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How Tutors Can Support Young Readers

In this chapter:

- Setting the Stage for Success
- Tutoring Strategies for Preschool and Kindergarten
- Tutoring Strategies for the Primary Grades

The previous chapter provided background knowledge on how most children learn to read and write. The information on child development, brain research, emerging literacy, and how children become readers and writers, provides the foundation for designing effective programs to help children read well and independently. These insights are critical to becoming an effective tutor. This chapter is addressed to the tutors (sometimes called reading coaches, reading helpers, or facilitators); it can also be helpful to reading specialists or teachers who are partnering with the tutors, and to program developers and trainers.

The knowledge base provided in Chapter 2, *How Most Children Learn to Read*, will help you understand and use the curriculum adopted by your tutoring program. It will also help you identify the skills and interests of the child to whom you are assigned. You can then individualize your support to best encourage the reading and writing skills of this child.

This chapter covers the following topics:

- setting the stage for success—preparing for the first session, using effective tutoring strategies, and motivating children to read;
- tutoring strategies for preschool and kindergarten children—reading, talking, and writing with children; and
- tutoring strategies for the primary grades—reading together, building decoding skills, taking meaning from the text, and supporting the writing process.

Even the best resource is secondary to the relationship that is established between the AmeriCorps member and the student. To optimize the effectiveness of any session, surround your student with trust, love, and genuine praise for individual achievements—for work well done as measured by the child's strengths.

*Mike Houston, Director, SLICE Corps, AmeriCorps Project
Simpson County Schools, Kentucky, February 1997*

Setting the Stage for Success

To set the stage for success, tutors need to know exactly what they are helping a child accomplish. What does it mean to read and write? What are readers and writers able to do?

Reading includes more than word knowledge or pronouncing words correctly. Readers must take meaning from the text to be considered engaged readers. *Engaged readers* are:⁶

- **motivated**—they read for pleasure, for information, and to learn skills;
- **knowledgeable**—they use past experiences to make sense of what they read, learn from reading, and apply what they learn in a variety of ways;
- **strategic**—they use thinking skills to decode and construct meaning; and
- **communicative**—they discuss what they have read to share ideas and to expand their understanding.

Writing involves more than forming the letters of the alphabet and using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Engaged writers express creativity, tell stories, and share ideas. Like listening and talking, writing helps children improve their reading skills. Children learn about writing at the same time as and in conjunction with reading.

The primary goal of your one-on-one tutoring sessions is to help a child gain the skills needed to become an engaged reader and writer. What you do during each session will vary depending on the child’s age, abilities, and other individual characteristics. However, everything you do with the child should be leading him or her to attain this goal.

Prepare for the First Tutoring Session

Most tutoring programs help tutors prepare for their first sessions by providing an orientation to the program’s philosophy, curriculum, and procedures. You can review the information in the previous chapter, read about literacy and tutoring, and visit the child’s child care or Head Start program or school. The first session is an opportunity to begin surrounding the child “with trust, love, and genuine praise for individual achievements.” Here are seven steps to help you prepare for your first tutoring session:

Step 1. Learn about the child. Make sure you know the child’s first and last names and how to pronounce them correctly. Learn about and show respect for the child’s culture, home language, and community.



A tutor’s primary goal is to help a child become an engaged reader.

Step 2. Contact the child’s teacher and family. This will help you learn about the child’s learning style, skills, interests, and any special needs that might affect the child’s literacy development. It also introduces you to the other people who are supporting the child’s emerging literacy or reading and writing skills. You can discuss ways to keep each other informed about the child’s activities and progress.

Step 3. Make a “tutors tool box.” Put your tutoring supplies in a bag or backpack, designated just for this purpose. Include a notebook or journal for yourself, lined and unlined paper, index cards, markers, pencils with working erasers, books, a three-hole punch and laces for binding books, and other reading and writing materials appropriate for the child’s age level.

Step 4. Start a collection of “conversation starters.” Clip cartoons, jokes, popular song lyrics, short poems, photographs, and magazine articles to use as conversation-starters and to encourage writing skills. Collect “found” objects that a child of this age is likely to find interesting—giant and tiny pinecones, shiny rocks, a toy from your childhood. Add new items as you get to know the child.

Step 5. Visit the children’s section of your local library. Ask the librarian to point out several high-quality children’s books. Learn what books are appropriate for different age groups and levels of reading ability. Review examples of the different kinds of books children enjoy such as wordless picture books, picture books, beginning readers, chapter books, concept books, books of jokes and riddles, simple biographies, and books about a special topic.

TIPS FOR CHOOSING CHILDREN’S BOOKS

- Keep the child’s individual interests, skills, and characteristics in mind. Children tend to like characters, situations, and topics they can relate to.
- Look for books that introduce new ideas. Most children enjoy learning something new.
- Vary your selections. Choose stories about real life and stories featuring imaginary characters and situations. Introduce different genres—non-fiction, poetry, and folk tales.
- Make sure the illustrations and text depict cultures, abilities, genders, and families in positive ways.
- Read a few pages. Both children and tutors enjoy books with rich, interesting language.
- Focus on the illustrations. Are they attractive? colorful? detailed? interesting?
- Look for nominees and winners of book awards such as Caldecott, Newbery, and Coretta Scott King.
- Ask children’s librarians to suggest titles and to direct you to lists of recommended books.
- Talk with children about books they have liked in the past. Use this information to guide future selections.
- Ask families what books their child likes to read at home.

Step 6. Plan what you will do at the start of your first tutoring session.

Here are some suggestions:⁷

- Share what makes you a unique individual. Introduce yourself and talk about your experiences and interests. Bring something real that represents who you are and can stimulate a conversation with the child. For example, you could bring some photographs, a vacation souvenir, some shells from a collection, a well-loved children's book, or equipment such as a bike helmet or basketball used for your favorite sport.
- Write your name and phone number on two index cards. Give these to the child at your first session and explain that one is for him and one is for his family.
- Read a story suitable to the child's age level.
- Play a question game. You and the child can ask each other three questions that are easy to answer and not too personal. For example, you might ask, "Tell me about your favorite holiday?" "What do you like best about school?" Tailor the questions to the child's age and what you already know about her interests.
- Make a *Talking About Books Journal*. You and the child can make a cover for the journal. The child can write messages to you about books and reading, ask questions, share ideas, and tell you what he likes and dislikes about tutoring. A younger child can dictate her message while you write it. When she is finished, read it to her. Using a journal helps children build confidence in their ability to express their ideas and feelings in writing. This is a key first step in learning to write. When you write back, respond to the content of the child's message without correcting mistakes in grammar, spelling, or word usage. Model how to follow the rules of writing in your entries.
- Follow the steps on the next page to make an *All About Us* book with the child. You will need paper, markers or crayons, a piece of cardboard or oaktag paper (for the cover) and a stapler.

Step 7. Be prepared. Develop and review your plans. Gather your materials. Look at a map to make sure you know where you are going and how long it will take to get there. Relax. Remember how pleased the child will be to have your help in learning to read.

STEPS TO MAKE AN ALL ABOUT US BOOK

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|---|---|
| <p>1 Make a list of questions to ask each other. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your favorite food? • What do you like to do for fun? • Who are the people in your family? | <p>3 Make a pair of pages by writing or drawing a picture to answer the question. Continue making pairs of pages for each of the questions on your list.</p> |
| <p>2 Write the first question on a piece of paper. Have the child write the same question on his or her paper. For a younger child, write the question, then read it aloud.</p> | <p>4 Ask the child to make a cover with a title, a picture, and the names of the authors.</p> |
| | <p>5 Collate the finished pairs of pages so they face each other. Put the cover on top and staple the book together.</p> |
| | <p>6 Read the book together. Have the child take the book home to share with his family.</p> |

Using Effective Tutoring Strategies

Many of the strategies tutors use are based on the program's reading curriculum or the age of the child with whom they work. Others are appropriate for children throughout preschool and the primary grades and are likely to support any effective curriculum. Suggested strategies follow.

PLAN FOR EACH CHILD

Follow an agenda for each session. Most tutoring programs follow a specific agenda for each session. (See Chapter 6, *Developing a Tutoring Program*, for descriptions of tutoring agendas.) For younger children the agenda might include time for play, reading aloud, and drawing or writing with the tutor. A typical agenda for children in the primary grades includes time to review the previous session, read, write, complete a summary activity wrap up, and assign a follow-up assignment. As part of the "wrap up" for each session, you may want to have the child discuss with you what happened during the day, what he liked or didn't like. In some programs, the child might receive a sticker or some other form of recognition. Arrive early for each session so you can start as soon as the child is ready and keep the session fast-paced and on schedule.

Tailor the agenda to each child's unique characteristics. Think of what you can do to individualize the session for the child. What strategies will build on the child's learning style, skills, culture, home language, and interests? How can you address specific learning goals? If the child has special needs or disabilities that affect learning, seek expert advice on how best to build on the child's capabilities. Be sure to add any needed books or materials to your tool box.

Adjust the plan if needed. Understand that experiences in and out of school can affect a child’s ability to focus. Pay attention to the child’s body language. As needed, address the child’s feelings so you can get back on track. “You seem to be a little tired today. Let’s read together today. You can read on your own next time.”

Focus on learning. Remember that your primary responsibility is to support the child’s reading and literacy development. Playing the role of mentor for the child should be secondary to, and generally in support of, the role of reading tutor. If you have concerns about the child’s physical or social well-being, discuss them with your supervisor so he or she can address the family’s needs directly or through referral to another agency.



Tutors need to work as a team with the child’s family and teacher.

Form a partnership with the child’s family. Set up a communication system—notes, a journal, an audiotape—to keep each other informed about the child’s activities and progress. Involve the child and family in creating and using a portfolio to track progress and plan ways to encourage reading and writing at home and during tutoring sessions. A portfolio is a collection of items that show what and how a child has learned. The child will enjoy making a portfolio folder out of construction paper, laced with yarn or other materials. The child can decorate the folder during free time or while you and the child are talking. (See Chapter 4, *Involving Families in Tutoring Programs*, for more information on building partnerships with families.)

Keep in touch with the child’s teacher. Share information about the child’s interests, skills, and progress. Use tutoring strategies that complement and build on how and what the child is learning at a child care or Head Start program or in school. Sometimes it will be necessary to work out specific procedures and a time so that this actually takes place.

*INCORPORATE CONDITIONS OF LEARNING*⁸

Brian Cambourne, a New Zealand educator, has identified “conditions of learning,” that encourage children in preschool through the primary grades to become engaged readers and writers. You can incorporate these conditions in your one-on-one tutoring sessions by using the following tutoring strategies:

Expose the child to many kinds of reading and writing materials. Introduce different kinds of books, signs, charts, songs, poems, and writing materials during your tutoring sessions.

Show the child how you use language for different reasons. Let the child see you write notes and lists, make charts, read a book, sing songs, and share interesting stories from your own life.

Get the child actively involved. When you read aloud, invite the child to recite repeated words and phrases, turn the pages, and discuss the story and characters.

Expect that most children can learn to read and write. Learn what the child can do and build on these strengths. Encourage a child to explore, make discoveries, learn from mistakes, and believe in his or her own abilities.

Make the child a partner in the tutoring process. Help the child set goals for learning and keep track of progress. Ask, “What would you like to read and write?” “What do you like to do?” “What would you like to know about?” Address the child’s goals and interests in your tutoring sessions. Ask the child to help plan the follow-up assignment and the next session.

Offer support throughout the learning process. Respond to a child’s efforts and encourage risk-taking. “That’s right. The word begins with ‘P’. Now, do you see any clues in the pictures?”

Help the child use language skills in functional and realistic ways. Create opportunities for the child to use language for different reasons—to tell a story, express an opinion, explain ideas, make predictions, and solve problems.

Give children feedback about their learning. Encourage a child to express how and what he or she has learned. Keep track of progress by including items that show what and how a child has learned in a portfolio.

USE SCAFFOLDING TECHNIQUES

When a new building goes up it is surrounded by scaffolding, a framework that provides temporary support while the building is under construction. The scaffolding is gradually removed as different parts of the structure are completed and the building is able to stand on its own.

Like the scaffolding used in construction, scaffolding techniques used by parents, teachers, and tutors support a child as he or she is learning a new skill. The adult provides just enough support to help the child move forward. As the child makes incremental progress towards this goal, the adult gradually lets go so the child can function independently. The adult then helps the child use the skill to build new ones. Here is an example of how a tutor might use scaffolding techniques with a child trying to read a new word:



Scaffolding provides just enough support to help a child move forward.

SCAFFOLDING IN ACTION *While reading One Fish, Two Fish by Dr. Seuss**

Child	One fish, two fish. Red fish, yellow fish. (Stops reading. Looks at tutor.) Yellow doesn't sound right.	Tutor	What can you tell me about the fish?
Tutor	That was a good guess, but you're right, it's not yellow.	Child	There's a red one and a blue one. I know, I know. One fish, two fish. Red fish, blue fish.
Child	What is it?	Tutor	Good thinking. How else could you figure out that word says blue?
Tutor	Well, let's take a look. Do you see any clues in the picture?	Child	It starts with a 'b.'
Child	There's fish in the pictures.	Tutor	More good thinking. Can you read some more?

* Random House, 1960.

In the above example the tutor used several scaffolding techniques:

- The tutor and child worked on a problem together—figuring out the new word, “blue.”
- The tutor helped the child understand the connections between what he already knew and what he was learning—the child knows his colors and can recognize the letter ‘b.’
- The tutor was warm and responsive. She offered praise and acknowledged the child’s incremental success in figuring out the new word.
- The tutor asked questions and offered clues to lead the child to make his own discoveries.

Here are some examples of *scaffolding strategies* you can use in tutoring sessions:

Encourage the child to think and problem solve. Ask questions that encourage the child to make predictions and solve problems. “What do you think might happen next?” Allow enough time for an answer—silence might mean a child is thinking. When the child does respond ask, “How did you come up with that answer?” Restate a child’s question to encourage him or her to answer it. Ask a child what he or she knows before offering an explanation. Avoid questions that can be answered with one word, such as “yes” or “no.”

Help each child experience success. Include opportunities for incremental achievements in each tutoring session. Reinforce mastered skills and concepts and move to the next step so the child can continue making progress. Make comments, ask questions, and provide clues that help a child figure out how to read or write a new letter or word or remember what happened in a story you have read aloud.

Offer genuine praise for efforts and accomplishments. Notice small breakthroughs and gains as well as large ones. “I see you wrote a ‘P’ on your picture. That’s the first letter in your name, ‘Peter.’” “You’re on the right track. The first part of the word is ‘black.’” Encourage a child to take risks and learn from mistakes. Be specific in your feedback. Avoid hollow praise that is not related to the child’s efforts and achievements—children value candor and are quick to see through hypocrisy.

Build trust and respect. Always keep your commitments and let the child know in advance if you have to miss a session. When you make a mistake, say so. If you can’t answer a question, help the child find an answer or offer to find the answer before the next session. Maintain confidentiality unless you suspect a child is living in an unsafe environment. If you suspect a child is at risk, follow your program’s procedures for reporting your observations.

*Motivating Children to Read*⁹

...the central and most important goal of reading instruction is to foster the love of reading.

Linda B. Gambrell, The Reading Teacher, September 1996

Children who are read to often learn to value books and reading. Children who enjoy reading are likely to read more often. Children who read more often continue to improve their reading skills and overall school performance. Tutors can play a significant role in helping children discover the pleasures of reading.

Recent studies have identified characteristics of teachers and classroom environments that foster reading motivation. You can use these teaching behaviors and attitudes in your tutoring sessions with children. Some examples follow.

Serve as a reading model. Talk about what you are reading—describe a character, read aloud a passage that uses beautiful words, recite a poem, introduce a new word, or read a newspaper or magazine account of a sports event. Share what you are interested in and what might be of interest to the child. This simple practice teaches a child how reading helps us learn new words, find out about the world, use our imaginations, and have fun.

Make sure the child has access to a variety of books. Children need plenty of books to choose from so they can find books of interest to read alone and with their families. You can work with families, teachers, and school and community libraries to achieve this goal.

Encourage the child to choose which books to read. Children are most interested in reading when they can select the books they want to read. During a tutoring session with a child in a primary grade—grades one through three—you can ask the child to read a book you selected, but also include an opportunity to read a book of his or her choice. Even younger children enjoy picking out books and learn from the experience.

Talk with the child about books. Talking leads to thinking and encourages a child to read more. Discuss the characters, how the story relates to real life, other books by the same author, books with similar themes, and what might happen next. Ask, “What did you like and not like about this book?” “What did you think of the pictures?”

Allow a child to read the same book again and again. Children develop a sense of competence by reading and rereading books with which they are familiar. When children have confidence in their reading skills they are more likely to choose new books to read on their own.

Arrange for children to tutor in pairs. Research shows that when children tutor one another, both of the children’s interest in reading improves. Encourage peer tutoring among children of the same age and reading level or have older or more skilled readers help younger ones.

Offer appropriate reading-related incentives. Children learn to value books and reading when a book is the reward for reading. Your tutoring program can work with community partners to sponsor book giveaways through organizations such as Reading is Fundamental, Children’s Literacy Initiative, First Book, and Rolling Readers. These organizations make it possible for children to choose books to keep as their own. They can take the books home, read them alone and with their families, and reread them as often as they like. (Appendix B, Resources for Tutoring Programs, includes contact information for these groups.)

Motivation is a key factor in ensuring that students become—or stay—interested in what they are learning. Researchers have described motivation as the ‘skill and will’ to learn.

*Council for Educational Development and Research
What We Know About Reading Teaching and Learning, July 1992*

Tutoring Strategies for Preschool and Kindergarten

...the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.

Becoming a Nation of Readers, 1985

Almost everything young children do in the preschool and kindergarten years supports their emerging language and literacy skills. For example, in a cooking activity children can build the small muscle skills used in writing; learn how the text in the recipe provides information; and talk about how the ingredients look, feel, and taste. When children have access to reading and writing materials at home and at their child care or Head Start program, they will incorporate literacy in their play. For example, children might write prescriptions for their patients, read to their stuffed animals, and make signs to protect block structures.

Many young children explore literacy play on their own, with little need for encouragement from adults. Other children need the one-on-one attention of a tutor to help them make literacy discoveries such as print is talk written down, reading books is fun and interesting, and printed words carry messages to the reader.

This section presents tutoring strategies for working with children in preschool and kindergarten. Some of the strategies presented in the next section, Tutoring Strategies for the Primary Grades, may also be appropriate for a child in preschool or kindergarten, just as some of the older children may be in an earlier phase of literacy development.

Reading Aloud

One of the best ways to encourage emerging literacy is to read aloud with a child as often as possible. If you work with a child in a preschool or kindergarten, spend at least part of each session reading aloud. Read-aloud sessions involve much more than saying words and turning pages. When you express your own excitement about the pictures, story, setting, and characters, the child will be excited too. With your guidance, the child can learn to take meaning from the words and expand his or her understanding and enjoyment of the story. Looking for the details in the pictures, talking about what might happen next, and discussing how the story relates to the child's real-life experiences are important parts of read-aloud sessions. The following six-point checklist summarizes the key strategies used to read aloud to young children.



When children have access to reading and writing materials they will incorporate literacy in their play.

CHECKLIST FOR READING ALOUD

1 Choose a Book

Look for a book that:

- you will enjoy reading.
- supports and builds on the child's interests and experiences.
- has beautiful pictures.
- is slightly above the child's current vocabulary level.
- introduces a new style such as poetry or a folk tale.

Invite the child to choose books she would like to read.

Repeat familiar, well-loved books often.

2 Get to Know the Book

Examine the illustrations so you can point out the information and clues in the pictures.

Read the story to yourself.

Plan ways to vary your voice (tone, volume, pauses) to fit the plot and characters.

Collect dress-up clothes, puppets, or other props related to the story.

3 Set the Stage for Success

Help the child get ready to listen.

Make sure the child is comfortable and can see the book.

Make sure you are comfortable.

4 Before Starting the Story

Introduce the author and/or illustrator.

Talk about other books you've read by the same author and/or illustrator.

Show the cover and point out details in the illustration.

Read the title aloud.

Talk about what type of book it is—true, make-believe, folk tale, realistic.

Describe where and when the story takes place.

Introduce the setting and the main characters.

Suggest things to look and listen for in the story.

Show a few pages and ask: What do you think will happen in this book?

continued on next page

5 While Reading the Story

Vary your voice to fit the characters and the plot.

Stop frequently to:

- add information that will help the child understand what's happening.
- rephrase something that might be confusing.
- explain the meaning of a new word.
- invite the child to predict what might happen next.
- ask the child about the story and characters.
- show the pictures and describe what's happening.
- share your own reactions to the story and characters.
- use the props to enhance the child's enjoyment of the story.

Encourage participation by inviting the child to:

- join in with rhymes and repeated words and phrases.
- make different sounds "Peter, would you like to be the cow?"
- add the last word to a familiar part of the text.

Move your finger under words as you read.

6 After Reading the Story

Ask questions to help the child:

- recall what happened in the story.
- relate the story to personal experiences (e.g., "Did you ever...?").
- put themselves in the story— (e.g., "What would you have done...?").
- express ideas, opinions, and creativity.

Do a book-related activity so the child can:

- act out the story (with or without props).
- make up a sequel to the story which you write on a large piece of paper.
- draw pictures that show the events in the story then use them to retell the story.
- learn about the author and/or illustrator—
 - talk about his or her life
 - look at his or her other books
 - draw a picture of the characters in these books.

Encourage the child to look at the book at home or in the classroom.

Read the book again and again if the child is interested.

Talking with Children

Because all forms of language are connected, talking with children is an important way to encourage their emerging literacy. Talking helps children develop thinking skills, use their creativity, express ideas, increase their vocabulary, and understand the relationships between oral and written forms of language. As described above, talking is an important part of reading aloud with young children. When you talk with a child you send important messages—“I’m interested in you. Tell me about what you’re doing. I want to hear your ideas.” You can talk with children while reading, writing, playing, and doing routines together. Some examples follow:

- **Talk about the past, present, and future.** “Last week we played in the sand box together. This week we painted pictures. What would you like to do next week?”
- **Talk during everyday activities.** While preparing and eating a snack with a child, follow the child’s lead. “I like cats too. I used to have a fat cat with white paws.”
- **Ask sincere questions.** While taking a walk together, respond to the child’s interest. “How do you think that dandelion grew up through the sidewalk?”
- **Start a conversation.** While looking out the window together, say, “The clouds look soft today.” Wait for the child to respond.
- **Respond to a child’s question.** “I don’t know if hamsters like nuts like squirrels do. Let’s see what it says in the hamster book.”
- **Offer props that lead to talking.** Use puppets, dress-up clothes, and accessories to encourage make-believe play.



Talking with a child sends important messages—
“I’m interested in you.
Tell me about what you’re
doing. I want to hear
your ideas.”

Writing with Children

Writing is communicating with others by putting ideas in print. Children begin learning to write in the early years. Writing focuses children’s attention on print, helps them learn that letters represent sounds, and contributes to their emergent reading skills. Handwriting comes later when children can form letters and words in conventional ways. If you are a tutor who works with a 3- to 5-year-old child, you can offer support that helps a child make discoveries about writing. Here are some examples:

Bring writing materials to each session. In your tutor’s toolbox include:

- a magic slate
- paper (lined and unlined; different sizes, shapes, colors, weights, and textures)
- writing tools (crayons, markers, alphabet stamps and pad, pencils)
- a small slate, chalk, and an eraser.

Let the child see how you use writing. Tell the child that you need to make a list and ask, “Would you like to make a list, too?” While you write your list the child can use scribble writing or invented spelling to write hers. Take turns reading your lists aloud.

Help a child see the connection between spoken and written words. Have the child draw a picture then dictate a story to you. You can write the story—exactly as the child tells it—then read it back to him.

Encourage a child to put her ideas on paper. The child can use scribble writing or invented spelling to write a story, then read it to you. Encourage her to take the story home to read to her family.

Create opportunities to practice writing. Bring paintbrushes and a bucket of water outdoors. You and the child can write letters and words on a wall or sidewalk. Write letters in the air—whichever letters are of most interest to the child.

Show respect for a child’s home language. Learn how to write a few words in this language. Ask the child’s family to help you, if necessary. When children have strong skills in one language, they can use these skills to become proficient in a second language.¹⁰

Help the child see the connections between oral and written language. Ask a question about an interesting experience or special time she had with her family. Write the question in a special journal, then write the child’s answer. Read aloud the question and the child’s answer—to close the session and to start the next one.

Help a child build the small muscles and coordination used for writing. Together you can cut, paste, draw, paint, thread beads on a lace, roll playdough, connect small blocks, use a computer keyboard, play a drum, or spread peanut butter on a cracker.

Have the child write and illustrate a story. Make a simple book from paper folded in half and stapled on the fold. Make a fancier book with paper and a cardboard cover. Bind the book by lacing thick yarn through holes made with a hole punch. Encourage the child to take the book home to read to his family.

Make alphabet cards or an alphabet book. Save interesting pictures, catalogs, magazines, junk mail, and other items that contain print for the child to look at, cut up, and paste on index cards. Collect images that represent the child's culture, home, and family. Show the letters of the alphabet in various forms (A, a, and a), together with an appropriate picture. Use the cards or books to refer to letters of the alphabet that come up while reading and writing with the child.

Tutoring Strategies for the Primary Grades

Children learn language best when they are intellectually engaged, when they feel comfortable taking risks that learning requires, when they can share their ideas with others, and when they can take control of and reflect upon their own learning.

*National Council of Teachers of English,
Standards for the English Language Arts, 1996*

In grades one through three—the primary grades—children continue learning about language and literacy through exploration. They try out their ideas and use what they know to make sense of new concepts. Within this age group, children's reading and writing skills vary greatly. A few children will enter first grade able to read with considerable fluency. Some children will learn to read and write with ease. Others need the one-on-one attention of a tutor to develop an understanding of basic concepts, build specific skills, gain confidence, and become motivated to read and write.

This section presents tutoring strategies for working with children in the primary grades. Many of the strategies presented in the previous section will also be appropriate for a child in the primary grades.

Reading Together

Many tutoring programs use a scaffolding strategy that calls for tutors and children to read together. (See the discussion on scaffolding earlier in this chapter.) This does not replace reading aloud and independent reading, instead it is an additional strategy for promoting reading skills. The following are strategies tutors can use when reading with a child.

Explicit Modeling. This type of modeling helps children learn to think about what they already know while they are reading. Explain to the child that you are going to think aloud while reading. As you read a short passage aloud, talk about your thinking process—what you do to get meaning from the words and understand the text. For example: “That’s a new word. It begins with cl. I don’t know how to pronounce the next part—ue. Harriet is a spy. It must be clue because spies look for clues.”

Implicit Modeling. This type of modeling also helps children think while they read. In this case, you would demonstrate how to use thinking skills without describing what you are doing. When a child is stuck on a word you can suggest strategies he or she can use to figure it out. The child can use these strategies immediately and when reading in the future. You might say, “Try reading the sentence again.” “Try reading the next sentence.” “Where did the boy go at the beginning of the story?” “Where do you think he might be going now?”

Choral Reading. This strategy helps children become more fluent and confident readers. Ask the child to sit beside you or slightly in front of you. Hold the book together and ask the child to read along with you. Begin reading in a voice that is slightly louder and faster than the child’s. As the child becomes more comfortable with reading the text, lower your voice and slow down your reading speed. If the child slows down, increase your loudness and speed again.

Echo Reading. This is another way to help a child develop confidence and fluency. Read aloud a line of text. Ask the child to read the same line. With a young child, point to the line of text as you are reading and encourage the child to do the same. Continue taking turns reading and rereading the same lines. When the child begins to read with more expression and fluency, suggest that he read aloud on his own.

Paired Reading.¹¹ Paired reading is a technique that allows tutors to vary the amount of support they provide to a child while reading aloud together. Explain to the child that sometimes you will read aloud together—duet reading—and sometimes he or she will read alone—solo reading. Agree on two signals the child can use to switch back and forth from solo to duet reading. When the child gives you the duet signal, you will begin reading together. When the child feels ready for solo reading, she will give the solo signal and you will stop reading. You can nod your head or give some other simple sign of encouragement for her solo reading. Continue paired reading until the book or passage is completed.

Helping Children Develop Decoding Strategies

Engaged readers automatically use decoding, or cuing, strategies to figure out new words in text. Marie Clay, developer of the Reading Recovery program (see Examples of Reading and Tutoring Programs in Chapter 5), encourages teachers and tutors to help children learn at least four approaches to decoding. These approaches include:

- focusing on the meaning—semantics;
- relating sounds to letters—phonics;
- looking at how words and phrases are formed—syntax; and
- recognizing sight words—visual.

Some children develop decoding strategies over time with little direct instruction. Other children need one-on-one instruction to help them learn decoding strategies. Here are some tutoring strategies for decoding.

Focus on the Meaning. Young readers often figure out a new word by thinking about what would make sense in a sentence or story. You can help by suggesting that the child look at the pictures, then read a sentence again. If a child's guess at a word is incorrect, ask questions such as, "Does that make sense? What did the girl do at the last house she visited?"

Relate Sounds to Letters. Children apply what they already know about the relationships between letters and sounds to read a new word. For example, a child can read the word "train," because she knows the "tr" in this word makes the same sound as the "tr" at the beginning of "truck," a word she already knows. You can help by reminding a child what she already knows about letter-sound relationships and helping her use this knowledge to attack new words.

Look at How Words and Phrases are Formed. Compound words are formed by combining two words (e.g., playground). You can help a child read an unfamiliar compound word by demonstrating how to break it down into its parts. "That was a good guess—raincoat. You recognized the first part of the word, 'rain.' But look at the second part of the word again. I'll cover the first part. Now, what does the second part say? That's right, it's bow. So what is the word? Yay! You got it, it's rainbow. Now the story makes more sense. After the rain, she saw a rainbow, not a raincoat."

Recognize Sight Words. High-frequency sight words make up about 50 percent of the words we read and often cause children problems. When a child masters high frequency sight words he experiences success which can boost his self-confidence and interest in reading. Children may be able to decode other words if they automatically recognize the sight words surrounding them. You can help children make flash cards for sight words to use with you during tutoring sessions and with his family at home. You and the child can celebrate and track progress in mastering sight words by recording them in a journal, making a paper chain, or adding “sight word leaves” to a tree. Here are 60 high-frequency sight words.

HIGH-FREQUENCY SIGHT WORDS

I	a	and	am	at	on	me
my	we	no	said	you	the	they
it	is	in	of	for	from	was
saw	off	come	she	he	your	see
not	be	get	are	if	can	do
all	an	what	why	where	when	who
that	there	then	these	those	their	want
went	now	one	ask	would	could	should
before	after	knew	know			

In his book, *How to Teach Reading for Teachers, Parents, and Tutors*, Edward Fry provides a list of the first 300 “Instant Words,” together with numerous suggestions for games and other techniques for helping children master this basic vocabulary list.¹² These 300 words make up approximately two-thirds of all written material; and an average student learns about 100 of these common sight words each year in first, second and third grade.

Use Multiple Cues. When reading with a child you can model how to use several decoding systems at one time as problem solving strategies for determining how to read an unfamiliar word. This process encourages a child to think about what might make sense in the sentence. “What would fit here? The sentence begins, I put ‘cr...,’ then I see the word soup. But what might she put in the soup that begins with cr. Oh, I know. It must be crackers. The girl put crackers in her soup.”

Helping Children Understand What They Read

Reading involves making sense of the written word, or, in today's popular phrase, **making meaning**. Some children pronounce words correctly and read with apparent ease, but don't know the meaning of what they have read. As children increase their vocabularies, they begin to take more meaning from text. *The child's capacity to derive meaning is the basic criterion for judging reading ability*—not word recognition, knowledge of phonics, or any other single literacy skill. This has implications for the selection of reading materials and for assessment and tutoring strategies. Tutors should include chapter- and trade-books, and not rely solely on texts made up from grade-level word lists. They should encourage higher order thinking, and not emphasize simple recall of information—words or facts in isolation. Reading and writing tasks should be paired to stimulate and probe for understanding.

You can help by encouraging a child to talk about what she has read, by pointing out new words and explaining their meaning, and by using strategies such as the K-W-L approach to help children understand what they read.¹³

The K-W-L approach includes the following steps:

- K** **What I know.** Help the child list what he already knows about a topic that is discussed in a book he is going to read.
- W** **What I would like to know.** Help the child think of some questions he has about this topic and add them to the chart.
- L** **What I learned or still need to learn.** Explain that while he reads the book—alone or with you—he can think about what he is learning. After the reading, discuss the book and add what was learned to the chart along with any information he still needs to learn.

Here is an example of a K-W-L chart.

Book: *Everybody Eats Rice* **Topic:** Rice

K—What I know	W—What I want to know	L—What I learned or still need to learn
Rice is white.	Who eats rice?	Learned: People cook rice in lots of different ways. Need to learn: Where does rice come from? How does it grow?
It puffs up when cooked.	Where does it come from?	
It comes in a bag or a box.		

Helping Children Become Engaged Writers

Many reading and tutoring programs include writing as a part of each session because these two language skills are closely connected. As children become more skilled readers, they also improve their writing skills. The opposite is also true—writing contributes to growth in phonics, spelling, word recognition, memory, and reading comprehension.¹⁴ The Department of Education’s READ*WRITE*NOW tutoring approach (see Examples of Reading and Tutoring Programs in Chapter 5) ends each session with a brief writing assignment built around what was read or a writing task the child needs to complete for school. Using a Talking About Books Journal, as described earlier in this chapter, is another way to support children’s writing skills.

Many children enjoy writing their own books. They might make up a completely new story or follow the same pattern as used in a favorite book. For example, a child might make up a story about going on a tiger hunt instead of a bear hunt or put herself in the story instead of the main character.

Tutors can adapt the writing workshop approach used by many teachers in the primary grades. This approach is ideal for an ongoing tutoring program because it allows a child to experience writing as a process that evolves over time. You can serve as the audience for the child’s writing. The writing workshop includes the following steps:¹⁵

Choosing a topic. The child decides what she wants to write about. You can help the child come up with a topic by thinking about his own experiences or books he has read.

Drafting. The child is likely to write several drafts of the same piece. Writing evolves over time so first drafts differ greatly from final ones. During the drafting step, young children may talk and draw as much as they write. Many times their first drafts are quite short.

First drafts are likely to have grammatical, spelling, and punctuation mistakes. At this point in the writing process, you do not need to correct these mistakes. The child will correct these mistakes as she revises, rewrites, and edits subsequent drafts. You can support the child by responding to the content of her drafts and asking questions to help her focus on how to express her ideas clearly. Keep your expectations realistic and tailored to the child’s ability. Remember the importance of keeping the task at a level where the child can experience success and sustain motivation.

Revising. The child might decide she is no longer interested in the topic she chose or she might decide to expand it. Younger children are likely to make their stories longer. More experienced writers might add to descriptions, move sections, or rewrite sentences or paragraphs. You can continue to offer support by answering questions, making suggestions, and responding to the child's ideas.

Conferencing. In classroom writing workshops, children discuss their drafts and get encouragement and feedback from teachers and peers. You can assume this role by listening, asking questions, and making comments that guide the child to improve writing drafts.

Sharing. In classrooms, daily writing workshops end with a time for sharing. One or two children read their draft or a finished piece and their peers respond with helpful questions and comments (children will need some coaching to know which comments are "helpful" in tone and substance). This helps children understand how their audience responds to their writing. They learn what the audience understood and what they did not. This helps children make their messages as clear as possible. You can serve as the audience for a child's writing and encourage the child's family to do the same.

Editing. Older children finalize their drafts by reviewing and correcting errors in punctuation, grammar, and spelling. Ask the child to circle the words she thinks are misspelled. Many children have a visual memory that lets them know that a word is not written conventionally, even if they don't know how to spell it. Help the child use a dictionary to look up correct spellings.

Publishing. This step lets the child make the writing available to others. A tutoring program could accomplish this through a newsletter or collection of children's finished work. A child might bind her work with a cover and illustrations and share it with her family and teacher.



KEY POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER

- Engaged readers are motivated, knowledgeable, strategic, and communicative.
- Engaged writers express creativity, tell stories, and share ideas.
- A tutor's first session with a child is an opportunity to begin forging a trusting and supportive relationship.
- Tutoring sessions should follow an agenda that is tailored to build on a child's interests and skills.
- A tutor's primary role is to support a child's reading and literacy development.
- Conditions of learning set the stage for children's success in reading and writing.
- Scaffolding provides just enough support to move a child forward in learning a new skill.
- Children who enjoy reading are likely to read more often and to continue improving their skills.
- Tutors can help children in child care, Head Start and kindergarten explore literacy play and make language discoveries.
- Reading aloud is one of the most effective ways to encourage a child's emerging literacy and to support growing reading skills.
- Talking with children helps them understand the relationships between spoken and printed language.
- Writing focuses children's attention on print and helps them learn that letters represent sounds.
- Reading together is a scaffolding technique tutors can use to support children as they learn to read independently.
- Tutors can help children learn to use decoding strategies to figure out new words.
- Tutors can teach children how to *make meaning* in what they read.
- Tutors can help children experience writing as an ongoing process that evolves over time.

