Simple Summer Learning Tips

Easy strategies for reading, spelling, math, writing, and attention

Presented by Stowell Learning Centers

Easy Strategies to Enhance Reading Accuracy, Fluency, Comprehension, and Enjoyment

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.

Neurological Impress Reading

Neurological Impress Reading uses all of our academic learning senses. The student sees, hears, touches, and says the words simultaneously. This helps students to develop reading vocabulary and fluency. Confidence in reading is built because the technique reduces the pressure or stress of trying to read a word. This technique also improves auditory and visual synchrony, sense of timing, impulse control, sequencing, and reading comprehension.

When choosing a book, find subjects the student is interested in. Start with books that are slightly below the student's reading level to learn the strategy, but because you are reading with the student, he may be able to move up to books that are at or slightly above his reading level.

The book should rest at about a 30-45 degree angle in front of the student. A 2-inch or larger notebook can be used to lay the book on to provide an inclined work surface.

(Follow procedure instructions) *10 min/day; 5 days/week*

Teacher/Parent-Guided NIR

The instructor sits across from the student. The instructor points to each word with finger above the word, and the student points below the word. Read **slowly** together using appropriate phrasing and intonation. It is okay if the student says the word after the instructor, but he must accurately say each word while pointing to it. Tap twice at each punctuation mark.

This technique improves orientation and synchrony between what the student is seeing and saying when reading. It takes the stress out of reading and keeps students from practicing reading words incorrectly. Neurological Impress Reading allows students to focus on the meaning of each word and phrase, thus improving comprehension.

Independent Neurological Impress Reading with Visualizing at Punctuation

The student points to each word and reads **slowly** using appropriate phrasing and intonation. If the student does not know a word, she should spell, then read the word. The instructor should supply the word if the student still does not know it after spelling it.

The student will tap twice at each punctuation mark. The instructor will question the student to see if she has 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 student is imaging as she is reading. This will interrupt the flow of the reading at first, but gradually, the student will be able to mentally check her own images at each punctuation mark, without having to stop and discuss them.

This technique continues to improve orientation and synchrony between what the student is seeing and saying when reading. In addition, it is now beginning to help 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.

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

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.

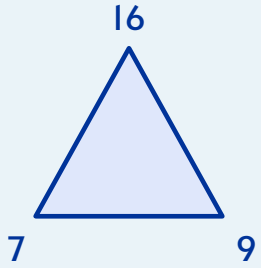
Math Triangles (+ - x ÷ Facts)

Purpose:

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

Procedure:

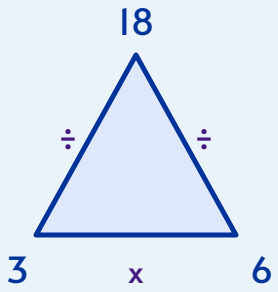
- Make flashcards of challenging math facts (those that the student doesn't know and needs to practice). Draw a triangle on the card.
- *For + -*
- At the top of the triangle, put the answer to the addition problem (sum). On the bottom two corners, put the addends (two numbers that are added together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

COPS: Proofreading Strategy

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.

Attention Strategies

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.

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)*
   1. Cross legs at ankles. Cross arms over chest. Sit this way for one minute, eyes closed, breathing deeply.
   2. Uncross legs, and put finger tips together, breathing deeply for another minute.

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.

Permanently Solving Learning Challenges

The most common reason for a child to struggle in school is weak or inconsistent learning skills or what you might think of as information processing skills. These underlying skills cause interference to learning. Unfortunately, they do not typically improve with time or traditional tutoring.

As a result, students become more frustrated and anxious about their learning challenges. They may become angry or withdrawn. They may appear unmotivated or lazy. They may make poor decisions, feel like a failure, and quit believing in themselves.

It does not have to be this way. These issues can be changed. But to permanently solve a learning problem, the underlying skills must be developed. With specialized training the brain can learn to think and process information in more effective ways. Students don't have to go through life crippled by their learning challenges.

Parents contact our learning center for help because their children are having problems with reading, math, or some other academic area in school. We explore with parents what the academic problem looks like at school or when the child is doing homework. This provides important insight into what might be causing the problem. But the key piece of the puzzle is to understand what is happening underneath the obvious academic struggle and poor grades.

We look at learning as a continuum with academic skills at the top of the continuum being supported by everything that comes earlier.

Here is how the continuum builds:

CONTENT AREAS & HIGHER LEARNING
Refining and Applying Basic Academic Skills, Subject Areas, Social Success

BASIC ACADEMIC SKILLS
Reading, Spelling, Writing, Math, Language

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION
Reasoning, Strategizing, Organizing, Planning, Self-Monitoring of Attention and Behavior, Study Skills

PROCESSING SKILLS
Memory, Attention Focus, Auditory and Visual Processing, Processing Speed, Language Processing

CORE LEARNING SKILLS
Developmental Visual and Motor Skills, Internal Organization, Body and Attention Awareness and Control

Schools and Tutoring Focus Here

We Work Here

Below is a brief explanation of the first three levels of the continuum and a few of the symptoms parents might notice if their child has challenges at that level:

Developmental / Core Learning Skills

These are basic visual and motor skills that help children develop a sense of self, internal organization, and body and attention awareness and control. Challenges in this area might show up as follows:

- ☐ Poor posture
- ☐ Awkward or uncoordinated
- ☐ Fatigue, low stamina
- ☐ Laying on desk
- ☐ Confusion with directions, spatial orientation, letter reversals
- ☐ Hard time getting started or following through
- ☐ Lack of organization: always losing or forgetting things
- ☐ Poor handwriting
- ☐ Can't sit still
- ☐ Trouble getting self going

Processing Skills

These are skills such as attention, memory, auditory and visual processing (how we think about and understand things that we see or hear), processing speed, language comprehension, and phonemic awareness (the thinking process critical to reading that supports learning and using phonics). Problems in this area will show up as:

- ☐ Trouble sounding out words
- ☐ Trouble memorizing spelling words or math facts
- ☐ Can read but can't remember or understand what was read
- ☐ Get very tired when listening
- ☐ Miss information when listening
- ☐ Trouble understanding visual organization in math, charts, etc.
- ☐ Can learn words for spelling test but can't remember the next week
- ☐ Poor attention
- ☐ Can do the work but can't "get it together" to get the work done and turned in
- ☐ Slow work / working too hard or too long

Executive Function

This is our personal manager that guides and directs our attention and behavior. It helps us reason, problem solve, organize, and make decisions. Problems in this area may appear as follows:

- ☐ Poor time management
- ☐ Can't organize materials
- ☐ Trouble reasoning
- ☐ Wait until the last minute to start a long term project
- ☐ Can't plan and organize projects
- ☐ Lack tact
- ☐ Poor follow through
- ☐ Trouble getting started

If a 10-year-old fourth grader is laboriously reading at a second grade level, something is wrong. More practice reading or someone sitting at his side helping him say the words is not going to fix this problem.

Solving the reading problem first requires retraining the brain to learn more easily and efficiently. To do this, we must look at what underlying skills on the learning skills continuum are not supporting the learner well enough. It is only by developing these areas and then remediating the basic academic skills that students can become the truly independent and comfortable learners they can and should be.

Free Resources for Parents and Teachers

StowellCenter.com
Find information about Stowell Learning Center and free resources for learning and attention challenges, including dyslexia and auditory processing.

Newsletter
Subscribe to our weekly newsletter for updates on the latest events, and lifetime access to all of our free resources and downloads.

SLC Mom Squad
A private Facebook group for parents of kids with learning and attention challenges. Gain support from other parents who understand what you are going through!

Take the Stone Out of the Shoe: *A Must-Have Guide to Understanding, Supporting, and Correcting Dyslexia, Learning, and Attention Challenges*, by Jill Stowell is now available in paperback, audiobook, and Kindle.

Free Consultation
Want to learn more about our services? Schedule a Consultation to speak with one of our Learning Specialists.

At Wit's End: *A Parent's Guide to Ending the Struggle, Tears and Turmoil of Learning Disabilities*, by Jill Stowell

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