

Reading Strategies for Intermediate Adult Learners

Using the newspaper

Your local weekly or daily newspaper is an excellent resource for tutoring. It is cheap, easily available and full of all kinds of articles, graphics, and photographs. Like you, your student is not going to read it cover to cover since she will be interested only in particular articles. Explain to your student that hardly anyone reads the paper from beginning to end. Most people skim through newspapers for items that interest them. Set your student up for success by letting her choose and use appropriate sections of the paper.

Find an article and discuss the topic before reading it. Find out what the student already knows about the topic. Encourage her to brainstorm about the ideas and key vocabulary that might be encountered in the article. Here is a quick list of newspaper activities for you to try:

- Cut out photographs and captions. Have your student match each photograph with its matching caption.
- Look at the table of contents and predict what type of articles will fall under each section.
- Locate cities on a weather map. Read temperature charts for highs and lows in your province and across the country.
- Use the food flyers in the paper to make a grocery list. Add up your bill with a calculator or turn the exercise into a numeracy activity to teach basic math skills. Decipher abbreviations such as apt., apts., bdrm., and then read classified ads. Do the same with the help wanted and items for sale classifieds.
- Cut up birth notices. Have your student put them in alphabetical order according to last name. Together, create a fictional birth announcement.
- Write an obituary about a fictional character, and follow this up with a field trip to the local cemetery to read the gravestones. This might spark an interest in local history or a trip to the local library to research the local archives.
- Use a photograph or headline to inspire a language experience story.
- Encourage your student to write (or dictate to you) a letter to the editor. This activity builds confidence and allows you to introduce and develop self-editing techniques. And most important, your student may see her letter published.

Alphabetical order

It is essential to understand the concept of alphabetical order to use most of the reference sources in our society (e.g., dictionaries, address books, and book lists.) To teach alphabetical order, you might use the following approach:

Materials:

- One folding alphabet (alphabet printed on a long strip of paper and folded accordion-style).
- Blank index cards.
- Ten pairs of markers (each pair a different colour).

Method

- Write five words beginning with different letters, each word on a separate card.
- Ask your student to underline or identify the first letter of each word and place it under the corresponding letter on the unfolded alphabet line.
- By reading from left to right, have your student put the words in alphabetical order and write them out.

Once the student has mastered alphabetizing words beginning with different letters you can introduce words beginning with the same letter. Follow the same method except, cover the first letters of the words until the student understands the procedure. If the list contains a mixture of words that begin with the same letter and some that do not, determine a preliminary order and group the words separately.

Song lyrics

If your student likes music, here is an effective way to use this interest to develop reading skills.

- Ask your student to choose a song she likes. Find the words from the CD cover or directly from the song.
- Together with your student, listen to the song and ask her to follow the words.
- Listen to the song a second time and stop it at specific points. Ask her to say the line where the song stopped. (Repeat this as appropriate.)

- Ask your student to count the number of times a particular word or phrase is repeated (a refrain or chorus, for example).
- Any interesting words in the song can be reinforced in a number of ways:
 - Write each letter of the word on separate pieces of paper and make a puzzle.
 - Write words on cards to see which ones rhyme, have the same or opposite meaning, etc.
- Use the words of the song to discuss:
 - Rhyming
 - The use of proper names (if appropriate)
 - Poetry

Instead of song lyrics you can record a joke, story, or poem that you can then transcribe. Ask your student to follow the writing while listening to the recording. You can also listen to a podcast, discuss the content, and do a writing activity related to the podcast.

Skimming and scanning

Skimming is a skill used to obtain a quick overview of a text by reading the topic sentences. If there are diagrams they may be examined with their accompanying explanations. When skimming, the main ideas are extracted and details are overlooked.

Scanning is a skill used to select an item in a phone book, dictionary, or library file. The student should be encouraged to use quick clues (e.g., select the item beginning with 'd'). The student's eye should move down the initial letters until the correct one is reached and selected. It is not necessary to read each word and the first letter clue is sufficient to succeed in this exercise.

Following directions

You may want to look at:

- Game rules
- Street directions
- Recipes
- Items that require assembly
- Instructions for doing work around the house, such as hanging wallpaper.

Find the main idea activity

In a written text all the sentences are about the main idea of the paragraph. Read the paragraph with your student and ask, "What do you think the main point is in this text?" This discussion helps your student develop the skills to find the main idea.

You may use:

- A paragraph
- A story
- Morals or lessons
- A newspaper or magazine article
- A personal or business letter

Idioms

Idioms can be quite a challenge for new readers. These are particular expressions that can only be understood through familiarity and not through a literal understanding of each word. They can, however, be a lot of fun to work with.

Encourage your student to ask for clarification when she does not understand the use of an idiom and to keep a record of all the new expressions and idioms that she has learned.

Following are lists of expressions or idioms that your student may or may not have seen in print. Ask which ones she has heard or used herself. Together, come up with sentences that use them in a meaningful context. Your student can add to this list. Encourage your student to keep a record of any new expressions.

Expressions using animals

sly as a fox

dog in the manger

fight like cats and dogs

raining cats and dogs

all bark and no bite Making an inference is also known as reading between the lines. Successful readers learn to put together the information the writer provides and the information that the reader already knows to come up

eats like a sparrow

snake in the grass

Expressions using clothing

fits like a glove

walk in someone else's shoes

if the shoe fits

a stuffed shirt

air dirty laundry

skirt the issue

keep one's shirt on

at the drop of a hat

pass the hat around

talk through one's hat

eat one's hat

tighten one's belt

Weather and nature expressions

changes like the wind

fair weather friend

an ill wind

save for a rainy day

make waves

under the weather

once in a blue moon

grows like a weed

a tangled web

under a cloud

storm out

beat around the bush

Expressions using food

easy as pie

a piece of cake

full of beans

meat and potatoes

two peas in a pod

apple of my eye

from soup to nuts

crying over spilt milk

the way the cookie crumbles

Inference

Making an inference is also known as reading between the lines. Successful readers learn to put together the information the writer provides and the information that the reader already knows to come up with the full meaning. Here is an example exercise to develop inference skills:

Example 1:

She put on her mitts and snow suit and went out to play.

Discuss the following questions:

- Is the 'main character' a male or female? How do you know?

- Is it night time, morning, afternoon or evening? How do you know?
- How old is she? How do you know?
- What season is it? How do you know?

Example 2: (from Literacy Trainers Manual)

Robert was working very hard. Sometimes he worked fourteen hours a day. He had worked for the last ten days straight. He was looking tired.

Robert was saving for a new sports car. He finally heard from the dealer that his car had arrived. He had not told his wife about the car. But he hurried to pick it up. The car was for his wife's birthday tomorrow.

As he sat in the beautiful, shiny red sports car, waiting for the traffic light to change, he admired the purr of the engine. He was waiting to turn on to the freeway. The light finally changed. So did the reverse lights of the large, black pickup truck ahead of him. Its engine roared...

Drawing upon the facts of this text, discuss with your student:

- What do you think will happen next?
- Will Robert be upset? Will his wife?
- What would you do in this situation?