Simple Strategies for Supporting Struggling Students in the Classroom

Reading, spelling, math, writing, study, and focus strategies

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Increase Decoding Fluency and Visual Attention for Reading

Decoding: Vowel Sound to Whole Word

Struggling readers often get stuck in sound-by-sound decoding (saying each sound in the word and then blending them together). This causes their reading to be slow and choppy, and they often forget what sounds they said and end up reading the word incorrectly.

Vowel sounds are like the glue that holds the letters together to make a word. Instead of having the student say each sound and then blend, try having him **say the vowel sound and then read the whole word.** This helps students to focus on that all-important vowel sound and to become quicker and more automatic with their decoding.

Spell-Read

Purpose:

- Improves left to right eye movement
- Trains the brain to notice all of the letters in words
- Improves word reading accuracy
- Reduces impulsivity

Procedure:

- The student spells each word and then reads it.
- Parent or teacher says the word if the student doesn't immediately know it after spelling.

Do this exercise for 5 minutes daily before doing regular oral reading. When the student is doing oral reading, have him spell-read words that he can't decode or that he skips or guesses at. The student will often recognize the word once he has spelled it and noticed all of the letters.

Increase Careful Reading and Attention to Meaning

Neurological Impress Reading with Visualizing at Punctuation

Students point to each word and read **slowly** orally or silently, using appropriate phrasing and intonation. Students will tap twice at each punctuation mark. This calls attention to the punctuation and gives students a chance to think about what they are reading.

The instructor will question the students to see if they have created a mental image from the phrase or sentence just read. Do as much or as little questioning as needed to be sure that the students are imaging as they are reading. This will interrupt the flow of the reading at first, but gradually, the students will be able to mentally check their own images at each punctuation mark, without having to stop and discuss them.

This technique improves orientation and synchrony between what the student is seeing and saying when reading. In addition, it helps students consciously focus on creating images as they are reading. This is a critical factor in reading comprehension.

When students get comfortable with this technique, they can use it for studying and test taking by pointing to each word as they orally or mentally say it and tapping twice at punctuation and visualizing. This increases accuracy and attention to words and meanings.

Tune-Up/Support Listening

Thinking Caps (www.braingym.org)

Massage the curled part of the ear lobes, taking deep breaths as you "uncurl" and rub the earlobe. This activates the ears for listening.

Simplify instructions

- [ ] Give instructions in short phrases with visual back-up.
- [ ] Give only pertinent content.

Comprehension and Memory

Visualize on the Walls

When teaching new information, discussing events in a story, learning a sequence of steps or new vocabulary, guide students in developing mental images and locating them in order or in various places on the walls. Then go back and drill or have them retell the information by looking at that spot on the wall. Anchoring an image somewhere specific in space will make it easier to retrieve the information.

Associations

Guide students in creating sequences of mental images to remember lists and facts (such as states and capitals, presidents, steps in science or math formulas). Be sure to link each new image to the one before it.

Strong images are easier to remember. Students can make their images strong by adding color or movement, changing the size, making them silly or absurd, or making them illustrate a strong emotion.

Associations can be used to remember vocabulary or facts. For example:

Vagus Nerve: Sometimes called the Vagabond Nerve because it connects so extensively in the body. The student could visualize a vagabond walking along the "nerve highways" holding a stick on his shoulder with a knapsack on the end of it.

Spelling Strategies

Say and Write

The student should say each sound **as** he writes it. This keeps him from guessing and being impulsive. It helps him think about all of the sounds in the word.

The vowel + e pattern is particularly tricky for many students, even if they can verbally explain the rule. Try having the student write the vowel + e as a single code as he says the sound and then insert the consonant. This way he won't forget the silent e and the pattern becomes more ingrained in his mind.

Example: For the word *make*, the student would say and write:

/m/ **m**
/ae/ m**a e**
/k/ ma**k**e

Look Up and Spell it Fast

If your student asks you how to spell a sight word, particularly a non-phonetic word that you are pretty sure he knows, have him "look up and spell it fast." Looking up helps him access his visual memory and spelling it fast helps him rely on what he already knows versus over-thinking or sounding it out.

Rafter Words

Write common words that your students struggle to spell in large, bold printed letters on cards and put them around your room up high on the wall. (Tip: Blue painter's tape will stick but not damage your walls). When students need to spell one of those words, have them look up and find it. Looking up and finding it in a specific location each time will help them imprint the word in their visual memory.

Visualize!

To be a good speller, you must be able to think about the sounds in the word **and** have a mental picture of what the word looks like.

Here is a fun strategy for visualizing how words look. Use this to practice difficult spelling words. Break the word into parts if needed and then put it back together and practice the whole word.

1. Look at the word.
2. Look up and visualize the word on a large imaginary screen slightly at eye level. The letters should be large.
3. Point to each letter in the air and say the letter. Repeat 3 times to get a clear image of the letters. (Draw the letters with two fingers if needed in order to get a good image).
4. Now point to and say the letters in random order as fast as you can. (If the student can do this rapidly, he is getting a good image of the word).
5. If there are tricky letters that the student tends to miss or make mistakes on, have him make those letters especially large, bright, or colored in his image.
6. Spell the word forward and say the word.

Math Facts

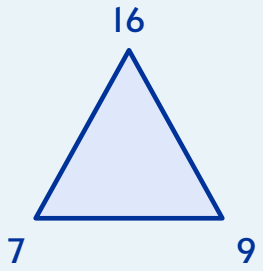
Math Triangles (+ - x ÷ Facts)

Purpose:

- [ ] Help students associate addition and subtraction as opposite operations
- [ ] Help students associate multiplication and division as opposite operations
- [ ] Learn math facts

Procedure:

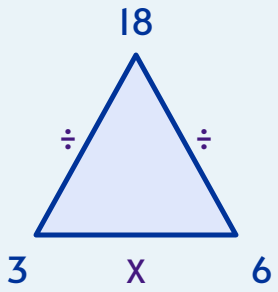
- Make flashcards of challenging math facts (those that the student doesn't know and needs to practice). Draw a triangle on the card.
- *For + -*
- At the top of the triangle, put the answer to the addition problem (sum). On the bottom two corners, put the addends (two numbers that are added together to make the sum).



- Have the student practice reading all possible problems as the instructor points to the numbers:
  - 7 + 9 = 16
  - 9 + 7 = 16
  - 16 – 7 = 9
  - 16 – 9 = 7
- Guide the student in noting:
  - Whichever order he adds the numbers at the bottom of the triangle, the answer is always the same.
  - The answer (sum) of an addition problem is always a bigger number than either of the two numbers he is adding.
  - When subtracting, he always starts with the biggest number (16 in the problem above).
  - The relationship between the addition and subtraction facts: that the addition and subtraction facts use the same numbers.

Math Triangles, continued

- Drill while looking at the numbers: The instructor points to the number. The student says the numbers and supplies the operation based on where the instructor started.
- Drill the various facts: Instructor covers one corner of the triangle and says the corresponding problem. The student says the answer.
- Drill with a visualized triangle: The instructor points to the spot where the numbers would be as the student says the numbers and supplies the operation based on where the instructor started.
- *For x ÷*
- The procedure and practice work the same for multiplication and division as for addition and subtraction. At the top of the triangle, put the answer to the multiplication problem (product). On the bottom two corners put the factors (two numbers that are multiplied together to make the product).



Signs can be added to the triangle as needed to help the student understand and remember.

Memory Grid for Math Facts

Purpose: To remember numeric combinations
To use visualization and visual memory to recall information

Activity:

1. Create a 3 x 3 grid on a paper
2. Fill-in the numbers 1-9 on the grid.
3. Have students memorize the numbers on the grid.
4. Play tic/tac/toe with the grid from memory.
5. Use the grid to place the times table combinations (1 x 3, 2 x 3, 3 x 3, etc.).
6. Image the grid with the combinations.
7. Drill/play tic/tac/toe to reinforce the grid.
8. Image and drill with answers only; then with a blank grid.
9. Use the grid concept for one or two of the most difficult combination sets. (Often 8s are a very difficult set for students to recall).

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

1 x 3 = 3	2 x 3 = 6	3 x 3 = 9
4 x 3 = 12	5 x 3 = 15	6 x 3 = 18
7 x 3 = 21	8 x 3 = 24	9 x 3 = 27

3	6	9
12	15	18
21	24	27

5-Minute Power Writing Strategy

Principles:

- It is easier to write from a question than a statement
- The faster you write, the better you write
- This gives you a way to break writing into small manageable chunks so it doesn't drag or feel overwhelming.

Rules:

- [ ] Start with 3 power words (nouns or verbs) about the topic
- [ ] Your first word in your first paragraph must be one of the 3 power words.
- [ ] The other 2 words must appear in the first paragraph.
- [ ] Write for 5 minutes without stopping. No editing, erasing, or going back. No stopping to think.

Steps:

1. Take your main idea sentence or topic and turn it into a question.
2. Visualize the answer to the question.
3. Write 3 power words (nouns or verbs) that will help answer the question
4. Write for 5 minutes following the rules.
5. At the end of 5 minutes, edit, extend, and clarify the sentences.
6. Proofread with COPS.

Proofreading Strategy

COPS

Here's a simple technique to help writers of any age become more independent in proofreading their written work.

Have the student write COPS on a 3x5 card or at the top of her paper. Explain what each letter in the acronym stands for and walk through the process together with everything the student writes, even single sentences. Very quickly, most students will begin to apply COPS all on their own.

COPS stands for:

Capitalization

Overall Appearance (Spacing; clean, clear, well-formed letters; mistakes erased completely)

Punctuation

Spelling (Have the student check spelling by starting with the last word in the sentence or paragraph. This takes the words out of context. The student should check to see if the word "sounds right" and "looks right.")

Have students go through each sentence checking for **C**apitalization. When done, they get to check off the **C**. Then check for **O**verall appearance, checking it off when done. Go on to **P**unctuation, followed by **S**pelling.

Test Study Strategy

Concept Diagramming: *A study strategy proven to increase comprehension and test scores!*

Most students have no idea how to study for a test. They often resort to reading the chapter over and over, hoping it will sink in; depending on parents to read the material and quiz them; or just hoping they somehow got the information through osmosis.

Some students work hard to memorize their study guides or practice questions word for word. They think they know the material, but when it appears on the test, stated in a different way, they don't recognize it as being what they studied and end up being disappointed in their grade.

Here is a strategy that takes a bit of time up front, but helps students really understand the material and makes studying much more interesting. Test grades improve because students are really *thinking* about the information instead of just trying to ingest it by rote.

This strategy, called **Concept Diagramming**, is great for use with content areas such as history or science. It is a good tool to use when studying in groups or with a partner (or parent).

Steps

The student should:

1. Put important events, dates, vocabulary, and names on 3X5 cards.
2. Organize the cards in some way and orally explain why it makes sense to group the cards in that way.
3. Then mix the cards up and group them in another way, orally explaining the new connections.
4. After each test, save all of the cards, labeling them by chapter or section so that they can be used again to study for unit tests and finals.

Focus Strategies

Timer

Use a **timer** for kids with trouble focusing on task. Start with 5 minutes and gradually increase. When the timer goes off, celebrate; then re-set for the next 5 minutes.

Movement Minute

Recognize the limits of your students' ability to concentrate before becoming unproductive. Take a **"Movement Minute"** to re-energize thinking and focus.

PACE (www.braingym.org).

The activities in PACE are done in reverse order and take only a few minutes to complete. PACEing helps students to mentally shift and get focused and integrated. PACE is a quick, simple, and effective activity to use before school, before homework, during transitions between subjects, before tests, and after recess or lunch.

Each activity in PACE can also be used on its own.

P: Positive
A: Active
C: Clear
E: Energize

1. **Energize: Drink water** *(especially good for energy, test taking, productivity)*
2. **Clear: Brain Buttons** *(helps students settle and clear their mind. This is especially helpful in transitions from one activity to another or for settling down if emotionally upset, worried, agitated, or excited)*
   Put one hand on the navel and with the thumb and first two fingers of the other hand, massage the soft spots on either side of the sternum just below the collar bone for 10-60 seconds. Breathe slowly. Switch hands and repeat.
3. **Active: Cross Crawls** *(activates the brain for reading, writing, and spelling; very helpful when student is getting disoriented or flustered and making many errors; helps fluency)* Touch hand to opposite knee; alternate moving one arm and opposite leg.
4. **Positive: Cook's Hook-ups** *(diffuses stress, establishes positive orientation and focus)*
   Cross legs at ankles. Cross arms over chest. Sit this way for one minute, eyes closed, breathing deeply.
   Uncross legs and put finger tips together, breathing deeply for another minute.

Five-Count Breath

Student inhales slowly through the nose and counts five counts on fingers. Without holding breath, student begins to exhale slowly through the mouth in five counts as he puts his fingers back down.

- Repeat 3 times.

Deep breathing immediately forces oxygen into the brain, which improves thinking and encourages muscles to relax as they are flooded with oxygen rich blood. This supports clearer thinking and learning.

Thought Box

Have the student visualize a special box where he will put his thoughts/ideas/things he wants to say when it is not the right time to share them. This validates that what the student is thinking is valuable and isn't being thrown away or forgotten, but that this is not what he needs to be focusing on right now.

PRACTICE using the thought box (best done one-to-one) and then devise a cue between the teacher and student that will be used to help the student begin using the thought box in class. Specify a time during the day (and eventually perhaps just once a week) when the student can share something with the teacher out of his thought box.

Getting Started Questions

Getting Started Questions/Cues: Together with the student, make a list of the first three things that he needs to do to get started. Before starting each assignment, the student should read and use his questions to help him get started immediately and independently.

1. What materials do I need?
2. Did I put my name on the paper?
3. Where is the first set of instructions?

Is This Your Child?

Do You Know a...

- ☐ Bright Underachiever
- ☐ High achiever who struggles
- ☐ Child or teen with Dyslexia
- ☐ Smart student with learning or attention challenges

There is a reason a bright child might struggle in school...

- It's not because he's lazy
- Or because of bad parenting
- Or because teachers don't know how to teach

The most common reason for a child to struggle in school?
Weak or inefficient underlying learning or information processing skills.

These weak underlying skills cause interference to learning. Unfortunately, they do not typically improve with time or traditional tutoring.

We can help. We do what traditional tutoring doesn't do. We get to the ROOT of the problem.

Helping children, teens, and adults since 1984 to eliminate the struggles associated with diagnosed or undiagnosed learning and attention challenges including:

- ☐ Dyslexia
- ☐ Learning disabilities
- ☐ Attention deficit
- ☐ Auditory processing disorders
- ☐ Executive function
- ☐ Processing skills
- ☐ Bright underachievers

Schedule a free consultation

Talk with a learning specialist. Testing and programs are available in person or remotely, for children, teens, and adults.

Schedule a Free Call

(877) 774-0444

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