

GOAL: Read a Book

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Introduction

When you first start with a literacy program, your goals may be very specific – to read instructions, to write a letter, to fill out an application. These are goals to meet immediate needs and pressing concerns. To “read a book” as a beginning goal may seem overwhelming or even not relevant to the reading demands of every-day life. Gradually, as you gain confidence in your reading ability, you will gravitate toward reading for pleasure and enjoyment – very good reasons to read! Reading can be your escape from a busy or difficult day; it can teach you how to do something or how to make an improvement in your life; it can comfort you in bad times; and make you laugh out loud. And the more you read, the more your vocabulary will expand as well as your knowledge of people, places and things.

Getting Started

First you and your tutor should think about what you would like to read. If you really don’t know where to start in choosing a book, think about the television shows that you prefer... Do you like romance? Mystery and suspense? Crime stories? Historical stories? Science fiction? Westerns? Or would you rather read self-help books... Something that will help you make positive changes in your life? Or how-to books: is there some new skill you would like to learn? What are your interests and hobbies? Talk to friends and family about the books that they’ve read and enjoyed.

Once you’ve sorted through your interests and have an idea about what kinds of things you would like to read, the next thing to do is apply for a library card (if you haven’t already). Your tutor or literacy staff can walk you through this process, if you would like. The library card will give you access to all of the books in the library – a wealth of material, all available to you for free.

Books & Materials

Books

There are two general categories of books: fiction and non-fiction:

Fiction – Books of fable or fantasy. Fiction suggests a story made-up to either entertain or to deceive. Applies to a tale, legend, myth or any story that is invented by the imagination.

Non-Fiction – True stories based upon facts and reality including biography, history and science. Includes self-help books and how-to books and manuals.

Literacy Collection. And don't forget to browse your literacy collection! The books there have been specially selected for new readers and on topics covering a wide range of interests. Your literacy staff can help you find something that will fit your interests *and* your reading level.

Children's Books. Children's books are great selections if there are children you would like to share them with. (See the "Share a book with children/family" goal in this curriculum guide.) But if you truly want to read a book for your own pleasure, you would want to select something that has been written for adults. Go instead to the literacy collection or to the adult fiction and non-fiction sections of the library to select a book that's right for you.

Audio Books. Also called books-on-tape or books-on-CD, these are possibly the greatest invention of all time! Audio books let you sit back, relax and listen to the story of your choice. You can also find many different titles in the audio format at your library, often best-sellers. Sometimes the books are read by celebrities and occasionally by the author. If you are interested in reading a popular book but find the reading level too difficult, check out an audio book. Audio books are also great if you are a commuter, spend a lot of time in your car, or want to be entertained while you're doing chores and housework.

Key Vocabulary

- ◆ Fiction
- ◆ Genre
- ◆ Audio Book
- ◆ Table of Contents
- ◆ Non-Fiction
- ◆ Character
- ◆ Context
- ◆ Abridged/Unabridged
- ◆ Plot
- ◆ Novel
- ◆ Style
- ◆ Setting
- ◆ Theme

Reading Practice

Using a Dictionary. It makes sense to read with a dictionary next to you however, you don't want to interrupt your reading too often by stopping to look things up. That can really break your train of thought and take away from your enjoyment of the reading. Another idea is to read with a notepad and pen nearby so you can jot down words you would like to look-up later.

There are many dictionaries available (your library will have a big assortment). Pick one that you can easily read. Bigger sized text is also a plus. You may also want to invest in an electronic dictionary or speller, which serves the same purpose as the book but is more convenient and can fit in your pocket or purse.

As a reader, you will mainly be interested in using your dictionary for looking up the meanings of words. It is important to remember, though, that the dictionary can never know the exact context in which the word is being used, so you will have to use your knowledge of the language as well. You will need to:

1. Use your knowledge of the language to get information about the word you want look up
2. Guess the general meaning of the word in the context
3. Decide if it is necessary to look up the word - can you understand the sentence without it?
4. Find the word in the dictionary
5. Choose the correct entry in the dictionary
6. Check the meaning given by the dictionary to see if it fits in the context

Example: You are reading a book about life in America and you see the following heading:

"Knife River: Early village life on the plains."

But, you are not familiar with the word "plains".

1. Using your knowledge of the language, you can work out that it is a noun - "the" comes before it and it has a plural "s".
2. You can also tell that it is probably a place - because villages are there.
3. It is important to you to know exactly where the villages are.
4. This is the dictionary entry:

plain¹ /plein/ *adj* (-er, -est) **1** easy to see, hear or understand: ~ *English*; *The meaning is quite ~.* **2** simple; ordinary; without luxury or ornament: ~ *cooking*; *a ~ blue dress*, without a pattern on it, or without trimmings, etc. **In plain clothes**, (esp of policemen) in ordinary clothes, not in uniform. **3** (of persons, their thoughts, actions, etc) straightforward; frank. **In plain words**, frankly. **4** (of a person's appearance) not pretty or handsome: *It's a pity her husband is so ~.* .

plain² /plein/ *n* [C] area of level land: *the wide ~s of Canada.*

plain³ /plein/ *n* [C] simple stitch in knitting. > *purl.* . *vt, vi knit this stitch.*

5. As we are looking for a noun, the first meaning of plain, **plain**¹, is not correct. **plain**², an area of level land, is a noun.
6. This meaning makes sense in context. This is therefore the most likely meaning.

Example from: Using English for Academic Purposes, www.uefap.com

Alphabetizing. A skill that goes hand-in-hand with dictionary use is alphabetizing. The dictionary, after all, is organized around the alphabet. To find the word you want you must be able to put words in alphabetical order. Fortunately it's a skill you can practice and master:

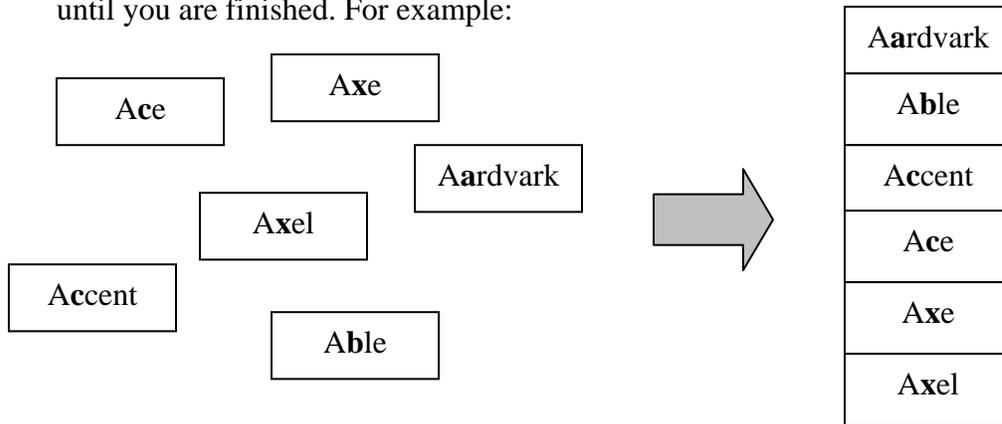
Step 1: Review Your Alphabet. The first step to becoming a good alphabetizer is making sure you know the correct alphabetical order. In English, this is:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Refresh your memory or make a cheat sheet if you need to do a large amount of alphabetizing and find yourself struggling with the order.

Step 2: Start Sorting. Do a rough sort of the items needing to be alphabetized. Put everything beginning with A into one group/pile, everything beginning with B into another group/pile and so on, working your way through the alphabet until you have everything sorted out by the first letter of the word.

Step 3: Refine your Sorting. Now comes the more difficult sorting. After getting everything into piles by first letter, move to sorting by second letter and then third letter until you are finished. For example:



Note that the two "c"s in "accent" do not count as a single letter and that "axel" follows "axe" because "axe" has no letter in the fourth spot and blank spots come first.

Example from www.ehow.com.

Book Discussion. After reading a book, nothing is better than talking about it with a friend (your tutor!) or group of friends. Talk to your literacy staff to see if there is a book discussion group of adult learners already meeting that you could join. If not, maybe you would be willing to help get one started? This is a great way to meet new people and to expand your understanding and enjoyment of what you have read.

Here's how a book discussion works: the host (the library, or the literacy program) purchases many copies of the same audio book or book and then hands them out to participants. About a month later (which means you have about a month or more to listen to the book), you meet with the other readers for an hour or two to talk about the book. A group leader will usually have some discussion questions to get the conversation moving. There are no "wrong" answers in a book discussion. The questions tend to deal with your reactions to the book which are, of course, personal.

Favorite books-on-tape for book discussions have included:

- Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster, read by the author, John Krakauer
- Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl, one version read by actress Julie Harris, another version read by actress Winona Ryder
- Stones from the River, read by the author, Ursula Hegi
- The Secret Life of Bees, by Sue Monk Kidd, read by Jenna Lamia
- All Over but the Shoutin', read by the author, Rick Bragg
- To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee, read by actress Sissy Spacek

Writing Practice

Create Your Own Dictionary. Buy a flip book of index cards or any kind of notebook or booklet and as you're reading and come across unfamiliar words, jot them down in this book. Organize it like a dictionary so that the first page or pages might be where you put all the words that begin with "A," the next page is for the words that begin with "B," and so on. Bring your notebook with you to your tutoring session and then spend some time looking up your words in the dictionary and writing down the definitions next to the words. You might even want to add a picture to help explain the word, just like the dictionary does. Review these words often and practice saying them aloud.

Book Review. Perhaps nothing kills the joy of reading faster than having to write a book report. So let's not go there. However, it certainly doesn't hurt to become a book critic and review the book you have just read. Here are some questions you could answer:

- What were its strengths?
- Its weaknesses?
- Was it so good that you couldn't put it down or did you have to force yourself to finish?
- How about the author's vocabulary and use of language?
- Did his/her descriptions help you see things in your mind's eye?
- Did the ending surprise you or did things turn out the way you expected them to?
- Would you recommend this book to your friends? Why or why not?

Producer/Director. Have you noticed when you read or listen to a good book that you have a "movie" running in your head? You can practically "see" the characters and the setting. So once you've read a good book, pretend that you will be making a movie from it. Which famous actresses and actors will you choose to play the characters? Where will your movie take place?

Read the Book/See the Movie. Often a book is so good that it *is* made into a movie. Though it's tempting to see the movie first, you may want to read/listen to the book first instead. If you see the movie first then you don't get the chance to create your own images of the characters and

settings in your head. The images that the movie supplies for you will tend to stick in your head even as you read or listen to the book. Once you're done with the book, go see the movie and then write up some notes on how the two are similar and how they are different. You might be surprised by how much the movie differs from the book! Here are just a few of the many books that have been made into movies (all of these are also available as books-on-tape):

To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee
The Reader, by Bernhard Schlink
The Kite Runner, by Khaled Hosseini
Eragon, by Christopher Paolini
The Devil Wears Prada, by Lauren Weisberger
The Secret Life of Bees, by Sue Monk Kidd
Girl With a Pearl Earring, by Tracy Chevalier
House of Sand and Fog, by Andre Dubus
Frankenstein, by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

Games & Activities

Scrabble. Scrabble is a great game for word-play and building vocabulary. Bring the game from home or ask if your literacy office has one to borrow during your tutoring session.

Crossword Puzzles. Go to www.google.com and then enter "crossword puzzle maker" in the search box. Then choose a website where you can make a **free** crossword puzzle. Use the words and definitions from your own dictionary that you've made (in the "Create Your Own Dictionary" activity above) or brainstorm some new ones.

Real World Practice

Writer to Writer. The Writer to Writer Challenge is the annual statewide writing competition for adult learners in public library literacy programs throughout California. You are invited to read a book of your choice and then write a personal letter to the author of that book, sharing with the author your thoughts and opinions on how the book has affected you. All the information and forms about Writer to Writer are on-line at the California Library Literacy Services website: www.libraryliteracy.org/w2w/index.html. At the website you can also see some video clips of adult learners reading their letters and winners' letters from past years are available for you to read.

Independent Practice/Homework Ideas

Read At Home. Read aloud at home to your family members and/or children. You can always practice in your tutoring session and then try things out at home. If one or more family members can be counted on to be listener or co-reader, all the better. Of course reading aloud to children is a great joy too! Select children's books that are written at a level that you feel comfortable

reading – the children’s librarian can help with this. Practice in your tutoring session and then try the books with your children, grand-children, nieces, nephews and/or neighbor’s kids! For more strategies, see the “Share a book with children/family” goal in this curriculum guide.

Milestones

- **Initial Effort** – Talk about your interests and preferences in reading materials. Make a short list of books you would like to read. Get your library card. Tour the library and get familiar with where various items are located: fiction, non-fiction, biography, children’s books and audio books, and videos. Find out if your literacy program has a book discussion for adult learners.
- **Making Progress** – Begin reading or listening to a book at your leisure. There is no rush! Begin creating your own personal dictionary of vocabulary words you come across in the course of your reading. Discuss what you’ve read with your tutor and make some predictions about what you think will happen next.
- **Accomplished** – You’ve completed a book! Congratulations. Now consider joining a book discussion group or entering the Writer to Writer Competition hosted by the California State Library. The sky’s the limit!

Contributors’ Biographies

Melanie S. Liu. Melanie has a B.A. from National Taiwan University and a Masters in Education from Harvard University. Before getting into the field of adult literacy she had 19 years in business administration. She is a life-long student of Chinese and English and loves to read, teach, travel, cook and garden.

Valerie Reinke. Valerie has worked in the field of adult and family literacy for over 20 years at the Riverside City & County Public Library (as it was then called), Orange Public Library, Corona Public Library and the California State Library. She currently works from her home as an independent consultant to libraries.