

## Reading and Writing Activities for Adult Learners

### *Word banks*

A word bank can be used with new readers or with students who can read some of the words in a passage on which the tutor and student are working. New words are written and collected in the student's word bank (many tutors use index cards, others prefer to keep dated lists).

From the language experience exercises, you and your student will have collected a number of words on index cards or listed on paper. These are the words that your student is learning to recognize by sight. They are called sight words. You may have gone over some of the phonetic rules for some of these words but, generally speaking, your student can probably read them from memory. It is important to keep them together in some sort of order. This is why:

- Your student is accomplishing a great deal each time she learns a new word. Keeping the words together helps her see progress as the inventory of sight words grows.
- While reading, the student may need to review these words from time to time or to be reminded that she has seen the word before.
- By keeping a word bank, the student is effectively creating a personal dictionary of words that can be used in the next writing project.

There are a variety of ways to keep a word bank. Make sure that the student decides which one is best for her and that it is easy for her to carry to and from lessons.

### **Example exercise: adding words to a word bank**

In large letters, write down three or four words from a passage. Read the passage slowly to the student, pointing to each word.

- When one of the target words is reached, ask the student to supply it and point to it on the card. Context and previous discussion should make this a manageable task. Remember that newly learned words are always written in the student's word bank.
  - Make sure it is safe before you pass.
  - Use your mirror.
  - Signal before you change lanes.

Your student has decided on the words: *pass*, *signal*, and *mirror*.

- Point out the words in a different order from that in which they appear.
- Read the text to the student, stopping at *pass*, and ask the student to say the next word or point to it on the card.
- Repeat for signal and mirror. You may provide extra clues by saying, “something before you change lanes. What word was missing where I said something?”
- Repeat the activity for new words at another session.

Together with your student devise ways to save sight words in an effective and creative way. Use a small address book as a personal dictionary. It is compact so your student can carry it in her pocket. Be inventive!

### ***Log or personal dictionary***

If your student does not want to use index cards, you can always use an exercise book or three-ring binder as a word bank. Label the top of each page with a letter from the alphabet. If you are using a bound book and cannot add pages as needed, leave three or four pages for each letter. Follow the same process as you would using the index cards but use a portion of each page for each word instead. Divide the page into quarters or eighths so that your student has enough room to work on each word.

This method makes it more difficult to keep words in alphabetical order because you cannot remove the sections of each page. It may, however, work just fine for your student.

### ***Concentration***

Another way to review words from your student’s word bank is to play this matching pairs game. Here’s how:

- Cut out two identical pictures, of some common and easily-recognizable object.
- Glue the pictures onto cards.
- Write the name of the object on the card beside the picture.
- Teach the name of the object by:
  - Reading the name and asking what the first letter would be.
  - Showing the student the corresponding picture.
  - Having the student write the word in a notebook.

- Once you have done this with a number of cards, the game is played as follows:
  - All the cards are turned upside down.
  - The student turns over one card.
  - Then the student turns over a second card to find a match with the first.
  - If a pair of cards is found, it is removed from the pile and the student reads the word.
  - If no pair is found, each card is returned upside down to the rest of the pile.
  - The tutor takes a turn and the game continues until all the pairs are found.

### ***Word matching***

- Choose key words from the student's vocabulary.
- Write each one on two pieces of card using only five or six pairs at a time.
- Put all the cards on a table face up.
- Select one and name it.
- Ask the student to find the matching card and repeat the word.

### ***Rhyming activities***

Many aspects of language can be learned through rhyme. One of the easiest ways to start is by looking at a poem or song lyrics and talking about words that end with the same sounds.

You can:

- Make lists of rhyming words.
- Write rhyming couplets as a team (your student supplies the first line, you supply the last line, then switch).
- Write songs.
- Look at spelling patterns.

Teaching rhyme can provide an enjoyable break if the work is getting monotonous.

### Cloze exercises

The cloze exercise is simply written text with words left out. Here is an example of a cloze exercise based on a student's language experience. The first week, the student dictated this story to her tutor who wrote it down word for word. They read it together chorally and then the student read it out loud. The following week the tutor used the same reading passage but this time as a cloze exercise. The tutor blanked out the problem words from the week before. The student read the passage independently and chose the correct word from the list the tutor had written at the bottom of the page. This type of activity integrates reading and writing.

#### My Worst Customer

My \_\_\_\_\_ customer. It was this guy, he's the \_\_\_\_\_ of these townhouses \_\_\_\_\_. When I went there with the \_\_\_\_\_ for him to sign, before he signed it, he had his hat on. He \_\_\_\_\_ it off. He put it on. He \_\_\_\_\_ on the contract more than I did. He made me \_\_\_\_\_ here and there and up and down and then he \_\_\_\_\_ signed it. After the job, I sent the \_\_\_\_\_. He never paid. He knows I was there. He knows he's \_\_\_\_\_ to pay.

*supposed, downtown, contract, invoice, initial, worst, wrote, finally, took, owner*

The blank spaces provide the student with an opportunity to guess what words might belong in the text. Rather than having the student struggle through difficult words, it allows the student to draw upon other skills. The student is forced to read ahead, to skim, and above all to read for meaning. The student has to ask—What would make sense here?

How to create a cloze exercise:

1. Decide on a text to use for the exercise. Use either a piece from a language experience exercise or another text of the student's choice (e.g., a newspaper article).
2. Photocopy, scan, or type the text so that you do not have to alter the original.
3. Omit every eighth word or so, making sure that the text remains readable and not too difficult to decipher. If your student is more advanced, then omit every fifth or sixth word. (Omitting nouns and verbs makes the exercise easier. The exercise will be more difficult if you omit adverbs, pronouns, and very small words.)

4. Ensure the exercise is relevant to your student's particular reading needs. If there is a word or type of word that consistently poses problems, design the cloze exercise with emphasis on those words.
5. If the student has trouble with the blank spaces and is reluctant to guess, provide options after the blank space as points of reference.

It is \_\_\_\_\_ (hard, scared, easy) to know sometimes whether or not there will be \_\_\_\_\_ (days, planes, traffic) on the highway. Usually, it is busy right \_\_\_\_\_ (under, around, after) rush \_\_\_\_\_ (man, hour) but on some days there isn't a \_\_\_\_\_ (plane, dog, car) in \_\_\_\_\_ (sight, cup, master).

### **Getting out into the community**

Reading is a way of understanding “the word and the world” (Freire, 1970). Books are indeed a gateway to the outside. Keep in mind that nothing prevents you and your student from ‘getting out’ and practicing reading strategies in the real world, on the street, in the subway or at the movies. In fact, we strongly recommend it! However, ensure that your program coordinator knows about your plans, and when you will return. After getting to know your student, you will know each other's interests. Also keep in mind that your student has a lot to teach you. It is very empowering for your student to teach you about his interests, culture or community. Here is a tutor's experience of such an outing.

*My student brought me to a Pow-Wow last summer. It was such a fantastic experience for me. We walked around together, he danced in full costume, and I wrote about my feelings on the experience. Later, we used that as reading material in a lesson. It was particularly nice for him. He felt like he had something to teach me. He has so much to teach me!*

Make sure that, if your student expresses interest in learning a reading skill for a particular task, you work on the skill in its natural setting. That is, if your student is interested in learning how to use a bank machine, go for a walk and find one! Use real life materials to teach real life lessons.

Here are some ideas on how to practice reading by getting out. It is extremely important that you do these activities with another tutor and student, not on your own.

- Go grocery shopping and compare labels and prices.
- Explore the bookstore and search for a favourite topic.

- Learn how to use the library.
- Go and hear a free band or concert and then read through the song lyrics.
- Take a ride on public transit to learn the bus and subway routes.
- Go for a walk and read street and traffic signs in preparation for a driver's test.
- Go to a literary reading and then read the book.
- Go to a play and then read the script.
- Go to events and gatherings with other students and tutors.
- Rent a DVD and then read the reviews.

### ***Word and language games***

Complete crossword puzzles and word searches with your student. Play Scrabble, Boggle, or Trivial Pursuit. You do not need to buy the board game. Many games can be handmade and can be made with your student. You can create word searches and crossword puzzles through the web. Create a Pictionary game to play with a group of students and tutors by creating a list of nouns based on the interests of the tutors and students.

#### **Example list for Pictionary:**

Football player	Wreath	Nest
Guitar	Party	Telephone
Dog	Fireplace	Computer
Sled	Mitts	House

#### **Example list for Scategory:**

Identify words that begin with the letter D for:

- Name of an animal
- Name of a country
- Name of vehicle
- Name of a dessert
- Name of boy
- Name of a girl