



Ask Chris

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

My student frequently stumbles when he reads aloud. What is the best way to help him? Should he be reading silently instead?

Frustrated

In order to progress, students need to be able to read fluently and accurately at their level. Reading aloud is a key way to develop fluency and accuracy, which in turn are critical for reading comprehension. Accuracy means that students say what is written on the page: they include all the endings and they don't substitute similar words. Accuracy takes place at the level of the individual word. Fluency refers to the ease and speed of reading: students should aim to be able to read at a natural pace. Fluency takes place not only when students can read each individual word, but can also read in meaningful phrases.

However, as you describe, many students stumble and make multiple errors. You will need to develop a three-pronged approach, working at the level of individual words, phrases and the passage as a whole. The process outlined below is one method to help your student develop fluency and accuracy. The scooping technique is particularly powerful.

Pre-reading: Work on Individual Words

Don't forget to do some pre-reading activities to help your student get ready to read and understand the passage. Before he begins reading, you should pull out any words you think might be difficult for him. Go over them carefully. Point out the special features of the word—how it looks, what it means. If it uses phonics patterns you have already covered, point that out. If it uses phonics patterns you haven't yet covered, let your student know that for now he should just treat this word as a sight word.

During First Reading: Monitor Errors

As your student reads, you should both be monitoring for errors. If your student has trouble with a word, don't just feed it to him. He needs time to work on it and if you provide the answer too quickly, you interrupt this process. If he can't figure it out, through either decoding or context, tell him to just say blank, and place a small dot over the word. Make sure he knows you will go back and work on those words together. This takes the pressure off the student to get the right answer immediately. At the same time, you should be marking any other errors on your copy of the reading. For example, note where he is leaving off endings or skipping words. Finally, make a note of the total number of errors.

After Reading: Talk about What You Have Read

After your student reads through the passage once, ask some comprehension questions. It's a good idea to get in the habit of helping your student review the 5 Ws and an H—who, what, when, where, why and how. You may notice that he has difficulty

answering specific questions. This is often because the effort of reading is so great that the mind can't also take in the details needed for complete comprehension.

Review Errors: Choose Words to Work On

Go back over the words your student marked with a dot and any others that he missed that you think he needs to work on. Make a list of them for study, print them on index cards, or add them to his personal dictionary. Have your student draw a picture or write a short definition or sentence to help him remember the word. These are his study words. You will need to review them again the next time you meet.

Model Reading: Use Scooping for Fluent Phrases

Next go back over the passage. Model reading a sentence by scooping your finger or the eraser end of a pencil from phrase to phrase. The idea is to help your student process the sentence in meaningful units. By reading in chunks like this, the brain can more easily recall meaning. The phrases you choose will depend on your student's level. With a low level student you might be working on very simple subject and verb phrases. For example in the sentence, "*John went to the supermarket,*" you would scoop, "*John went*" and then scoop "*to the supermarket.*" Ask your student to read in the same way, scooping each phrase. The scooping technique really pulls students along, helping them to develop the speed they need to be able to understand what they read. At the end of the sentence, quickly run through the 5Ws, repeating words from the sentence in your questions. *Who went? John went.* Depending on your student and the amount of difficulty he had with the passage, you might model scooping for each sentence or only for a few of them. You might also use this time to point out mistakes the student made but was unaware of. For example, you could say, "*This word is making. When you read it you said make.*" Then model the whole sentence, scooping each phrase.

Repeat Reading to Build Fluency

Have your student read the passage again. Remember to once again make a note of any mistakes. You will probably find that your student makes many fewer mistakes the second time around and is reading more fluently. If not, you may be working on material that is too hard for your student at this point.

Practice Between Lessons

Finally, your student should practice reading for fluency and accuracy. Many tutors assign a short passage for students to practice between lessons. It is best if the passage is slightly BELOW a student's instructional level. For example, if you are working in Voyager 3, you might choose a passage from Voyager 2 or from one of the Blue Plus books. Poems work well because they are fun to read over and over. Ask your student to read the passage aloud. Make a note of the errors. Ask him to practice it at home, trying his best to read each word accurately and the whole passage fluently. Remind him to use the scooping method and to read in natural phrases. Suggest he also work on reading with expression. The following lesson, have him read the passage out loud again. Keep doing this until he is reading the passage fluently and with very close to 100% accuracy.

Working at the Right Level

It is important to make sure your student is working at the right level. How can you determine this? Count the words in the passage and divide that number by the number of errors to get a percentage of words read correctly. If this is less than 70%, the

material is probably too difficult. If it is above 95%, it may be too easy. In general, for instructional level material, you would expect about 85% initial accuracy.