

Guidelines for Adapting Instruction for Elementary Struggling Readers

- **Reteach and review previously taught concepts and build on and connect background knowledge.** Struggling students benefit from frequent review of previously taught concepts, which can be presented in small steps. Focus on what students know, and build upon their knowledge.
 - Reteach or review skills that are needed to understand a new skill or concept.
 - Preteach critical prior knowledge or vocabulary.
 - State the goals of lessons and use graphic organizers (e.g., story maps, K-W-L charts) to help students focus on the important concepts.
 - Several times during a lesson, review new information and check for understanding.
 - Integrate practice with more complex tasks to illustrate application of a strategy or skill in a variety of contexts. For example, after working on blends, provide words with the blends for students to read. Then, have students read decodable text that contains words with the blends that were targeted for instruction.
 - Use progress-monitoring data to identify skills and concepts that require additional teaching or adaptations.
 - Consider students' background knowledge about a skill or concept and build from there. For instance, before learning to decode consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words, students need to know the letter-sound correspondence in the words and how to blend the sounds together.
 - Use examples familiar to students, consider background and culture, and use materials connected to students' culture.
 - Accept oral approximations. English language learners often borrow the closest sound from their native language when pronouncing words in English. For instance, many Spanish-speaking students substitute the /ch/ for the /sh/ sound in words like *shoe*. Even though a student may struggle with pronunciation, continue instruction. This does not indicate a lack of understanding. Monitor understanding frequently through alternative responses, such as matching or pointing to a picture.
 - Focus on words that students already know. Teach phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle in a meaningful context when working with English language learners. For example, read aloud and enjoy a poem or story before beginning a phonics lesson.

- **Sequence instruction of new concepts.** Present new skills or concepts in small steps and one at a time, to reduce confusion.
 - Strategically integrate new skills with previously taught skills so students learn to distinguish one from the other and begin to make connections between them. For instance, integrate phonemic awareness instruction with letter-sound knowledge as students begin to decode words.
 - Introduce consistent examples before exceptions. For instance, when teaching decoding CVCe words, teach that the first vowel is long using examples such as *make* and *came*, before teaching exceptions such as *done* and *some*.
 - Introduce concepts that are frequently used or encountered before less frequently used concepts or knowledge. For instance, teach common irregular words such as *said* and *was* before less common words such as *tomb* and *heir*.
 - Build concepts from the simple to the complex. For instance, teach easier to distinguish letter-sound correspondences such as /a/ and /o/ before /i/ and /e/.
 - Introduce easily confused concepts at different times. For instance, separate teaching *were* and *where* into different lessons.

- **Model procedures and explain what you are thinking, which is called “thinking aloud.”** Modeling is an effective method for teaching struggling readers because they can clearly see and hear how to use procedures and processes as they read and write.
 - Blend sounds together to read words when you demonstrate how to stretch sounds in words, such as /mmaaannn/.
 - Demonstrate how a task is done, and model the thinking processes that are used during the task.
 - Develop cue cards to help students remember steps to follow when they are practicing certain strategies or skills.
 - Encourage students to “think to themselves” rather than aloud as they become more proficient with strategies and skills.

- **Try multiple techniques.** Combine systematic and explicit instruction with visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic approaches for struggling students. Add concrete learning (e.g., chips, tiles) as needed.
 - Combine blending and segmenting of words with the writing or tracing of each letter as sounds are segmented and then blended together to make the word.

- Introduce segmenting of simple words by phonemes by having students say and clap each sound.
- **Maximize student engagement.** Use a variety of strategies and approaches that encourage students to actively participate during instruction, practice, and review.
 - Think—Pair—Share: Students sit in pairs as you present information. Pose a problem or question for students to think about, discuss with their partner, and share with other student pairs.
 - Turn to Your Neighbor: After hearing a story read or reading a passage, students turn to their neighbor and tell one idea they liked, retell what they learned, or ask a question.
 - Response Cards: Each student has a card that contains answers to questions or typical responses (yes/no; true/false). The teacher asks a question and the students hold up their card to show their response.
 - Pinch Cards: Preprinted cards with multiple answers on one card (the number of answers can vary depending on the needs of students). Students hold up the card with their thumb and forefinger, pinching the part of the card that displays the correct answer. Clothespins can also be used as pinching tools.
 - Write-On Boards: White boards can be used for students to record their responses on.
- **Provide immediate and appropriate feedback.** Provide prompts to help students notice and fix errors.
 - Provide prompts to help students notice errors:
 - “Check to see if that looks (sounds) right.”
 - “There is a tricky word on this line.”
 - “Try that again.”
 - “Try it another way.”
 - “Find the part that’s not right.”
 - Provide prompts to help students correct errors:
 - “Stop; listen” (teacher models); “now it’s your turn.”
 - “What do you hear first (next, last)?”
 - “What word starts with those letters?”

“What do you know that might help you?”

“What could you try?”

“You have only one letter to change.”

“That sounds right, but does it look right?”

“Did you write all of the sounds you heard?”

“It starts (ends) like _____.”

- **Incorporate collaborative partnerships into instruction.**

Use available resources to help implement adaptations.

- Co-teach with a colleague, if possible (e.g., special education teacher)
- Use parent volunteers.
- Involve student teachers in the application of adaptations.
- Solicit and use volunteers from the community (e.g., mentors, college or university students, student peers).
- Incorporate paraeducators into the adaptations plan.
- Share with your colleagues teaching strategies that promote learning. For example, special education and reading teachers can share word identification strategies for English/language arts teachers to use during class. (See, for example, in the Word Identification section the bookmarks with the HINTS and SPLIT strategies that students can use in English/Language Arts to help them read multisyllabic words.)

(adapted from UTCRLA, 2000b)