student’s conscious awareness of strategies he uses while reading.

Analyzing the running record. After the tutoring session the tutor analyzes the data collected during the running record. First, the tutor calculates the accuracy percentage. The accuracy percentage assists the tutor in determining when the student is ready to move on to the next level. Second, the tutor carefully examines and interprets the student’s reading behaviors. Analyzing reading behaviors helps the tutor identify sources of information the student is and is not using while reading.

To calculate the accuracy rate, the tutor uses the following procedures:

1. Count the number of words read by the student.
2. Subtract the total errors from the number of words read.
   - a self-correction is not counted as an error
   - a substitution counts as one error
   - multiple attempts at one word counts as one error
   - an omission counts as one error
   - a word given by the tutor counts as one error
   - a proper name that appears repeatedly and is misread in the same way each time counts as one error
3. Divide the number of words read correctly by the total number of words read and multiply by 100.
   - If the student scores below 90% the text is considered “frustration level” and the tutor must determine whether the student should be introduced to a new book at the previous level or introduced to a new book at the same level.
• If the student scores between 90% and 95% the text is considered “instructional” and the student should be introduced to a new book at the same level.

• If the student scores above 95% the tutor must determine whether the student should be introduced to a new book at the next level or another book at the same level.

Tutors must carefully monitor students’ accuracy rate to ensure opportunities are available for students to integrate all sources of information while reading. If the text is too difficult, students can not monitor the meaning of what they are reading; if the text is too easy, opportunities to extend students’ reading skills and strategies are not available.

To examine and interpret reading behaviors, the tutor should consider several aspects of the student’s reading:

1. Look carefully at the self-corrections. What sources of information were used?

2. Look carefully at each error. What is correct about the error?

3. Consider the reading rate and prosody. Is the student reading in phrases or word by word? Does the student attend to punctuation while reading?

4. Look for patterns. What sources of information does the student rely on? What sources are neglected?

When students are acquiring strategies, the tutor should consider the following when interpreting errors and corrections:

• Confusions over directionality of print
• Efforts to match what is said to the number of words printed on the page
• Use of a familiar word as an anchor in matching voice to print
• Use of repetitive sentence patterns in the story to support reading
• Use of picture clues
• Student’s oral language patterns
When students are building their repertoire of reading strategies, the tutor should consider the following when interpreting the error/correction:

- Use of beginning sounds
- Use of ending sounds
- Familiarity with common letter sound clusters
- Attempts to sound out the word letter by letter
- Something did not make sense
- Something did not sound the way we might say it
- Recognition of a familiar word or word part
- Attempts to read in phrases and with fluency
- Mismatch in information from two different sources

When students are controlling reading strategies, the tutor should consider the following when interpreting the error/correction:

- Reading with phrasing and fluency
- Unusual letter-sound cluster
- Something did not sound right
- Something did not make sense
- Something did not match the letters on the page
- Rereading to confirm identification of a word
- Rereading to regain fluency and/or clarify meaning
- Attends to punctuation

Considerations

There may be occasions when the student refuses to go on with the reading upon encountering an unknown word. In this case the tutor's best option is to say, “How could you figure out that word?” If the student remains stumped the tutor may prompt the student to use a specific strategy and notes this in the running record. As a last resort, the tutor may either give the word to the student or tell the student to say “skip” and continue reading. The tutor should discourage the student from saying “skip” or relying on the tutor to give the word (especially during “Gaining Fluency” and “Reading the New Book”) as a plausible reading strategy. Instead, the tutor should always encourage the student to use reading strategies he knows.
Step 3: Writing for Reading

Purpose

Writing helps the reader learn how to “take words apart, on the run, while reading” (Clay, 1993; p. 49). The student becomes conscious of how words work by collaborating with the tutor to write a short message. Together, the tutor and student analyze words and construct their spellings. Through writing, the student learns words are made up of letters, arranged in a particular order, and linked in some way to the sounds they hear (Clay, 1991).

The eye does not photograph the detail of print and transfer it to the brain. The child must learn to attend to the details in print, respecting the rules of direction, the order or sequences of letters, and the order of words. Some children, finding this difficult or tedious, coast along on their language skills and pay as little attention to the detail of print as they can get away with.” (Clay, 1993; p. 23)

Method

“Writing for Reading” comprises three steps. First, the tutor elicits a message from the student. Second, the student records the message with the tutor’s coaching and assistance. Third, the student rereads and reassembles the message from the previous tutoring session.

Eliciting a message. As the running record is completed, the tutor begins an informal conversation with the student about the story. The tutor might say, “I liked that story, it reminds me of the time I went to the zoo. Have you ever been to the zoo?” As the conversation continues, the tutor listens for a sentence that is meaningful to the student and provides instructional opportunities. That is, it should be a complete sentence with words that would be useful and manageable for the student to learn.

When, in the course of this conversation, the student constructs a suitable sentence, the tutor should respond by saying, “That’s a great sentence. Let’s write that sentence today.” The tutor should never simply ask, “What do you want to write today?” Given this type of prompt, the student is likely to limit his or her sentence to a short one made up of already known words. Even worse, a student may decide on a sentence that is grammatically incorrect. Avoid these issues by selecting a sentence that occurs naturally during conversation with the students.
Some students require extensive prompting to elicit a suitable sentence. Be prepared to help your student connect ideas into a complete sentence.

**Writing the message.** Tutors have to make many important instructional decisions during this step of the session. Decisions are based on careful observations of what the student is able to do independently, a recently demonstrated need for a particular skill or strategy, and the tutor’s knowledge of sounds or words in the new book that are unfamiliar to the student. Together, the student and the tutor work on the “cutting edge” of the student’s learning (Clay, 1993; p. 29). Before working with the student to write the message, the tutor needs to take a moment to do the following:

1. Quickly jot down the student’s message in the Session Notes.
2. Circle high frequency words that are unfamiliar to the student.
3. Box 2-4 words that have easily distinguished sounds and simple sound spellings.
4. Underline words the student is able to write independently.

Example:

\[
\text{It (was) so funny when the cat fell off the couch.}
\]

The tutor and student work together to record the message (a sentence or two) in the writing book. The writing book, containing blank sheets of paper, is turned sideways with the top page providing space for “word work” and the bottom page for writing the sentence(s). The tutor works with the student on one word at a time to record the message.

- When the student knows a word, the student writes the word directly on the sentence page.
- If the tutor thinks the student might know the word, the student is directed to first write the word on the word work page.
- Unfamiliar high frequency words with uncommon spellings (e.g., *was, they*) are spelled by the tutor on the word work page. The student is asked to “write the word again” on the word work page, followed by several similar requests. Finally the student writes the word on the sentence page.
The tutor identifies two to four unfamiliar words with clearly distinguishable phonemes (sounds). The tutor-student interactions shift over time for unfamiliar words with regular sound spellings. While the student is acquiring strategies, the tutor works with the student to isolate and identify a few sounds. As the student builds strategies, the tutor helps the student isolate, count, and identify each individual phoneme. While the student is acquiring and building reading strategies, Elkonin boxes provide a useful strategy for isolating phonemes and identifying letters. (See the Resources section for an explanation of Elkonin boxes.) As the student learns to control these strategies the tutor assists the student by isolating prefixes, suffixes, and inflections; identifying how many letters are needed to spell the word; and spelling by analogy (“Here is like there, so how do you think the word here would look?).

When the student’s message includes uncommon words with unusual spellings (e.g., Ninja, rhinoceros) the tutor can assist the student in one of the following ways: write the word for the student on the sentence page; write the word for the student on the word work page so that the student can write it on the sentence page; or help the student identify word parts he can spell.

Magnetic letters can also be used during this portion of the tutoring session to enhance fluency with common sight words, build word families, facilitate spelling by analogy, and isolate and add inflections, prefixes, and suffixes.

Reading and assembling the previous message. The tutor prepares three computer-printed copies of the message from the previous tutoring session for this portion of the session. To support the beginning reader, the tutor should choose a clear, large, standard font, and include extra spacing between words and lines. During this activity, the tutor presents the student with a computer-printed copy of the previous session’s message. The student uses available strategies to read the message to the tutor. The tutor assists the student as needed with prompting and demonstrations. The student reads the message a second time as the tutor cuts the message into phrases, words, or word parts. Again, the student-tutor interactions during this portion of the session shift over time.

After the sentence is cut apart and scrambled, the student is directed to reassemble the sentence. Finally, the cut-up sentence is placed in an envelope with an intact copy of the sentence pasted on the envelope. The envelope is sent home for further practice. A third computer-printed sentence is pasted on the correlating sentence page in the writing book.
Considerations

Eliciting a message from the student can be tricky at times. As the student becomes familiar with the tutoring routine, he quickly figures out when the tutor is listening for a message for the Writing Book. In some cases, it becomes a challenge to gain the student’s cooperation because writing the message is hard work. (Tutors have also reported that the resistance diminishes as the student acquires new skills and strategies. In fact, the student looks forward to the challenge of writing a message.) Students who resist writing tend to figure out what the tutor is trying to do after the running record and will refrain from participating in the conversation. If this is the case, the tutor needs to listen for a message during other parts of the session. Some tutors find it useful to listen carefully and facilitate conversations while walking with the student from the classroom to the tutoring station. Other tutors listen for a message and facilitate conversations while rereading familiar books. Finally, some tutors have found it helpful to occasionally rearrange the order of the session components.

Keep in mind that the purpose of this portion of the tutoring session is designed to help the student understand how words work. That is, this is not a creative writing lesson, a session on English grammar rules, an opportunity to perfect handwriting skills, or an occasion to isolate or “teach” punctuation. The tutor should be focused on helping the student isolate and identify phonemes, notice spelling patterns in word families, become familiar with letters that are commonly seen together in words, and to build reading skills by engaging the student in actively processing every letter in every word.
Step 4: Reading a New Book

Purpose

During each tutoring session, the student will read a new, somewhat challenging book. Reading a new book provides an opportunity for the student to learn new reading strategies and to practice the application of strategies he knows with progressively more difficult text. This component includes the most intensive and applied reading instruction of the tutoring session.

Method

Selecting the text. The tutor must select a new book for each tutoring session. This selection should be based on the tutor's knowledge of the skills and strategies that the student can use effectively and which ones he needs to learn or practice. The level of the book is determined by the results of the previous session's running record. Selecting books with topics of interest to the student will promote student success.

Introducing the text. It is important for the tutor to help the student realize that a good reader thinks about a book before beginning to read it. To develop this habit and to build and activate the student's background knowledge before reading, the tutor and the student look through the book and talk about it.

During this introduction, the focus is on the pictures, not on the text. The tutor helps the student notice relevant features in the illustrations, make predictions about the story, and relate the content of the story to the student's life. Although the introduction should be elaborate, the process should take no more than two minutes.

When introducing a new book, the tutor should . . .

• Encourage the student to respond to the book by pointing out illustrations and link it to other familiar stories or topics.

• Shape the plot or structure the sequence up to the climax, and when appropriate, leave the ending a surprise.

• Use and deliberately enunciate novel language features (e.g., names, difficult language, language not used or uncommon in their culture, and syntactically confusing language).
• Draw on his or her background knowledge and introduce new knowledge.
• Model repetitive sentence patterns.
• Notice parts of the text that may prove difficult—provide support without giving words.
• Encourage the student to be an active participant in the conversation.

(Adapted from Clay, 1991)

Coaching the student through the text. After the student and the tutor have examined the book together, the student begins to read the book, and the tutor provides coaching as needed. This is probably the most important component of the tutoring session, because the tutor is helping the student acquire the skills and strategies necessary for independent reading.

During the sequence of tutoring sessions, the nature of the coaching that the tutor provides will change from extremely explicit to more implicit. In other words, during the early sessions, while the student is acquiring strategies and skills, the tutor will demonstrate strategies and tell the student what to do to figure out an unfamiliar word. As the student builds understanding of strategies, the tutor will begin to ask the student which strategy he thinks may be appropriate to figure out a word. Eventually, as the student gains control of reading strategies, the student should be able to apply them independently and identify which strategy was used.

The student must become familiar with the various sources of information in text that can be used to identify an unfamiliar word: letters and sounds, meaning, and syntax. The most useful source of information for reading is the letters and their sounds. To use this orthographic information effectively, the student must be able to recognize the appropriate sounds associated with the letters in the word and blend these sounds together.

The tutor can help the student develop these skills in numerous ways. For example, when the student encounters an unfamiliar but readily decodable word, the tutor may use magnetic letters to help the student see how each letter in the word represents a sound and how the letters come together to form the word. The tutor may, instead, choose to help the student relate the word to a similar word he already knows and identify the similarities and differences. For longer words, the tutor
may demonstrate how to cover up parts of the word and decode one part at a time.

The other sources of information, meaning and syntax, are used primarily to predict and confirm that the student's decoding was accurate. The tutor can teach the student to use meaning to predict the identity of a difficult word by prompting him to continue reading and think of a word that would fit. The student must then decode the word to check his prediction. Ideally, the student learns to use meaning and syntax to confirm that a word was decoded correctly. The tutor can prompt this strategy by asking, "Does that word make sense there?" If the student decodes a word incorrectly and the word he says violates rules of syntax, the tutor can prompt the student by asking, "Does that word sound right?"

Working with new words. As the tutor coaches the student through the new book, she should note new words that provide challenges to the student. Additional time at the end of this session step may be allocated to working with any challenging new word. The tutor may use magnetic letters to (a) demonstrate how the letters come together to form the word, (b) point out similarities and differences between the new word and a word the child already knows, or (c) to form word families using portions of the new word as a base (e.g., new word = string; word family = ring, sing, thing, etc.). The tutor might also use a dry erase board to spell the new word in Elkonin boxes or to write a multisyllable word one syllable at a time.

Considerations

The tutor must allocate enough time (usually about ten minutes) to this component of the tutoring session. Because the new book component occurs at the end of the session, some tutors may fail to reserve sufficient time for introducing and coaching the student through the book. This mistake can seriously impede student progress.

The tutor must ensure that the new book selected is at an appropriate level, given the student's understanding of strategies, background knowledge, and previous reading performance on the running record.

To avoid overwhelming the student, the tutor should not attempt to introduce more than one or two new strategies during a single tutoring session. By previewing the book and by carefully examining the running records, the tutor will be able to make a judicious selection of strategies to introduce and practice during each session.
Step 5: Extending Literacy

Purpose

In the final step of the tutoring session, the tutor and the student explore a variety of text genres. Through these experiences, students develop awareness of numerous text structures and of the many functions of literacy (e.g., communication, enjoyment, gaining information). An important aspect of this step is that the student begins generalizing the use of strategies beyond leveled books. This is a particularly enjoyable step in the tutoring session in that the student’s motivation is enhanced as he realizes the many opportunities that learning to read offers.

Method

Selecting the genre. The tutor should consider the genre awareness assessment results when selecting materials to extend literacy. Begin by introducing those genres with which the student was unfamiliar. When the student has a basic understanding of various text structures, materials should be selected that interest the child and allow him to generalize his skills and strategies in a variety of contexts.

Introducing the text. A discussion of the text genre and the purpose or function of that genre is an important aspect of the extending literacy step of the session. As with the introduction of the new book, activating the student’s prior knowledge about the book’s topic increases his success with the activity. Additionally, the tutor should encourage the student to share any previous experiences or knowledge of the genre. The introduction of the text should only take about two minutes. For some text genres, a simple, two-minute introduction and discussion may be the only literacy extension for the session. For other materials, the introduction will lead into an activity that increases the student’s knowledge of that text structure and allows him to generalize his developing strategies.

Planning the activity. After selecting the genre, the tutor should think carefully about the focus of the activity. If the child is unfamiliar with the genre, a simple introduction to its form and function may be all that is needed for a first experience. If the child is familiar with the form and function of the selected genre, the activity should focus on increasing familiarity with the text structure. Below is a list of sample activities organized by genre.
• **Storybooks**

Storybooks should be *frequently* incorporated into the extending literacy step of the tutoring session. While students enjoy the leveled books, storybooks provide experiences with literature with a more developed story. The student applies strategies and builds confidence while reading such books. The strategies listed later in this section, support the student in reading a book that would otherwise be too difficult.

• **Newspaper**

Many activities can be incorporated easily into the session using the daily newspaper. Early introductions should focus on the parts of the newspaper, how to use the table of contents, and what types of information can be learned by reading a newspaper. Find out about the student’s interests, and together find articles related to those topics. It is appropriate for the tutor to read a short article to the student. If a high frequency sight word has been practiced during one of the earlier steps of the session, have the student locate and highlight that word in an article you have read together.

• **Magazines**

Children’s magazines are available on many topics, both fiction and non-fiction, and can be found in most school media centers. Some popular titles include *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, *Zoobooks*, *Ranger Rick*, *My Big Backyard*, and *Highlights*. Select magazines, which are available on a variety of reading levels, to fit the student’s interests and ability. The strategies listed later in this section, support the student in reading articles with challenging text.

• **Non-fiction topic book**

The text structure of non-fiction topic books (e.g., a book about insects) is unique to the genre. Introduce the student to the parts of the book, such as table of contents, index, headings and captions that are frequently found in non-fiction literature. One non-fiction book can be used over several sessions, highlighting different aspects of the book. Talk with the student about how a reader might skim the book and pick an area of interest to read.

• **Biography**

Biographies are available in easy-reader formats. Students are often interested in sports figures and celebrities. Introducing this genre
motivates the student to pursue an interest through reading. Biographies have unique features that make comprehension difficult for young readers. The tutor can familiarize the student with the vocabulary and structure of biographies (e.g., chronology, dates, places, names).

• **“How-to” Books**

Books that guide children in how to accomplish a task are popular once they are discovered. Books on cartooning, drawing, making paper airplanes, and performing magic tricks are examples of “how-to” books that may be of interest to the student; simply introducing the student to this genre will provide an impetus to read. For this genre, the introduction should include instruction on how to use this text structure. Many of these books have step-by-step directions that should be followed. The student should be guided through this process so that he can use this genre independently.

• **Poetry Books**

Poetry books can be used effectively to build fluency and increase motivation. Choose poetry books that interest the child. Allow the student to choose a poem he would like to learn to read independently. Print the poem in a large font, and have the student practice reading the poem. Begin by using echo reading (described later in this section) to enhance prosody as the student learns to read the poem. The tutor might also set a rate goal and begin timed readings of the poem. When the student attains the goal, have him read the poem on audiotape. The student can place the printed poem and tape in the class listening center.

• **Reference Books**

Brief introductions to a variety of reference texts should be included in the tutoring session. Reference materials may include, but are not limited to, (a) the telephone book, (b) a dictionary, (c) a children’s thesaurus, or (d) a CD-ROM Encyclopedia. These mini-lessons should be brief and focus mainly on the function of the resource being introduced. The tutoring session is not the time to focus on study skills; however, the student does need to know that reading is used in a variety of contexts.

• **Other Genres**

The tutor might consider introducing the features and functions of other genres such as (a) lists, (b) menus, (c) cookbooks, (d) recipes, (e) directions, or (f) signs.
Strategies to Support Beginning Readers

In **partner reading** the tutor and student read the text simultaneously. The tutor should be sensitive to the student’s reading level. When the student can read parts of the passage independently, the tutor should lessen support. When the student again reaches a portion of the text that is difficult, the tutor continues to read aloud with the student.

In **echo reading** the tutor reads a phrase or a sentence and the student repeats the text that the tutor has read. The reader should follow along with his finger.

**Repeated reading** is a strategy that increases fluency and builds confidence. Have the student work on one portion of the chosen text (e.g., the first stanza in a poem) by reading and rereading the portion until it is mastered. As a portion is mastered, the student moves on to the next part until he has mastered the entire piece.

**Considerations**

The student should be exposed to a variety of print genres; however, storybooks should be the most commonly used genre in the session. Keep in mind that one storybook may take several sessions to complete.

The tutor should plan carefully for this step of the session. Considerations for planning include, (a) the results of the Print Genre Awareness Assessment, (b) the types of strategies the student has developed, (c) the student’s interests, and (d) the accessibility of the text for the student.

Remember that the purpose of this step of the session is to expose the student to various genres and provide the opportunity to generalize newly developed skills and strategies. Guard against spending too much time on mini-lessons (e.g., drill on dictionary guide words) that detract from the focus on learning about a new genre.

Within the leveled books available for the tutoring sessions are a variety of genres. When reading a new book during Step 4, help the student make connections with what he is learning about genres in the Extending Literacy step. Use the introduction of the new book to emphasize the genre.
Addressing the Needs of a Developing Student

As students enter the tutoring program, most have extremely limited reading skills and know few, if any, reading strategies. The needs of an entering student, with so little incoming knowledge, are very different from the needs of a student who has received several weeks of effective tutoring.

In early tutoring sessions, the student begins to acquire the initial strategies he needs to move through text. After the student progresses through the first few book levels, he begins to build an understanding of the strategies he is using. Eventually, the student gains control of the strategies; that is, he becomes consciously aware of which strategies he is using and is able to apply them independently.

To help the student progresses in the development of reading strategies, the focus of the tutor’s instruction must shift to meet the student’s immediate needs. The following lists of strategies, while far from comprehensive, provides a guide for the tutor to use as the student progresses through the program.

**Acquire**

When a student is acquiring initial reading strategies, the tutor’s focus is on

- Fluency in letter recognition and letter-sound correspondences
- Directionality of print
- Matching voice to print; awareness of word
- Phonological awareness
- Picture clues
- Repetitive sentence structure as a contextual clue
- Beginning sounds to identify/confirm a word
- Familiarity with “anchor” words
**Build**

When a student is *building* understanding of strategies, the tutor’s focus is on

- Enhancing phonemic awareness
- Demonstrating blending as a word identification strategy
- Developing automaticity with basic sight words
- Prompting to notice new features of print or neglected clues
- Developing automaticity in the use of beginning sounds to eliminate other words that fit the context/meaning
- Using inflections to build and break apart words

**Control**

As a student gains *control* of the use of strategies, the tutor’s focus shifts to

- Independent blending and segmenting of sounds in reading and writing
- Independent self-monitoring, cross-checking, and self-correction
- Developing comprehension strategies in various text structures
- Identifying the strategies that were used during reading
- Fluent (quick, accurate, and prosodic) reading
- Application of strategies in a variety of contexts
Guidelines for the Tutor

Tips for Working in a School

• **Maintain a regular schedule.** Both your student and the classroom teacher will count on you to arrive at a particular time and to tutor on particular days. Be sure to take time to develop a tutoring schedule that you can maintain. If you need to modify your schedule, please inform the classroom teacher and your student at least one day in advance.

• **Be considerate of classroom teachers.** Although daily conversations with the classroom teacher are impossible, she is aware of your contributions and can help you when difficulties arise. Please consider the multiple demands placed on a classroom teacher, and understand that she will not be available to talk with you about your concerns when you pick-up or drop-off your student. If the classroom teacher has e-mail, use this as your primary means of communication when needed. If the classroom teacher does not have e-mail, leave a note or phone message indicating when and where you can be reached and what needs to be discussed.

• **Be aware of school policies and procedures.** Be conscientious of parking policies, procedures for checking-in, and any other school norms that are important for volunteers and visitors to follow.

• **Become familiar with the school calendar and class schedule.** School holidays and early dismissal days can not be included as scheduled tutoring sessions. Note school holidays when establishing your tutoring schedule in order to schedule the minimum number of required tutoring sessions. You should also familiarize yourself with the class schedule so that you do not schedule (or reschedule) tutoring sessions during Music, Art, PE, or regularly scheduled recess times.

• **Be prepared and organized.** Be sure to arrive a few minutes before your scheduled tutoring time so that you can check-in at the front office, gather your books and materials, and set up your tutoring station. The time you have scheduled for tutoring should be spent tutoring (not getting organized).

• **Help maintain the book collection.** The leveled book collection is essential to the success of the reading tutoring program. Schools have spent a tremendous amount of money to develop these collections. Please help the school maintain the collection by appropriately filing all books back into the collection at the end of each session. Use a post-it
note to reserve the book you need for the next running record; include your name and next tutoring date and time.

- **Be aware of the time and monitor your pacing.** Many times the classroom teacher schedules other instructional activities for your student around the tutoring time. Please learn to pace your session so that you return your student to the classroom at the scheduled time.

- **Walk your student to and from the classroom.** You are responsible for the safety of your student. Be sure to walk your student to and from the tutoring session. This provides a great time to talk with your student and establish rapport. Many times you will discover a writing topic during these walks.

**Suggestions for Successful Tutoring Sessions**

- **Establish your teaching presence.** The way you dress, your preparedness, and your interactions with your student all contribute to your student's perception of whether or not you "really are" a teacher. A strong, but caring, teaching presence will go a long way toward maximizing the amount of learning that will take place during your tutoring sessions.

- **Take it slow.** During your first few sessions your focus should be on getting to know your student, not teaching. Follow the recommended sequence for administering assessments and try to limit the number of assessments you administer during the first few sessions to two or three. Pace the assessments according to your student’s skill level and confidence. If the student has an easy time with the assessments for the day then you may continue. Stop administering any assessment during your introductory sessions if you find your student is getting frustrated. Try to introduce the assessments as a game. Smile and encourage your student.

- **Show your confidence.** When working with your student during the introductory sessions demonstrate your confidence in his skills and interest in what he already knows. The tutoring sessions are designed to build on what the student knows; observe carefully so that you become familiar with what you student is able to do.

- **Relax and smile.** You might be a little nervous and feel a bit overwhelmed as you learn to incorporate all the components of the tutoring session. Your student, however, does not know you are trying to follow a particular protocol. Relax, smile, and learn with your student. Effective tutoring is a great teaching experience!
• **Tune in to your student.** Pay attention to your student’s interests, experiences, and cultural background. Not only will these clues help you establish rapport and get to know your student better, but they will also help you plan your session. Choosing books that connect to your student’s personal experiences, interests, background knowledge, and cultural traditions is motivating and enhances comprehension.

• **Listen more than you talk.** Strive to make the tutoring session as conversational as possible. That is, you want to refrain from drilling your student with endless questions and try to limit your "lessons." Making statements and pausing for the student to respond, and showing interest in what the student has to say with eye contact and conversational responses will encourage active participation by your student.

• **Keep the session moving.** Keeping the session moving is a little tricky at first, but essential to maximizing student learning. Being prepared and organized will help you. Pausing for a long period of time to figure out what to do next or to get out needed materials not only wastes learning time, but also promotes off-task behavior and conversation. Always redirect the student to reading during the session, and know when you need to move on to the next component of the session.

• **Use specific praise.** Tutoring provides an ideal opportunity for reinforcing the strategies and skills good readers use. Specific praise highlights for the student what he is doing that is effective. Although you will say things like, "Good for you," as you establish rapport and keep the session moving, try using statements such as the following: "I noticed how you went back to the beginning of the sentence after you figured out that word to make sure you understood the sentence."

• **Demonstrate, model, and coach.** Showing a student how to use a reading strategy or skill, asking a student what strategy he might try, or using specific praise when you observe the student using a strategy builds confidence and reading fluency. Simply pointing out errors or telling a student how to do something does not promote a self-regulated, self-improving learner.
Conclusion

Children are acutely aware that learning to read is the most important accomplishment in the early years of school. Struggling to learn to read can be one of the most frustrating experiences a child ever has. Effective tutoring that helps a child achieve at a level approximating that of his peers can have a lasting impact on the child's school achievement and self-esteem.

The rewards of tutoring for the tutor may be as great as the rewards for the child. Tutoring has a significant impact on the tutor's knowledge about the reading process and about how children learn to read. Tutoring provides the tutor with the knowledge and skills required for exemplary classroom reading instruction.

"It is amazing and powerful to know and see the changes that have taken place within myself and my tutee . . .”

Reading Tutor
Fall 1998

References


University of Florida Literacy Initiative
Tutoring for Beginning Readers
Session Guide

Step 1: Gaining Fluency

- Select and read 1-4 familiar books (3-5 minutes)
- Work with familiar words (3-4 minutes)
- Record observations and focus of word work

Step 2: Measuring Progress

- Present book from previous session
- Take running record while child reads (2-3 minutes)
- Provide feedback regarding self-corrections you observed
- Quickly discuss story

Step 3: Writing for Reading

- Elicit, record, and code sentence (30 seconds)
- Work on each word, while coaching student (8-9 minutes)
- Cut apart and reassemble yesterday’s sentence (1 minute)

Step 4: Reading a New Book

- Introduce new book (1-2 minutes)
- Coach student through new book (6-7 minutes)
- Discuss story (30 seconds)
- Work with new words (2 minutes)
- Record strategies used and focus of word work

Step 5: Extending Literacy

- This step will take 2-8 minutes, depending on genre selected.
- Introduce genre to student
- Demonstrate use, read to or with student
- Record genre, text, & focus
Session Notes

Date __________ Session Time __________ to __________ New Book Level ______

Step 1: Gaining Fluency
Book Level/Title | Book Level/Title
-----------------|-----------------|
-----------------|-----------------|

Working with familiar words:

Step 2: Measuring Student Progress
Book Level/Title | Accuracy _____ %
-----------------|-----------------|
Running Record   | Observations

Step 3: Writing for Reading
familiar sight sound
Sentence: ____________________________________________

Step 4: Reading a New Book
Book Level/ Title: _________________________________________
Strategies introduced/practiced:

Working with new words:

Step 5: Extending Literacy
Genre/Text: ____________________________________________
Activity description:
# UFLI
Timed Reading Record

**Student** ____________________________  **Tutor** ____________________________  **Goal** _____________

**week of** ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________

| M | T | W | T | F | M | T | W | T | F | M | T | W | T | F | M | T | W | T | F | M | T | W | T | F | M | T | W | T | F |
| 100 | 95 | 90 | 85 | 80 | 75 | 70 | 65 | 60 | 55 | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 5 | 0 |

**Title &** ____________________________  **Level** ____________________________

UFLI: Tutoring for Beginning Reader
Using Elkonin Boxes

One of the earliest researchers to link phonological awareness to reading was Elkonin (1963), a Russian psychologist. He developed a method of teaching children to segment the sounds in a word by moving markers into boxes on a piece of paper, hence the name "Elkonin boxes". This early use of Elkonin boxes to assist in the development of phonological awareness has since been adapted to accomplish many related objectives.

Elkonin boxes may be used in several ways during tutoring sessions and during classroom reading instruction. Clay (1993) recommends using the boxes to help students hear the sounds in words and recording the sounds in sequence.

The following activities for using Elkonin boxes are recommended to help the student develop the phonological skills necessary to read and write:

1. Introduce the boxes with pictures that represent short, regular words. Model for the student how to say the name of the picture slowly and move a marker (a penny or chip) into a box for each sound in the word as you say the sound. Help the student practice moving the markers independently. If necessary, prompt the student to watch your lips as you pronounce each sound, or let him observe himself in a mirror to help him detect each sound visually.

2. During the sentence writing portion of the tutoring session, help the student write the words by drawing boxes on the practice page. Select only words that have few sounds and that have regular spellings. Begin by having the student push markers into the boxes as described above. Then ask him to identify the letter that makes the first sound and prompt him to write that letter in the first box. Help the student identify the letter that corresponds to each sound and write it in the appropriate box. If the student needs a model of how to write the letter, show him a magnetic letter or a letter card with the letter. At first, do not emphasize the order of the sounds. Let the student enter the letters he knows, and provide the other letters for him. As he becomes more confident with this procedure, begin to require that he enter the letters in the correct order from beginning to end.
3. Ask the student to count the number of sounds in regularly spelled words to determine how many boxes should be drawn. Help the student understand that the number of sounds you hear in a word corresponds roughly to the number of letters you see—the length of the word.

4. As you move from words with regular, simple spellings to words with more difficult spellings, you may need to put more than one letter in a box to represent a single sound. Use this opportunity to point out to the student that, often, several letters work together to make one sound and some letters are silent.

5. To help the student progress to spelling more difficult words independently, use dotted lines to split those boxes in which two letters are required to make one sound.

6. After sufficient practice with each of these activities, the student should be able to make his own boxes when needed. Eventually, the student should be able to spell the words using the sounding-out techniques without the Elkonin boxes.

References


Practice
Count the sounds for each word, then draw your Elkonin boxes here . . .

fish