

BASIS@FAME Reading and Writing for Ages 4-10

Learning Goal: Teach all students that reading and writing are fun!

Reading Suggestions: Ages 0-5

Read to your child. Read books that you like and books that your child particularly likes. Read nursery rhymes and poetry and exciting books and informational books and yes, all those old favorites if your child loves them.

Periodically run your finger under the text as you read. Without saying anything you will teach that we read from left to right and top to bottom.

At ages 3 and 4 begin noticing certain letters on the page as you read aloud-especially if they're big, colored or fancy capital letters- and say things like, "Oh, look at M, it says mmmm, this word is Mom." This is not an attempt to teach your child to read, it is a gradual introduction to the concept that letters have sounds attached to them. Do not press your child to remember these sounds, you are ADVERTISING at these ages. Reading is cuddly, and exciting and fun.

Call your student's attention to the artwork in picture books. Help them notice and enjoy the colors, patterns, textures, humor, and information in the illustrations. You will be teaching a lot this way without ever lecturing or pressuring your child.

Some children will learn a lot of the beginning consonant sounds (m, s, t, p, etc.) just by seeing and hearing them periodically. Many will not remember any sounds this way and that's perfectly normal.

Reading Suggestions: Ages 4-6

Continue to read to your child. Read often, and read with expression. Read what you both find fun and interesting. If your student has an interest or a passion, read to her about it.

Begin teaching phonics. Five to ten minutes of phonics daily is enough for young children. Do not start a "reading program" or "phonics program" if you can't spend 10 minutes a day at least 4 days a week. For most kids this is something they want to do, but don't know how to do, and they need your consistent, patient, encouraging, and loving support to gain confidence and skill. Sporadic teaching may result in sporadic learning.

Reading Suggestions: Ages 5-9

A few children "catch on" to reading after two months of instruction and zoom ahead to longer books and harder words without much more teaching. Most students take several years to go from reading "Sam can sit." to "Mr. Parker whistled softly as he calmly walked through the forest." They need steady teaching and constant encouragement until they can confidently go into the library and read whatever they're interested in.

Many phonics programs come with "leveled" readers (stories which only use sentences made from the words and letter sounds that the child has learned so far). Also, most libraries have a section with phonetically based stories for early readers. Parent teachers can write stories and sentences on a white board or around the house that the beginning reader can read. This is most fun if the child's name is often in these little homemade "stories".

As a child learns to read, he needs three components:

1. An instructional "lesson", which probably includes reading aloud to, or with, the teaching parent
2. Independent reading time (silently or out loud)
3. Daily Story Time (many of the stories read aloud should be longer and more complex than the student could read himself so that his vocabulary and mind are groomed for the more challenging stories he will eventually read.)

A child's "independent" reading level will always be lower than his "instructional" reading level, so don't be surprised when children select "easy" books to read in their free time.

Try to give students plenty of time to read books that feel "simple" to them because this is when they're building speed and fluency. Book series for older kids like Magic Treehouse, Boxcar Children and Nancy Drew are popular because they are both exciting and predictable. Once children can read them they meet many of the same characters and words over and over, and they become easier to read.

Don't stop reading out loud when your student begins reading to herself!! As you read aloud, you teach vocabulary, syntax, character, geography, history, humor, good reading skills and more. In addition, you are "advertising" the enjoyable side of reading. If your child is not yet a fluent reader, she may think that reading is work, and it is the adult's job to show that learning to read is worth the effort.

Above all, read to your child often. Giggle and snuggle and wonder while you read together. Many happy memories are forming while words and ideas and images are being stored in their brains.

Writing Suggestions: Ages 4-6

In order to write, a student must have skills in three areas:

- handwriting (the actual formation of letters)
- spelling
- composition

Not many five and six year-olds can do all three skills well at the same time. In fact, many seven, eight, nine and ten year-olds are not able to integrate their handwriting, spelling, grammar, punctuation and composing skills at the same time.

Try teaching each of these skills separately while children are young. At five or six begin a simple **handwriting** program. You can buy a book, or you can just teach your child how to make various letters. Kids usually like to learn to write their names first. If your student can't control a pencil, don't panic. Do encourage them to write their names and some beginning numbers and simple words. But don't push the whole alphabet or detailed writing. Help them strengthen their small motor skills through using clay (not play- dough, it's too soft), crayons (not markers, since markers slide over the paper; no strength is required), beads (string them), scissors, and other small tools while doing projects.

Help your child learn to **compose** by encouraging him to dictate to you. You can use his pictures, magazine pictures, family events, pets, field trips, etc. as inspiration. You, the teaching parent, write down what he says. Then you read it back to him. He will be very proud of his story! He can illustrate it, he can send a copy to grandparents, and he can put it in a notebook to "read" again later.

Once your child is beginning to learn to read, she is probably ready to do some very **simple spelling**. It can all be oral, and it should all be "easy". Don't ask your child to spell new or challenging words, instead, give them words you know they can spell. Build confidence through success.

Little by little call attention to periods in books. A period ends a sentence. Many children think of lines of text as sentences. Gradually point out how your voice "drops" at a period, and how all sentences have an

ending mark. Just a reminder-children don't usually write "words" until they can write some letters, and they don't write sentences until they know some words, so it's not useful to focus on punctuation in **their** work until they're comfortably writing short sentences.

Writing Suggestions: Ages 5-10

Another way for children to learn to **compose** is to ask them to "narrate" after you read aloud or after they read something or do something. Narration is simply telling about an event. A narrative piece of writing is one that tells a story. When children tell their own version of what the story or lesson was about they have to do a lot of thinking. They must decide what came first, what was most important, why things happened, and whether the story or event or ending was believable or logical or "right". These questions are exactly what writers face when they begin with a blank piece of paper, and a student who has practiced expressing herself and putting her thoughts in order **orally** for several years will have a much easier time putting her thoughts in writing later on.

If a student's mind is blank after hearing or reading stories and lessons, then either the material is too difficult or he isn't paying close attention. The parent teacher can shorten the story or lesson down to a paragraph or a sentence so that the child understands it and can tell about it in his own words. Gradually, children will learn to concentrate, if they're responsible for telling about what is heard and read afterwards.

After a student can comfortably write one or two sentences teach him to do "copywork". This is another step in building a confident writer. **Copywork** is simply copying someone else's writing. The student does not have to think of what to write or how to spell it. All he has to do is copy someone else's writing, thereby practicing handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and good syntax. Choose the writing to be copied with care. With very young children it should be short and simple. Older children will benefit from copying good writing-choose sentences from favorite books that sound exciting or are extremely descriptive. This is an excellent way to apply punctuation rules such as quotation marks and commas-choose sentences that include the punctuation that you have taught, are currently teaching, or plan to soon teach.

Dictation is another activity that will actively help a child learn to write well. It is very simple. A parent teacher dictates (speaks aloud) one or more sentences, which the student writes down. When a child can read simple sentences and can comfortably write a sentence begin doing this several times a week. It is essential that students recite the entire sentence or paragraph (for much older students) that is to be written before she begins to write. This essential step will train the child's memory. Too often beginning, and experienced, writers have an idea, mentally compose sentences, and then forget them in the process of writing. Doing dictation several times a week will have many benefits. Besides training a student's memory it helps him learn how to translate speech into the written word. The child practices handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and memorizing, but doesn't have to generate ideas. Older students should check their own work against the dictated text. The same writing could be used for several days until the student felt really successful. As with any new program start small and build up in difficulty. Also, choose the text with care because these are sentences that the student might remember for a long time.

Some children are born with an urge to write. They tell stories, they make lists, they write letters to their friends, and they often feel perfectly comfortable sharing all this writing. Other kids can't think of stories, don't imagine easily, or are unwilling to share their private and personal thoughts, even on everyday topics. Never force a young child to create. Many children under 5th and 6th grade simply don't have the life experience or inclination to generate a lot of original work in this arena. They are still gathering information and it is stressful for them to have to write creatively.

Since it is important for all children to learn to write in the "non-fiction" arena (history, science, geography, math, etc.) parent teachers should use these years to **teach writing a summary** and writing a paragraph. There are many ways to do this. One way, is to teach outlining. Another method, described by Andrew Pudewa, in his IEW program, is for the student to choose and write down three key words from each sentence in a paragraph that the student has read. When this short list of "key words" is complete the child

closes the book and rewrites the paragraph from his own key word outline. This method, or any variation of it, removes the stress of thinking of ideas. Instead, the child focuses on writing and ordering sentences using the chosen key words.

Above all, never be afraid to "help" your child learn to write. Narration, copywork, dictation, and summarizing are all activities that will help students "bridge" to more independent writing. Beginning writers need lots of assistance. Go ahead and give them ideas for topic sentences, ask questions to help them add details, and help them work out the logic of a concluding sentence. Encourage older children to pick favorite pieces to revise, edit and publish with a final copy. As children get older look for an "audience" if the child needs more motivation to do her best writing. Sometimes this is best done in writing clubs or classes; a few kids enjoy entering writing competitions; many write to penpals, friends and relatives.

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