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# The ABC's of Reading Strategies for Volunteers

A quick guide of ideas for volunteers and tutors to use  
with individuals and groups of students

## **Committee:**

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*Published in January 1998.*

*This partial reprint of the MRA flip chart provides readers with a sample of ideas. The complete chart can be ordered by calling 1-800-MRA-READ.*

This publication is designed to give volunteers and tutors ideas and suggestions of activities from A to Z to help students in the literacy learning process. This is a quick reference of some of the literacy projects a volunteer could use in and out of the classroom. For further information refer to the *MRA Guidelines for Tutors* available at the MRA office.

## **INTRODUCTION**

To interact with learners, volunteers need to:

- ✓ establish respect and trust
- ✓ let students do the talking
- ✓ help students to be independent thinkers
- ✓ encourage discussion
- ✓ be honest but kind
- ✓ know our students interests
- ✓ and enjoy!

## **Anticipate and Predict Meaning**

Use their prior experience and information from the text to make predictions.

### **1. BRAINSTORM**

Survey the story (look at title, pictures, beginning and ending) then ask students

to guess what the selection will include.

### **2. WORLD SERIES OF BOOKS**

Select other books by the same author and anticipate what adventure might happen this time.

## **Become lifelong readers and writers**

Develop lifelong literacy habits by encouraging students to read/write with parents, teachers, schoolmates and friends.

### **1. READING TOGETHER**

Encourage extra reading outside of the tutoring session. Bring a book, article, recipe or something you have read and share with the student. Ask the students to share their readings with you.



## 2. PEN PALS

Volunteer exchanges letters with the student or arranges for the student to be a pen pal with another student. Volunteers send cards to students on special occasions.

## Choose their own reading material

Select a variety of books and types of literature to read.

### 1. BOOK FAVORITES

Students can survey family, teachers, friends, and classmates on book favorites. Chart data or information by name of reader and category. This will help students to see that a wide variety of reading materials is available.

### 2. PERSONAL READING RECORDS

Encourage students to select a wide variety of reading materials. Brainstorm a list of different categories: science, fiction, biography, mystery, informational text, etc. Have students list them in a personal reading record and put a check each time they complete a book or story in a category.

## Delete Reading Every Word and Attending to Every Letter

Focus on the larger meaningful chunks of text.

### 1. SKIMMING AND SKIPPING

Read from the beginning and ending of the chapter, to bold and italicized words and phrases, and skim what is written under the pictures for information. Use a highlighter to identify meaningful text.

### 2. WHAT KIND OF STORY IS THIS?

Identify type of story: cause-effect, problem-solution, narrative and expository.

Help students to identify story schema or outline, characters, setting and plot.

## Elaborate on important parts of the text

### 1. READ MY MIND

On an outline of a character's head, the student can write words or phrases from the text that describe the character's thoughts, feelings, or motivations.

### 2. HOT SEAT

The student plays the part of a character from the book and sits in the "hot seat" while others ask questions of the character.

## Focus on fluency by reading

Continually read to become more fluent.

### 1. REPEATED READING

Take turns running a finger under the line, or using a paper marker while the other reads aloud.

### 2. SOUND OFF!!

Tape record student's reading of a passage, play back tape and assess smoothness of the reading. Then re-read.

## Get Books

Go Where books are. Use the library, browse in bookstores, borrow books from a friend and give books as gifts.

### 1. LIBRARY CARD

Help your student get a card for the public library.

### 2. BOOK EXCHANGE

Assemble a supply of donated books and encourage learners to bring a book to exchange.



# Teaching Literacy to English as Second Language Students

## Research and Best Practices

*This partial reprint of the MRA flip chart provides readers with a sampling of ideas. The complete chart can be ordered by calling 1-800-MRA-READ.*

### GOALS OF LITERACY

#### Research Evidence

1. Literacy development in the first language will support the development of literacy in the second language. There is a transfer of skills from reading in one's native language to reading in English.
2. People in our society read more kinds of texts for a wider variety of purposes than ever before.

The goals of literacy for some cultures may not match those defined by school literacy.

3. The National Assessment of Educational Progress indicates that students are improving their literal comprehension but not inferential comprehension. Higher level thinking skills need to be emphasized as work related tasks become more complex in the 21st century.

#### Classroom Implications

Teach students to read in their dominant language whenever possible.

Encourage the use of the native language in classroom activities as a bridge to learning English.

Teach students to read for a variety of purposes such as enjoyment, information, to learn new procedures, and evaluation.

#### ELA Standard 1 - Meaning and Communication

Authentic situations offer students opportunities to use literacy in ways that are meaningful and purposeful to them. Utilize literacy activities which connect the home culture with that of the school.

#### ELA Standard 10 - Ideas in Action

From the beginning, teach students that the purpose of literacy is to think and understand.

#### ELA Standard 3 - Meaning and Communication

In addition to literal comprehension, teach inferential and critical reading/thinking skills at all grade levels.

#### ELA Standard 9 - Depth of Understanding

### THE READER

#### Research Evidence

1. The student's reading of words should be automatic which allows the focus of attention on comprehension.

While automaticity is best developed through the practice of actual reading, it is important to recognize that for ESL students correct pronunciation is one of the last language skills to be refined and not necessarily a prerequisite for understanding.

#### Classroom Implications

Provide students with time to practice reading silently and orally for real and authentic purposes.

Shared books, predictable books, choral reading and repeated readings of sentences, stories, and essays reinforce basic patterns of English phrasing and fluency.

Encourage students to acquire meaning by considering ideas rather than by simply pronouncing words

#### ELA Standard 1 - Meaning and Communication



## THE READER

### Research Evidence

2. Students understand what they read most successfully as it relates to their prior knowledge. They are able to read passages that match their own cultural framework with more comprehension.

Many texts do not reflect content that is relevant or representative of ESL students rich knowledge and background.

3. There is a positive correlation between the levels of reading achievement and levels of self-concept. Students can improve their self-concept through successful reading experiences.

4. The linguistic demands of the text may exceed the language abilities of the student. Some comprehension problems may be due to reading and thinking in a language in which students are not fluent.

5. Students can learn reading concurrently with language. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are mutually supportive language processes. Literacy instruction need not be delayed until the student is fluent in oral English.

Students learn about language as they are learning their subject matter.

### Classroom Implications

To help expand overall background knowledge, provide a wide variety of classroom experiences and discussions including teacher read-alouds, written response to what has been read, access to many books including books about their own culture, and immersion in a print-rich environment.

Use scaffolding activities to help students link prior knowledge to knowledge necessary for comprehension of text. Examples include:

1. discussion of content to tap existing information and clarify any misconceptions,
2. directed reading/thinking activities as KWL,
3. advanced organizers,
4. graphic organizers.

### ELA Standard 1 – Meaning and Communication

To help students experience success in reading and encourage the development of a positive self-concept,

1. create a low anxiety environment to encourage taking risks with language,
2. select interesting materials at an appropriate reading level,
3. provide culturally relevant materials,
4. give appropriate feedback,
5. set realistic expectations

Encourage students to balance their use of background and prior knowledge with the language clues provided by the text. It is first necessary to determine whether they possess adequate background to utilize the linguistic cues.

### ELA Standard 1 – Meaning and Communication

Develop lessons which

1. are meaningful to students' lives inside and outside of school,
2. integrate listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing,
3. focus on meaning, not on language itself,
4. provide opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration.

### ELA Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 11 – Meaning and Communication, Language, Ideas in Action



## LEARNING ACTIVITIES / INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

### Research Evidence

1. The effective teacher can influence the quality of students' engaged learning time, thereby increasing the likelihood of academic achievement.
2. Teaching reading as a series of discrete skills isolated from each other and the process of reading may contribute to students' difficulties in reading. ESL students need the language clues found in the context of the reading material.
3. Teachers tend to ask questions that require only literal recall of information. These types of questions do not encourage critical thinking.
4. Social English language skills are generally acquired in 2-3 years while 5-7 years may be required to attain grade-level norms in academic language.
5. Students for whom reading presents a significant challenge tend to receive a curriculum that is quantitatively and qualitatively different from that provided to other students in the same classroom. These struggling readers receive drills on skills and few opportunities to read actual books.

### Classroom Implications

Practices which increase quality learning time include:

1. Select appropriate reading tasks based on individual student characteristics such as personal interests, personal experiences, skills, and academic level.
2. Allow students to make choices of topics, projects, materials, etc.
3. Teach interactively.
4. Maintain expectations appropriate for students.

Teach literacy as a meaningful whole emphasizing the integration of skills needed for the text and purposes for reading. For example, main ideas based upon causal link, example, description, or comparison.

#### ELA Standard 1 - Meaning and Communication

Guide students to think at all levels of comprehension, literal and higher levels including inferential, evaluative, analytical, and critical.

#### ELA Standard 1 - Meaning and Communication

Incorporate social and academic language development into every lesson. Use social language in activating students' background and prior knowledge. Extend academic language by using language, for example, to explain, classify, or generalize and/or apply ideas.

#### ELA Standard 4 - Language

Those who are struggling need the same quality programs as other students. Expose all students to a curriculum consisting of activities such as:

1. language experience,
2. reading quality books, poems, stories, etc. in their entirety, and
3. talking and writing about what they have read.

#### ELA Standards 1, 2, 3 - Meaning and Communication



**LEARNING ACTIVITIES / INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES****Research Evidence**

6. K-3 programs are relatively effective in teaching decoding but less so in teaching comprehension. In many classrooms, children spend their time learning phonics and the meaning of individual words. The phonics approach, however, depends largely upon oral language ability and auditory perception and discrimination skills which may not be adequately developed in ESL students to master this approach. Also, irregularities in rules and generalizations are often difficult for ESL students.
7. Children do not automatically grasp the meaning of text once they learn to decode. Superior decoding skills are not enough to produce superior readers if students lack the vocabulary and background knowledge essential to comprehension.
8. Students tend to give more thoughtful, reflective responses to questions when teachers wait an average of five seconds before they ask for responses. ESL students may need a longer wait time for responding to questions.
9. Vocabulary is best developed when taught in context, frequently reinforced, and utilized in reading and writing. For ESL students, the task can be more complex because they may be developing conceptual knowledge along with new vocabulary.
10. Setting a purpose for reading aids comprehension. Instructional practices in some cultures may expect the teacher to always establish the purpose.

**Classroom Implications**

From the beginning of students' reading development, they should be taught comprehension skills utilizing a balanced approach to work recognition including

1. sight vocabulary
2. context clues,
3. language and syntax knowledge
- 4, phonics, and
5. structural analysis

**ELA Standard 1 - Meaning and Communication  
Classroom Implications**

It is necessary to ascertain students' prior knowledge and to supplement where vocabulary development and background are not present for comprehension.

**ELA Standard 1 - Meaning and Communication**

Encourage students to take the necessary time to formulate answers in English. If students' English language skills are still in the beginning stages of development, allow students to answer in their native language using a bilingual aide or student to translate, if necessary.

**ELA Standard 1 - Meaning and Communication**

It is first necessary to determine whether ESL students' conceptual and vocabulary knowledge is appropriate for the learning task. Focus on a limited number of words utilizing strategies which include pre-reading vocabulary activities relating the students' previous knowledge to the reading material and, then, post-reading vocabulary activities including oral discussions and writing.

**ELA Standards 1, 2, 3 - Meaning and Communication**

First, teach students how to establish purpose for reading which may include enjoyment, gathering and clarifying information, conceptual understanding, and learning complex procedures. Teach students that different purposes demand different reading skills.

**ELA Standards 1, 3 - Meaning and Communication**