



## Ask Chris

This month Chris Turner answers a question about reading aloud to students.

In the last edition of the *Challenger*, in response to the tutor whose student wanted to work with the *King James Bible*, I gave you some suggestions about working on supplemental reading passages with your students. This month, I want to encourage you to try something new—read aloud to your student.

Many of us hesitate to read aloud to adults. We worry that it would be condescending or that somehow it is cheating. On the contrary, reading aloud is an extremely valuable technique to prepare adults to read independently. It is a strategy for long-range improvement because it provides the language experience that students need to succeed at higher levels.

### **How does reading aloud to adult students help them improve their reading?**

Reading aloud to students helps to improve their information processing skills, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and provides them with access to important information.

Some adult reading students have difficulty processing information. Listening to passages being read aloud is an excellent way of training their brains to process what they hear. In time, this ability will transfer over to reading silently. For example, many students have difficulty understanding passages that they can decode fairly well—in other words, it is as if the effort of reading the words blocks their ability to fully understand what they just read. Listening to a passage and trying to visualize what it is about can help students improve their ability to give meaning to what they read. Training this “inner voice” is very important.

Secondly, the language and vocabulary words we use in writing are very different from ordinary conversation. In conversation, we walk. In books, we might amble, stroll, trot or perambulate. When students have an opportunity to hear new vocabulary words and complex sentence structures, it prepares them to recognize, understand, and read these words and sentence patterns in the future. Active listening also helps fluency as students become familiar with the rhythm of more complex sentences, learning how to break them into meaningful phrases.

Finally, reading aloud to students can give them access to information and ideas that they may not yet be able to read for themselves. This can be highly motivating. Tutors have successfully used the *King James Bible*, junk mail, health brochures, workplace material, poetry, political speeches and insurance forms to provide their students with information that they are interested in and to help prepare them to read these texts independently.

### **Guidelines for Reading Aloud**

While there are a variety of different ways to read aloud to students, this is what I recommend.

**First, choose the passage to read aloud with your student.** Sometimes they have something that is important to them which they will bring to you. If not, you can suggest material that you think they will find interesting. Many students appreciate a chance to choose a short article from the newspaper.

**Second, prepare your student to listen for meaning.** Just as in reading, you need to do some preparation before you jump in. Together, you should look at the title and any illustrations, read the first and last sentence, and then ask your student to predict what the passage will be about.

**Prepare your student to listen actively.** Help students to focus by suggesting that they close their eyes and “make a video in their head.” This promotes active listening and information processing—and it is a vital linking step in helping students gain meaning from text when they read independently.

**Discuss the passage after you read.** Focus your discussion questions based on how difficult the passage is for your student. If it is very challenging work on the 5ws and an h (who, what when, where, why and how), recalling details, getting the main idea and sequencing. If the passage is relatively easy or if your student’s skills are strong, ask your student to summarize, draw conclusions, distinguish fact versus opinion and compare and contrast.

**For relatively easy passages begin work on independent reading.** If the passage you chose was not very difficult, you may wish to help your student read it independently. In this case, you will want to pull out key words and help your student to read them. Then you might want to take turns reading. Usually this works best if you build up to it gradually. Review the key words, then give your student a chance to follow along on their own copy while you read the passage again. Then alternate reading. In the next round, the tutor starts off reading the first paragraph. After that alternate reading paragraph by paragraph (or even sentence by sentence) with your student. With the right preparation, your student will be thrilled to discover that he or she can read real-life material.

**For relatively difficult passages, reinforce what was introduced in the passage.** If your student is not ready to read the passage independently, you can still reinforce the vocabulary and sentence structures used in the passage by using them in conversation or by teaching selected words as sight words.

**Finally, encourage your student to listen more actively outside of lessons.** The library has an excellent selection of books on tape. In addition, suggest that they close their eyes while listening to a newscast or documentary and to try and visualize what is happening. Suggest that they set a goal of learning three to five new words a week and to listen out for them.