CHAPTER 6

Preventing Reading Problems in the Early Grades

This chapter and the two that follow deal with reading instruction. Here I take up the teaching of beginning readers, and in Chapters 7 and 8, the teaching (or remediation) of older readers. I approach this task uneasily, with the words of my mentor in the back of my mind: "When a teacher writes about teaching, the principal problem for the reader is the fear that he will never stop" (Henderson, 1981, p. 124). Given the purpose of this book—that is, to provide perspective on a particular clinical approach—I will try hard not to overwhelm the reader with pedagogical detail. On the other hand, the teaching of reading is a craft and a degree of explicit explanation is necessary if I am to avoid recycling unhelpful generalities.

In the present chapter I describe a set of tutoring techniques or strategies that can be used with beginning readers. I go on to show how the various techniques can be combined and adjusted to meet the needs of beginning readers functioning at different developmental levels. Finally, I note briefly how the tutoring strategies can be adapted for small-group reading instruction in the primary-grade classroom. Before proceeding, however, let us consider a few preliminary concepts that will, I hope, lend structure and coherence to the discussion.

LESSON PLANS AND TEACHING TOOLS

The major task facing the teacher of a struggling, beginning reader is to pace the child efficiently through a set of graded reading materials, ensuring that he or she acquires sufficient word or orthographic knowledge along the way. However, the preceding statement begs the question of how the teacher is to accomplish the goal. For example, what instructional activities (e.g., guided reading, phonics, fluency drills, writing) are called for? How much time should be spent on each activity? And how does one know when to advance the learner to a higher (or more difficult) level?

Figure 6.1 depicts one way to think about these questions. Looking at the "learner" side of the figure, we see that instructional level and interest are key considerations. The *reading instructional level* is the difficulty level where the reader is challenged but not overwhelmed (see Chapters 3 and 4). *Reading interests* pertain to subjects preferred by an individual child (e.g., animals, outer space, mysteries, sports). Interest cannot be ignored because it spurs the effort that leads to learning.

Turning now to the "tutor" side of the figure, we find the concept of teaching tools. A skilled reading teacher is like a craftsperson with a toolbox. The craftsperson knows how to build, the teacher knows how to teach; still, each requires a good set of tools with which to work. The first component in the reading tutor's toolbox is a set of quality *reading materials*. These books should be interesting and well written, carefully leveled in difficulty (early-first through sixth grade), and should represent a variety of genres and subject areas. The second component in the tutor's toolbox is a set of *teaching techniques* that address various aspects of reading. For example, the tutor needs a few effective ways to teach word recognition, another set of techniques to teach reading fluency, and still another to teach comprehension.

The lesson plan, in the middle of Figure 6.1, is the "blueprint," or plan of action—the place where learner characteristics and tutor decision making come together. In devising a lesson plan, the tutor must choose activities that address

The learner	→	Lesson plan	←	The tutor
Reading instructional level		1. Activity (____ minutes)		Teaching tools
Reading interests		2. Activity (____ minutes)		• Reading materials
		3. Activity (____ minutes)		• Teaching techniques
		4. Activity (____ minutes)		

FIGURE 6.1. The mediation of teaching and learning through a lesson plan.

the learner's specific needs and also decide how much time to allot to each activity. For example, a 50-minute lesson plan for a young child might include guided oral reading (20 minutes), phonics (10 minutes), fluency drill (10 minutes), and being read to (10 minutes). For an older student, the 50 minutes might be allotted differently: silent reading comprehension (30 minutes), fluency drill (10 minutes), and writing (10 minutes). And it should go without saying that, in planning each lesson, the tutor must consider the reader's instructional level and interests.

The lesson plan is important for several reasons: (1) It affords the tutor an ongoing opportunity for reflection (e.g., whether to maintain or change a course of action); (2) it evolves over time, thereby providing a concrete record of the student's progress; and (3) as we will see in Chapter 9, it can serve as an important vehicle for communication between a tutor-in-training and his or her supervising clinician.

A TOOLBOX FOR TUTORING BEGINNING READERS

As noted, this chapter focuses on teaching beginning readers. Some of these children may know only a few printed words, others may be able to read simple preprimer texts, and a few may even read haltingly at the mid-first-grade level. Still, they are all beginners in need of support, and, for our purposes, there is a finite set of teaching tools (materials and techniques) from which a tutor can select in providing this support.

Reading Materials

The careful leveling of reading materials is crucially important in first grade, a nascent, tentative period of development. In our reading clinic, we have divided first-grade reading books into nine difficulty levels, corresponding roughly to the first-grade levels (*A* to *I*) of the Fountas and Pinnell system (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Book difficulty is determined by predictability of the text, amount of print on each page, and number of new vocabulary words. Table 6.1 shows how the nine book levels correspond to traditional basal reader levels.

Book Characteristics by Level

Books in levels 1 and 2 are characterized by predictable or repeating sentence patterns that provide needed support to the beginning reader (e.g., Rigby's *PM Starters* or Wright Group's *Story Box*). These books contain a good percentage of high-frequency words (e.g., *is, the, run, dog, can*), but they also contain lower-frequency words (e.g., *truck, grandpa, paddled, nose*) that are often accompanied

TABLE 6.1. A Comparison of the 9 First-Grade Book Levels with Traditional Basal Reader Levels

Book levels	Basal levels
Levels 1–2	Kindergarten
Level 3	Preprimer 1
Level 4	Preprimer 2[a]
Level 5	Preprimer 3
Levels 6–7	Primer[a]
Levels 8–9	Late first grade[a]

[a]Levels that are assessed on the First-Grade Reading Battery.

by a picture cue. Books in levels 3–5 are of two types: predictable texts and texts that tend to repeat a set of high-frequency words (e.g., Rigby's *PM Story Books*). As a group, the books in levels 1–5 have enough vocabulary control and repetition to help the child develop an initial sight vocabulary (75 or more known words). At the same time, the language patterns in these books are sufficiently "natural" to enable the reader to anticipate upcoming words in the text—to "read beyond the word" (Cunningham, Koppenhaver, Erickson, & Spadorcia, 2004, p. 28). By level 6, or primer level, the child has acquired a bit of reading independence. Books in levels 6–9 feature the natural language patterns and engaging story lines that are found in good first-grade basal readers or trade books (e.g., books by Syd Hoff, Arnold Lobel, or Edward Marshall).

Over the years, we have developed a book sequence that helps children progress through the first-grade reading levels (see Table 6.2). Of course, this is only

TABLE 6.2. A Sequence of First-Grade Reading Materials

Levels 1–2 (kindergarten)	Levels 3–5 (preprimer)	Levels 6–7 (primer)	Levels 8–9 (late first grade)
Wright Group's *Story Box* books	Rigby's *PM Story Books*	Rigby's *PM Story Books*	Random House's *Step into Reading*
Rigby's *PM Starters*	Wright Group's *Early Reading Intervention* books	Random House's *Step into Reading*	Rigby's *PM Story Books*
		Books by Mercer Mayer and Syd Hoff	Books by Arnold Lobel and Edward Marshall
		Pre-1990 basal readers (primer level)	Pre-1990 basal readers (1–2 level)

Note. See Appendix 6.1 for examples of individual book titles.

one of many possible first-grade book sequences, and experienced reading teachers will have their own. Nonetheless, it is a sequence that we have used successfully with many struggling first- and second-grade readers. Before leaving this topic, notice in Table 6.2 the inclusion of pre-1990 basal readers at the primer and late-first-grade (1–2) levels. We have found that these older basals (e.g., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980; Houghton Mifflin, 1986; Laidlaw, 1980) contain some good stories written in acceptable language. Moreover, they feature systematic word control (or repetition) that is not found in basal readers published since 1990.

Placing the Reader at the Correct Level

Remember that in our first-grade reading battery (see pp. 58–59), we administered reading passages at three levels: preprimer 2, primer, and late first grade. A child's performance on these passages directly informs instructional placement (see Table 6.1). For example, suppose Danny does poorly on the preprimer passage. The teacher begins his instruction at level 2, moving forward to level 3 if appropriate. A second child, Emily, reads the preprimer 2 passage easily but just misses instructional level (87% accuracy) on the primer passage. She is placed at level 5 for instruction. Finally, Curt reads the primer passage with 95% accuracy, but is frustrated on the late-first-grade passage. We start him off reading at level 7. Thus we see how initial passage-reading performance can be used to place a child at the appropriate first-grade reading level (1–9).

Teaching Techniques

Techniques or strategies for working with a beginning reader (emergent through mid-first-grade) fall within four areas: support reading, sight vocabulary, word study, and writing (see Table 6.3).

TABLE 6.3. Teaching Techniques for Working with a Beginning Reader.

Support reading	Sight vocabulary	Word study	Writing
Preview	Word bank	Beginning consonants	Sentence writing
Prediction questions		Word families (short vowels)	Partner writing
Plot-related questions		Short-vowel patterns	Independent writing
Echo reading			
Partner reading			
Independent reading			
Language experience			

Support Reading

The tutor can support the beginning reader in several ways: (1) by helping the child anticipate what is going to happen in the story; (2) by actually doing some of the reading, thereby modeling the process for the child; and (3) by providing difficult words quickly when the child is about to stumble. A tutor learns to provide such support through practice—but, make no mistake, its expert provision can make a huge difference to a child learning to read.

Comprehension Support

The tutor promotes comprehension of a story by previewing, eliciting predictions, and asking questions. Before reading, the tutor and child preview the first six to eight pages of the selection, discussing the pictures on each page and making guesses about the story line. This phase is sometimes referred to as a *picture walk* ("What do you think is happening in this picture, Beth? [*turning to the next page*] Now what do you think is happening?"). During the preview, the tutor may also point to and identify a few difficult words in the text. Then, tutor and child return to page 1 and begin to read. Done appropriately, a preview can provide important support. As the child reads, he or she can begin to "fill in" a mental outline, confirming or modifying expectations that were developed during the preview. This process reduces anxiety and makes the reading purposeful (see Clay, 1991b).

During the reading, the tutor may stop at certain points and ask the child for a prediction (e.g., "What do you think is going to happen next?"). The child's response provides a check on comprehension (i.e., we can infer understanding from a good prediction), but it also serves another function. Making a prediction tends to increase the reader's mental investment in the story; he or she wants to find out what happens ("Was I right?"). This investment often produces a more careful reading of the next few pages, which aids both comprehension *and* word recognition.

The picture walk and one or two prediction questions may suffice in reading short selections. However, with longer selections (e.g., mid-first grade), the tutor may need to intersperse a few additional questions. These plot-related questions, posed during the reading of the story, can address characters, setting, the problem facing the characters, and how it is resolved. The idea is to help the child follow the story line from beginning to end.

Print-Processing Support

The beginning reader faces a dilemma. He or she needs to read text in order to learn new words, but how does he or she read even simple texts when knowing very few words? Fortunately, there are time-honored ways to support children's

initial reading efforts, several of which use what Holdaway (1979) termed "memory support." In this section I describe a three-stage support strategy—a "scaffold," if you will—that allows even a nonreader (i.e., a child with very few sight words) to read simple texts.

Let us assume that Darren, a true beginning reader, is attempting to read a 12-page book with two lines of text per page. After previewing the book, the tutor and child return to page 1 and begin to *echo-read*. That is, the tutor reads aloud the first page, pointing to each word; then Darren echo reads the same page, again finger-pointing to the words. Pages 2 and 3 are read in the same echoic manner. On page 4, the child and tutor begin to *partner-read*, taking turns reading the next four pages (4–7). On reaching page 8, the tutor asks Darren to predict how the story will end. Then she says, "You know, I think you can read the rest of this story by yourself. If you run into trouble, I'll help." Darren proceeds to *read independently* the last five pages (8–12), with the tutor providing assistance on two words.

In the preceding example, echo reading of the first few pages served to introduce character names and the book's distinctive sentence patterning. In truth, the child would not have been able to read these initial pages without the full memory support offered by echo reading. The partner reading or turn taking on the middle pages continued to provide the child with support until he was ready to take over and read the last five pages by himself. And even then, he needed the tutor's help on two words. In this guided reading strategy, the tutor's job is to skillfully move from full support (echo) to partial support (partner) to limited support (independent), ensuring that the child is challenged, but not overchallenged, as he reads.

Echo, partner, and independent reading can be used together to support a reader with limited sight vocabulary. They can also be used separately or in different combinations. For example, in working with a primer-level reader (level 7 in our scheme), the tutor may use echo reading only to introduce the story. After echo reading the first two pages, the tutor stops and asks the child to predict what is going to happen next. From page 3 onward, the child reads independently, with the tutor providing assistance as needed. Stops are made every second page or so to check on comprehension and make further predictions. The echo or memory-supported reading on the first two pages is important because it gets the child "into the story," providing him or her with character names, setting, and preliminary information about the plot.

The tutor can also use partner reading for different purposes. It can be used to ease the child into a story; for example, the tutor reads the first page, the child reads the second page, and then a prediction is made. Or partner reading can be used to provide the child with a respite if he or she tires after reading several pages independently. The tutor's reading of alternate pages keeps the flow of the story going and, importantly, provides the child with a fluent model of oral reading.

A final word about "independent" reading is warranted. Beginners do not really read independently; they need help. They omit words, insert words, misread words, and sometimes stop abruptly when they meet a difficult word in the text. Knowing how to respond to their difficulties is at the center of the tutoring art. Unfortunately, no set of fixed rules or recommendations will work, because the reading situation changes from line to line, page to page, book to book. The basic idea is for the tutor to anticipate upcoming problems the child may face and provide help quickly when it is needed (see Morris, 2005a, pp. 121–125, for a fuller discussion).

Language Experience

Thus far we have considered how to support a child in reading leveled books. However, there is another time-honored way to introduce reading to beginners—the language-experience or dictated-story method (see Huey, 1968; Morris, 2003a; Stauffer, 1970). In this method the child dictates a short story (or personal experience) to the tutor, who writes down the sentences. Then, with the tutor's support, the child practices reading the dictated account until he or she can do so with some facility. The tutor's skill in using the language-experience method involves:

- Knowing the child's interests.
- Eliciting talk about one of these interests.
- Helping the child construct a coherent verbal account (beginning, middle, and end).
- Providing the appropriate amount of support that will allow the child to read back his or her dictation.

At this point, let us follow a child through a 3-day experience-story cycle. On *day 1*, Beth dictates a short account about losing a tooth. The tutor writes down the story and then reads it aloud, pointing to each word (see Figure 6.2). Next, Beth and the tutor choral-read the story, with the tutor again doing the finger pointing. Finally, armed with a "memory for the text," Beth reads the story by herself, requiring help on only one word (*when* in line 3). On *day 2*, Beth finger-point reads the story by herself after only one choral reading. And on *day 3*, she reads "My Tooth Fairy" independently with no support from the tutor. At the end of the day 3 reading, the tutor points randomly to a few words in the story to see whether Beth can read them (e.g., *not* in line 2, *my* in line 4). If she can, these words go into a sight word bank (see next section).

Once the child has dictated, read, and illustrated three or four experience stories according to the plan above, a *First Book* of dictations can be made. The tutor simply staples the four pages into a manila file folder (9″ × 12″) and has the

My Tooth Fairy

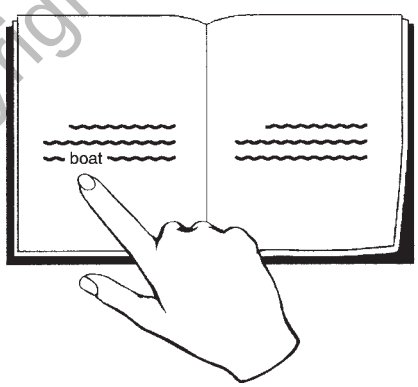
My tooth was loose. Then I kept loosening it till I pulled it. I put it under my pillow but it did not work. Then when I had another tooth loosened, I put it under my pillow. This time it worked. I got a dime and I spent it on candy.

FIGURE 6.2. Example of a language-experience story.

child provide an illustration for the cover. Such a book, which provides concrete evidence of progress, can be reread at home or in future tutoring lessons.

Sight Vocabulary

The *word bank* is a collection of known words culled from stories (leveled books or dictations) that the child has read. The word bank works in the following manner. After a story has been read several times, the tutor and child go back through the text, two pages at a time, "hunting" for sight words. The tutor randomly points to a few words and checks the quality of the child's word recognition. That is, if the child identifies the word immediately, the word is recorded on a 2″ × 3″ sight word card. If he or she has to use context to identify the word or attempts to sound it out, then the word is not recorded as a sight word. In checking for sight words, the tutor generally focuses on two word types: frequently occurring words (e.g., *to, is, and, went*) and pattern words (e.g., *ran, make, sit, like*).



boat

Over several weeks of tutoring, the number of words in the word bank increases—from 2 to 6 to 10 to 18. These sight words are flashed to the beginning

reader at the start of each lesson. If a given word is identified, it remains in the bank; if the child fails to read the word, it is removed from the bank. When there are 30 words in the bank, 20 of these known words are sent home, and the child starts working toward a new goal of 30 words.

Regular review of the word bank enables the child to practice a newly learned set of words and eventually store them in automatic memory. The child needs about 25 sight words to read comfortably at level 3 and 40 sight words to read comfortably at level 4. The word bank is usually discontinued at level 6 (early primer) when the child possesses a sight vocabulary of 70 or more words.

The word bank is both an instructional and diagnostic tool. The steady accumulation of words in the bank is a reliable sign of reading progress; conversely, unusual difficulty in establishing a core sight vocabulary is cause for concern.

Word Study

Written English is an alphabetic language in which a limited set of letters (26) map, in various combinations, to a limited set of sounds or phonemes (44). There is a letter–sound or orthographic system to be learned. Whereas a beginning reader may initially commit a few whole words to memory, to progress he or she must learn how to decode words, that is, attend to their letter–sound properties (e.g., *bat* = /b/-/ă/-/t/; *ship* = /sh/-/ĭ/-/p/). Many children learn to decode words in an effortless fashion, requiring minimal instruction. Others struggle mightily with this aspect of reading. In fact, a deficit in decoding or word recognition skill is at the heart of most serious reading problems.

Teaching a child how to decode words (word study) requires knowledge and skill. First, the tutor must understand the content or developmental continuum of word study (e.g., beginning consonants, short vowels, consonant clusters, long-vowel patterns, multisyllable words). Second, he or she must determine where the child needs to be taught along this continuum. And third, the tutor must have a method or procedure for teaching the various letter–sound relationships and spelling patterns.

There is agreement on what constitutes the basic *content* of a word study program (see Calfee, 1982; Henderson, 1990; Wilson, 1996). Table 6.4 shows a typical sequence of instruction. In the table, think of each element in a given column as representing a particular word pattern. For example, *-at* in the word-family column might stand for *cat, bat, sat*, and *flat*; *big* (short *i*) in the short-vowel column might stand for *big, hit, pin*, and *trip*; and *lake* in the vowel-pattern column might stand for *lake, made, name*, and *place*. The sequence of instruction depicted in the table moves from left to right. In fact, a child's learning of concepts further along the continuum (e.g., long-vowel patterns) will depend, in large part, on his or her mastery of concepts introduced earlier (e.g., word families, short vowels). In this chapter on beginning readers, our discussion

TABLE 6.4. Sequence of Word Study Instruction

Beginning consonants	Word families[a]	Short vowels	One-syllable vowel patterns	
b	-at	a hat	(a)	mat
c	-an			lake
d	-ap			park
f	-ack			tail
g				
h	-it	I big	(i)	kid
j	-in			ride
k	-ig			bird
(etc.)	-ick			light
ch	-ot	o top	(o)	job
sh	-op			rope
th	-ock			coat
wh				born
	-ed	e pet	(e)	leg
	-et			seed
	-ell			meat
	-ut	u rub	(u)	bug
	-ug			mule
	-ub			burn
	-uck			suit

[a]Consonant blends (*bl, dr, st*, etc.) are introduced at the word-family and short-vowel levels.

of word study focuses on the first three columns: beginning consonants, word families, and short vowels.

In *placing a student* along the word study continuum, we must keep in mind that aiming instruction too low (e.g., teaching beginning consonants when a child already knows these letter–sounds) wastes time and effort. On the other hand, aiming too high (e.g., teaching long-vowel patterns to a child who does not understand the basic short-vowel CVC [consonant–vowel–consonant] patterns) can produce frustration and, worse, confusion. Fortunately, it is not difficult to diagnose a child's word recognition level, particularly if we think in terms of broad conceptual levels (see Table 6.4) instead of discrete skills. We consider the placement issue in three case studies at the end of this chapter.

Regarding instructional *method*, we will use a word categorization or "word sorting" approach that was developed at the University of Virginia in the late 1970s and popularized in the textbook *Words Their Way* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2003; also see Henderson, 1990; Morris, 2005a). Word sorts, along with accompanying reinforcement games, can be used to teach the spectrum of word recognition concepts, from beginning consonants to multisyllable words.

At this point, some readers may be wondering why I have not yet mentioned phoneme or sound awareness, a prominent issue in beginning reading circles (see Blachman, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin,

1998). Researchers have argued that a child needs to be aware that a spoken word (e.g., /băg/) is composed of a sequence of sounds (/b/ /ă/ /g/) *before* he or she can be expected to match letters (*bag*) to sounds (/b/ /ă/ /g/) in the act of reading. I have no quarrel with this logic. However, I do believe the following: (1) phoneme awareness emerges not all of a piece, but in stages; (2) it need not be taught in isolation from print; and (3) there are a variety of ways to facilitate its development. In fact, as we see in the following sections, systematic word study or phonics instruction—attuned to the learner's developmental level—is one very effective way to teach phoneme awareness.

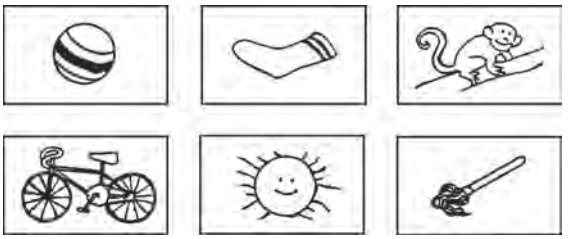
Beginning Consonants

The beginning consonant letter–sound is a very useful word recognition cue for the emergent reader, as in the following example:

> Me and my uncle use night crawlers to catch f_____.
>
> Saturday, we c_____ nine fish.
>
> They were little. W__ threw them back.

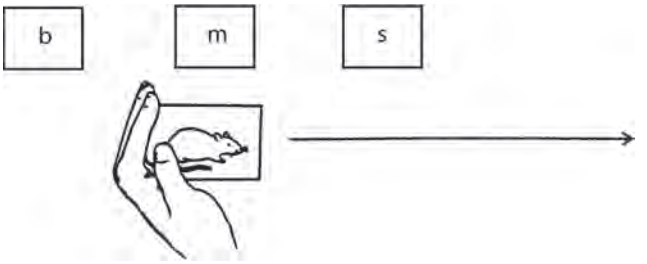
In this dictation example, it is easy to see how the beginning consonant letters, *f, c*, and *W*, could aid the child's contextual recognition of the words, *fish, caught*, and *We*. In fact, the use of beginning consonants along with sentence context has long been considered an effective word recognition strategy (Clay, 1991a).

An excellent activity for teaching beginning consonant discrimination is to have the child sort picture cards (spoken words) into categories by beginning consonant sounds. First, the tutor and child take turns sorting a dozen or so words (pictures) into three columns by beginning sound alone. It may take several lessons for the child to grasp the concept of segmenting off the beginning sound in a word (e.g., /b/ in /bīk/; /m/ in /mŏp/).



Once the child can reliably sort the words by beginning consonant sound, letter cards are brought out. Now the child sorts the words according to beginning consonant sound–letter match. The picture of a mouse is placed under the letter *m*, because its first sound is /m/. Similarly, a picture of a ball is placed under *b* and

a picture of a sock under *s*. A final step has the child write the consonant letters to dictation. The tutor dictates six sounds (e.g., /b/, /m/, /s/) or six words (e.g., *bear, sock, moon*), and the child writes the corresponding letter for each.



Once the child has learned the first set of consonants (*b, m,* and *s*), a second set (*c, f,* and *l*) is introduced. The same task sequence applies:

- Column sorting by beginning consonant sound.
- Column sorting by sound–letter match.
- Writing letters to dictation.

The child's learning rate will usually be faster on this second set of consonants. Nonetheless, there is no need to rush, and the tutor should ensure that the child is making fluent, accurate responses before moving on. A possible order for introducing the remaining consonants is:

b, m, s
c, f, l
t, g, r
j, p, v
k, n, d
w, z, h

Awareness of the beginning consonant in isolated words is an important starting point; however, the application of this knowledge in contextual reading is the ultimate goal. Thus if the child hesitates or misreads a word in context, *the tutor should point to the beginning consonant letter in the misread word, signaling the child to use this cue as he or she attempts to read the word.* The beginning reader's eventual internalization of this word recognition strategy (sentence context plus beginning consonant cue) is an important step forward.

The above discussion of beginning consonant instruction has ushered in the topic of phoneme awareness. Certainly beginning readers must be able to attend to individual sounds (phonemes) in words before they can match letters to these sounds (*Note*: This is why sound matching preceded sound–letter matching in the

instructional sequence described above.) Nonetheless, many reading educators wrongly equate phoneme awareness with full segmentation ability—that is, the child's ability to attend to each sound in a spoken word (e.g., /bĭt/ = /b/-/ĭ/-/t/). Instead, phoneme awareness is a complex, multilayered understanding that develops slowly. First, children become aware of the initial consonant sound in words (the /b/ in /bĭt/), later, the initial and ending sounds (/b/—/t/), and, finally, the consonants and the medial vowel (/b/ /ĭ/ /t/) (Ehri, 1998; Lewkowicz, 1980; Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, & Perney, 2003). At the outset, then, it makes good sense to prioritize beginning consonant discrimination and to teach this foundational skill carefully.

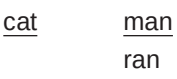
Word Families

After the child has mastered beginning consonants, the tutor introduces the next phase of word study: word families. Word families or short-vowel rhyming words are used because they provide an easy entry into word analysis. Knowing the word *man*, the child can decode a new word (e.g., *pan*) by simply changing the beginning consonant (/m/ to /p/) and then blending the consonant (/p/) with the vowel–consonant ending (/ăn/). Most beginning readers find this to be a doable task and, through word-family column sorts, games, and spell checks, they steadily develop sight vocabulary and decoding skill. That is, they learn to read many short-vowel words at sight (e.g., *cat, fan, sit, top*) and to decode or "sound out" others (e.g., *clap, tip, fed, shop*) that are not sight words.

To begin the initial word-family sort, the tutor places two word cards (*cat* and *man*) on the table and a deck of six more cards below (e.g., *sat, ran, pan, bat, fan, mat*).

If the child can read both *cat* and *man*, the sort can begin; if he or she can read only *cat*, the tutor must teach *man* before proceeding. (Drawing a small stick figure in the upper-right-hand corner of the *man* card is often helpful.)

After explaining that the words in the deck can be sorted under *cat* or *man*, the tutor picks up the top word in the deck (*ran*), places it under *man*, and reads the two words aloud—"man," "ran."



The child picks up the next word in the deck, *sat*, and places it incorrectly in the *-an* column. The tutor pauses for a moment and then says, "No, that one doesn't

go there." She moves *sat* into the *-at* column and reads the words aloud, "cat," "sat."

cat	man
	ran
←	sat

The tutor and child each take two more turns before the activity ends. (*Note*: Each time a word is sorted, the entire column is read from top to bottom.)

cat	man
sat	ran
bat	pan
mat	fan

What is being learned in this simple word-family sort? To what features is the child learning to attend? In sorting word families containing the same short-vowel sound, it is the *ending consonant* that actually cues the child as to which words belong in a given column.

cat	man
sat	
bat	

Bat goes under *cat* and *sat* because the words share the same final consonant letter–sound. Thus, the word-family sort leads the child to attend consistently to the end of the word—a first-time experience for many beginning readers. Note also that this attention to the ending consonant is the next step forward in phoneme awareness development.

After several lessons of sorting the same eight *-at* and *-an* words, the tutor introduces the *memory game*. Following a column sort, the tutor shuffles the eight cards and arrays them face down on the table, as shown below. The game begins with the child turning over two cards, reading them aloud, and checking for a word-family match (e.g., *cat* and *hat*). If there is a match, he or she can remove the two words from the table and take another turn. If there is no match, the child turns the cards back over, and the tutor takes a turn. The game is over when all the words have been removed from the table.

		cat	
hat			

The *memory game* is a perfect reinforcement activity. The format not only randomizes the words, requiring the student to read them out of column context, but also encourages the child to hold the short-*a* patterns in visual memory as he or she searches for matches on the table.

Spell checks are a second way to review and reinforce the short-*a* word families. The procedure is simple. After completing a column sort or game, the tutor scoops up the cards, leaving only two exemplars on the table.

cat	man

The tutor then proceeds to dictate four or five spelling words. As the child writes the words, he or she can use the exemplars on the table as a pattern reminder. On completion of the test, the tutor and child review the spellings and correct any mistakes.

mat
ran
sat
~~pat~~ pan

The spell check is an integral part of the word study lessons because it provides an alternative route or process for securing target patterns (in this case, short-*a* word families) in memory.

Once the student is comfortable with sorting, reading, and spelling the *-at* and *-an* families, a third family, *-ap*, is added.

hat	man	cap
rat	fan	lap
sat		
	clap	

On completion of the short-*a* word families (this may take several weeks), the tutor introduces short-*i* word families (see below), followed by short-*o*, short-*e*, and short-*u* families, in that order. Beginning consonant blends (e.g., *bl-*, *dr-*, and *st-*) and digraphs (e.g., *ch-*, *sh-*, and *th-*) are introduced early (with short *a* and *i*) and practiced throughout the word-family phase of instruction.

hit	pin	big
fit	win	pig
sit	tin	wig
bit	spin	twig

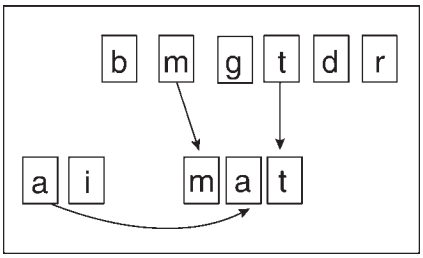


FIGURE 6.3. "Making words" with individual letters: a short-vowel lesson.

Now and again, a child may have trouble progressing through the word-family lessons. He or she may have difficulty attending to the individual letter–sounds within the short-vowel words or have difficulty committing the pattern words to sight memory. In either case, a drop-back teaching strategy ("make-a-word") is to have the child build and take apart short-vowel words using individual letter chips. After arraying eight consonants and two vowels on the table (see Figure 6.3), the tutor says to the child, "Make the word *mat*; now make *mad*; now *bad*; now *bag*; now *big*."

Or better still, the tutor might move the letters around and have the child read a sequence of tutor-constructed words. This format more closely approximates the decoding process. Keep in mind that "make-a-word" always takes place in the context of the specific short vowels being studied, for example, *a* and *i*. In this way, the tutor can provide the child with both an analytic (column sorting) and synthetic (making words) route to improving his or her recognition of short-vowel words.

In conclusion, word-family instruction serves as a bridge between beginning consonants and short-vowel patterns (see Table 6.4). By carefully teaching the short-vowel word families (*a, i, o, e*, and *u*), the tutor helps the student (1) increase his or her phoneme awareness, (2) learn about beginning consonant blends, and (3) acquire a small sight vocabulary of short-vowel words. This knowledge readies the learner for the next stage in word study—short-vowel patterns.

(*Note*: A more detailed description of short-vowel, word-family instruction can be found in Chapters 3 and 4 of *The Howard Street Tutoring Manual* [Morris, 2005a]. Also see Appendix 6.2 at the end of this chapter for a comprehensive list of short-vowel word families along with a suggested sequence of word sorts.)

Short-Vowel Patterns

Short-vowel words can be categorized in *families* or in *patterns*. In short-vowel word families, the vowel and ending consonant (*-at*) remain constant, as does the rhyme. In short-vowel patterns, only the vowel sound (/ă/) and the spelling pattern (CVC, CCVC) remain constant, thus presenting the child with a more difficult or abstract concept to learn.

Word family (-at)	*Vowel pattern (short-a)*
cat	cat
mat	bad
hat	tap
flat	plan

To begin short-vowel pattern instruction, the child must be able to read at least three words in each vowel category (*a, i, o, e*, and *u*). To identify known words, the tutor can flash a set of short-vowel words that were introduced in the previous word-family stage.

Known words	*New words*
cat	wag
tap	cab
flag	slap
big	hid
win	tip
hit	chin
job	dot
pot	log
mom	drop

The sort begins with the tutor placing three known words on the table to serve as exemplars. He or she also places three additional known words at the top of the sorting deck.

cat	big	job
	DECK	

The tutor explains that the words in the deck can be sorted under *cat, big*, or *job*. The idea is to find words that have the same vowel sound.

The child picks up the first word in the deck, *tap*, pronounces it, and places it in the short-*a* column under *cat*. The tutor follows by sorting *hit* under *big*; then the child again, sorting *pot* under *job*. After each sort, the tutor points out that words in the same column have the same vowel sound (/ă/, /ĭ/ or /ŏ/). Thus far, no problem; six words have been sorted, and *these were six that the child could already read*.

cat	big	job
tap	hit	pot
	DECK	

Now we come to the critical transfer phase of the task. Among the remaining 12 unsorted words in the deck are some *new* words; that is, the child has either misread them in the past or the tutor suspects that the words may not be in the child's sight vocabulary. As the child picks up the first "new" word (*tip*), the following scenario might unfold:

CHILD: I don't know this one.

TUTOR: See if you can put it in the right column.

CHILD: (*Places* tip *under* big, *cueing visually on the* i *in the middle of the word.*)

cat	big	job
tap	hit	pot
	(tip)	

TUTOR: (*pointing to* big) Read down the column and see if that helps you with the new word.

CHILD: "big" . . . "hit" . . . "t-i-p" . . . "tip."

TUTOR: "tip"—like the "tip" of your nose. Good!

CHILD: (*Picks up* log *from the top of the deck and quickly places it in the short* o *column.*) "job". . . "pot" . . . "l-og" . . . "log."

TUTOR: Nice going.

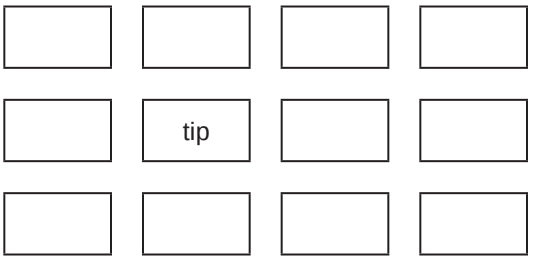
Note that the first two words in each column are *known words*. This strategy sets up a situation where each time the child is faced with decoding a new short-vowel word (e.g., *tip*), he or she can compare the new word to two known words that have the same visual pattern and vowel sound.

The sort continues, with the child and the tutor taking turns. Each time a word is sorted, all the words in that column are read aloud. This process consistently draws the child's attention to the spelling–pronunciation relationship, the *raison d'être* for sorting word cards.

cat	big	job
tap	hit	pot
wag	tip	log
cab	hid	drop
flag	chin	mom

After a few lessons, ending consonant blends and digraphs (e.g., *fast, lamp, rich, sock*) are introduced in the sort. Also, the tutor and child begin to play the

memory game, which is particularly useful at this point. After turning over a word card (see *tip*, below), the child must search his or her visual memory for matching short-*i* words that were turned over earlier in the game. This requires true concentration on short-vowel patterns, albeit within a gamelike activity.



Short *spell checks* provide the child with auditory–visual–kinesthetic practice of the various short-vowel patterns. After a completed sort, the tutor scoops up the word cards and dictates five or six spelling words. Initially, an exemplar for each pattern (e.g., *cat, big, job*) is left on the table to aid the child's spelling. After a few lessons, the exemplars are removed, forcing the child to spell the short-vowel patterns from memory. Each spell check concludes with the tutor and child correcting any misspellings and then graphing the results (e.g., five out of six correct).

Over a few weeks' time, the child will show some mastery of the *a*, *i*, and *o* short-vowel patterns, and a fourth pattern (*e*) can be introduced. A good way to do this is to contrast the new pattern with two of the old patterns:

hit	top	pet
hid	rob	red
rich	mom	beg
miss	lock	men
swim	drop	less

The introduction of only one new pattern focuses attention on the short-*e* words and at the same time allows for important review of the old *i* and *o* patterns.

Finally, it will be time to introduce the last short-vowel pattern (*u*). Again, the overlapping of old with new is appropriate:

job	red	bug
fog	met	sun
mop	hen	bus
spot	bell	rush
lock	mess	club

Timed trials are usually the last activity that is introduced. After shuffling 30–40 word cards (three to five patterns) into a deck, the tutor flashes the words to the child one at a time, stopping after 1 minute. The number of correct and incorrect responses is tallied, and a second trial is administered. Timed trials are motivating for the learner. They also provide useful information to the tutor because the number of short-vowel words read in 1 minute can be a sensitive indicator of progress.

It can be a long march from the initial two-column word-family sort (see p. 118) to the final timed trial on short-vowel words. Nonetheless, the short-vowel patterns (CVC, CCVC, CVCC), consistent and frequently occurring, need to be taught carefully. In fact, the child's mastery of these patterns is an important benchmark that sets the stage for future learning. Henderson (1990, p. 123) stated: "Success in learning [long-vowel patterns] will depend very much on the foundation that is built during the letter-name [short-vowel] stage of word knowledge."

Writing

The linguist Carol Chomsky (1971) once remarked that children should "write first, read later." She had observed that preschoolers who know the alphabet often construct or spell words by attending to their sequential sounds. Thus a young child might write KR for *car*, RID for *ride*, and YET for *went* (the letter name "y" being a sensible representation of the initial /w/ sound). Chomsky reasoned that early writing might play an important role in reading acquisition because it provides children with purposeful experience in analyzing the sequence of sounds in spoken words and in matching appropriate letters to these sounds (see Chomsky, 1979; Clay, 1991b; Ehri, 1989; Richgels, 2001).

The work of Henderson and his students (Henderson & Beers, 1980; Invernizzi & Hayes, 2004; Templeton & Bear, 1992) added to Chomsky's insight by describing a developmental path that beginning spellers take. As shown in Table 6.5, once children can write the alphabet letters, their early *semiphonetic (1)* spellings often include only the beginning consonant (B for *back*, S for *seat*). Later in this stage, *semiphonetic (2)*, they represent the beginning and ending consonants of one-syllable words (BK for *back*; ST for *seat*). In the next stage, *letter–name* (or *phonetic*), young spellers begin to represent vowels. They "sound their way" through the word to be spelled, making one-to-one sound–letter matches as they write. Long vowels are represented with the corresponding letter name (PLAT for *plate*, DRIV for *drive*). Short vowels are also represented with letter names, but, curiously, with those letter names that bear a phonetic similarity to the specific short-vowel sound. For example, the short-*i* and long-*e* sounds are articulated in a similar manner (the tongue is in a similar position in the vocal tract). When the child attempts to represent the short *i* in *fill*, he or she lacks a letter–name referent (there is no alphabet letter "ih"). Therefore, he or she tacitly chooses the nearest

TABLE 6.5. Developmental Spelling Stages

Word	Semiphonetic (1)	Semiphonetic (2)	Letter-name	Within-word pattern
back	B	BK	BAK	BAKC
seat	S	ST	SET	SETE
plate	P	PT	PLAT	PLAET
drive	J	JRV	DRIV	DRIAV
fill	F	FL	FEL	FIL
dress	J	JS	DRAS	DRES
float	F	FT	FLOT	FLOTE

long-vowel letter name, *e*, and spells *fill*, FEL. Other phonetically appropriate short vowel–letter name pairings are: *a* for short *e*; *i* for short *o*; and *o* for short *u* (see Read, 1971).

During the second half of first grade—that is, after extended opportunities to read and write—many children move into the *within-word pattern* stage. Here, they begin to spell short vowels correctly (FIL for *fill*; DRES for *dress*) and to mark long vowels (PLAET for *plate*; FLOTE for *float*), even though the vowel markers are often misplaced. Within-word pattern spellings, although still incorrect in the conventional sense, are a clear step forward developmentally. They indicate that children are abandoning their earlier conception of spelling as a one-to-one code (i.e., one sound = one letter), and instead are searching actively for the legitimate *patterns* of letters (CVC [*mat*]; CVCe [*lake*]; CVVC [*tail*]) that actually map the sounds of the spoken language to the spelling system.

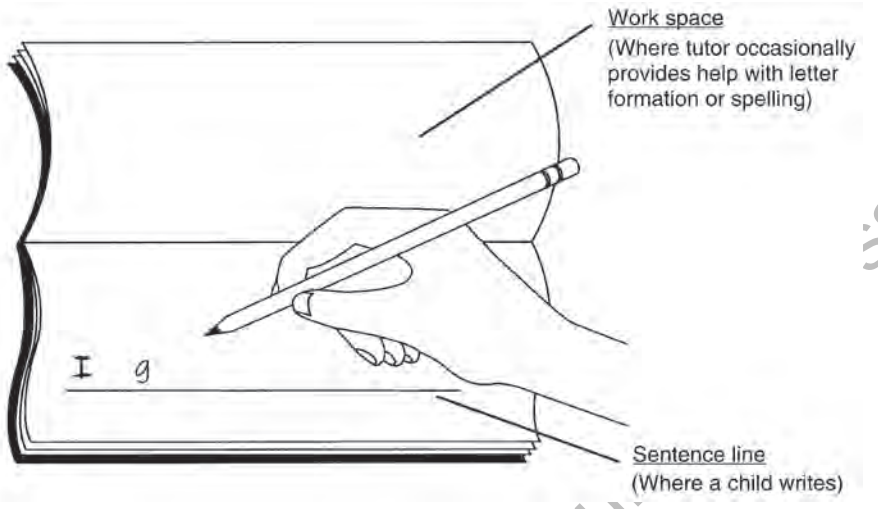
Early writing obviously serves a communicative function. However, from a reading teacher's perspective, it does more. First, writing with invented spellings provides the child with a meaningful context for developing phoneme awareness and exploring sound–letter relationships. Second, writing samples can provide the teacher with valuable diagnostic information. Because early writing—or at least its spelling component—tends to advance in stages, a student's developmental level can be identified and instruction crafted to meet his or her needs. In the sections that follow, I describe three tutoring strategies that do just that.

Sentence Writing

Sentence writing is a basic support-writing strategy that can be used with children who can read few words and have limited phoneme awareness (see Clay, 1993). It does help, however, if the child has some alphabet knowledge.

The child's task is to come up with a sentence and, with the tutor's help, write it down on paper. Topic possibilities are unlimited—friends, pets, hobbies, family

activities, school activities, and so on. In the example below, Ben, a first grader, chooses to write about the school bus.



As Ben begins to write, he pronounces each word slowly, trying to attend to its beginning sound. *It is critical that the child (not the tutor) say each word*; the child needs to feel his or her own articulatory movements, hear his or her own pronunciation, and search independently for the initial sound. In the first weeks of tutoring, Ben can represent only beginning consonants in his sentence writing:

I	G	N	the*	B	T	S.
(I	go	on	the	bus	to	school.)

In the preceding example, the tutor probes for the initial consonant sound on most of the words ("What sound do you hear at the beginning, Ben?"). Ben is hesitant but is able to "hear" and write the beginning consonants in most cases. When he hesitates on *the* (a high-frequency word), the tutor writes the word in the work space and lets the child copy it into his sentence ("This word comes up a lot, Ben; we need to learn it; 'the'—T-H-E.").

Three weeks later, Ben has become familiar with the sentence-writing routine. He has no trouble coming up with a sentence, segmenting the spoken sentence into word units, or writing down the beginning consonant for each word. At this point, the tutor decides to probe for additional letter–sounds in the writing. For example, "Ben, you heard the first sound in *dog* and wrote a *d*. Say *dog* slowly. What comes after the *d*?" (*Child says /daw-g/—/g/.)* "Good! What letter should we put down?" *(Ben writes a g.)* The same probe is used successfully with *can* and *flies*; the tutor provides the tricky *-ch* in *catch*. Notice in these examples that the act of writing led the child naturally to attend to individual sounds within

words. Notice also that when the tutor probed for additional sounds, she was actively teaching phoneme awareness.

M	D(G)	C(N)	CCH*	F(S).
(My	dog	can	catch	flies.)

Another month goes by. Ben's sentence-writing ability is progressing nicely. He now knows several high-frequency spellings (e.g., *the, is, and, like, my*) and consistently writes the beginning and ending consonants in words. The tutor decides it is time to probe for medial vowels.

BUCK	F( )L	OF	HZ	B( )K	AND	GT	HRT.
(Buck	fell	off	his	bike	and	got	hurt.)

In Ben's sentence about his older brother Buck, the tutor probes for the long-vowel sound in *bike* and the short-vowel sound in *fell*. First, she sketches a "sound box" in the work space above the child's writing.

TUTOR: (*pointing to the sound box*) Ben, you got the beginning and ending letters in *bike*. Say the word slowly and try to hear another sound in the middle.

BENJAMIN: /b —ī — k/; /b —ī — /. It's an *i*.

TUTOR: Good! Why don't you change your spelling? (*Ben changes the spelling BK to BIK.*)

Ben is led through a similar routine with *fell*. He is able to "hear" the medial /ĕ/ sound but says the letter should be *a*. The tutor, at this point, accepts Ben's response; after all, the short-*e* sound does bear a phonetic resemblance to the letter name, *a*.

The sound box provides a visual representation of the spoken word, in effect freezing the word's sequential speech sounds for analysis (Clay, 1993; Elkonin, 1973). The success of this teaching strategy depends on the child's developmental readiness to perceive the medial vowel sounds. The issue cannot be forced. If the strategy does not work the first time it is tried, patience is required. More reading, writing, and word study will eventually ready the child for vowel awareness, a crucial step forward in reading acquisition.

*Throughout, an asterisk indicates that the tutor assists the child in spelling the word.

Sentence writing is an important part of an emergent reader's tutoring program. It helps the child to develop sound awareness and letter–sound knowledge in the context of purposeful writing. Sentence writing at this stage is not uncomplicated, requiring concentrated effort from the child and thoughtful, moment-to-moment support from the tutor. Still, it is worth the effort. Over time, the daily writing notebook (unedited) will provide the clearest and most persuasive evidence of the emergent reader's growth in word knowledge. Note Ben's development in the few examples cited above:

September

I G N the* B T S.

October

M DG CN CCH* FS.

November

BUCK FAL OF HZ BIK AND GT HRT.

Partner Writing

Partner writing is a bridge between supported sentence writing and the independent writing of stories. It is generally used with preprimer-level readers who can spell phonetically but lack the fluency or stamina to write stories independently.

In partner writing, as in partner reading, the child and tutor take turns. After a short prewriting discussion, Lupe proceeds to write her first sentence (see Figure 6.4). Then she dictates the next sentence to the tutor, who writes it down. Lupe writes sentence 3 and the tutor serves as scribe on sentence 4. Note that all four sentences are composed by the child although she writes only the first and third.

After all four sentences have been written, Lupe reads the story back. Next, the tutor may have her focus on certain words that have been misspelled. These are usually high-frequency words (e.g., HAV for *have*; WON for *one*) or short-vowel patterns (e.g., BET for *bit*) that have been covered in previous word study lessons.

Partner writing is obviously an extension of sentence writing. The child takes responsibility for writing two sentences instead of one; in addition, his or her

Lupe: I HAV A PET HAMSTR.

Tutor: I like to take him out of the cage.

Lupe: WON DAY HE BET ME ON THE FEGR.

Tutor: He is fuzzy and sweet, but if you make him mad he can bite you.

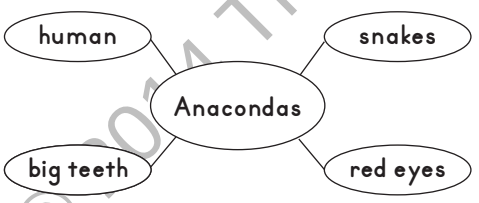
FIGURE 6.4. Example of partner writing.

selection and sequencing of all four sentences is good preparation for the next stage—independent writing of stories.

Independent Writing

Beginning readers will differ as to when they are able and willing to write independently. A child struggling to hear the individual sounds in words does not usually find story writing to be an appealing task. Nonetheless, when the child achieves a late-preprimer or primer reading level (i.e., has a core sight vocabulary and can spell phonetically) then he or she should be encouraged to write independently.

An independent writing activity has three phases: prewriting, writing, and postwriting. In the *prewriting* phase, the child self-selects a topic and, with the tutor's assistance, brainstorms ideas about this topic. Dalton, a second-grade child reading at the primer level, is very interested in snakes. He chooses to write about anacondas. As Dalton eagerly recounts some characteristics of this tree-dwelling snake, the tutor fills in a story map (see below). Notice that, in filling in the map, the tutor writes down only one or two words for each idea mentioned by Dalton.



With the brainstorming completed, the tutor effects a transition into the *writing* phase.

TUTOR: Okay, Dalton, how are we going to start your story about anacondas? What's your first sentence going to be?

DALTON: Anacondas are big and have red eyes.

TUTOR: That's good! But shouldn't we start off by telling the reader of your story that anacondas are snakes? Some people might not know.

DALTON: Yeah.

Dalton proceeds to write the first sentence and then, referring to the story map, writes several more sentences about anacondas. As he writes (see Figure

6.5), the tutor writes her own story about a long-ago encounter with a black snake.

Dalton begins the *postwriting* phase by going back and reading his story aloud. In doing so, he spontaneously inserts a period after MONKYS in line 2 and corrects the spelling of LIV in line 3. Aside from these changes, he seems quite satisfied with his piece. The tutor has two objectives in this postwriting phase: (1) to help the child improve or clarify the content of the writing sample, and (2) to help him correct mechanical errors such as punctuation and spelling. Nonetheless, the tutor proceeds very cautiously in providing feedback. In fact, she starts off by telling Dalton how much she likes his story, particularly his vivid descriptions of the anaconda (e.g., "eyes as red as a monkey's"; "live in water and will eat anything they see moving").

Regarding revision of content, the tutor might ask Dalton where anacondas live—North Carolina, the United States, another continent? Or she might ask him how the snake kills its prey. If the child is unsure about the answers to these questions, a quick visit to the encyclopedia might be helpful (in fact, anacondas live in tropical South America and suffocate their prey). If Dalton chooses to add information to his account, he can write a new sentence at the bottom of the page and use an arrow to show where the sentence should be inserted in his story.

Regarding editing, the tutor might call Dalton's attention to a missing period in line 3. She might also have him focus on his misspellings of *water* and *anything*, because these are frequently occurring words that he needs to learn to spell. With revision and editing completed, the tutor types up the story (correcting spelling and punctuation), has Dalton illustrate it, and sends the finished product home with the child.

This brings to an end our discussion of a toolbox of materials and methods that can be used in working with beginning readers. In the case studies that follow, we will see how these tools can be adapted or combined in various ways to meet the needs of beginners functioning at different levels of reading proficiency.

Anacondas are big snakes. They are
very long and have eyes as red as a MONKYS
anacondas LIV in WATR they will eat ENETHING
they see MOOVING. They have big TETH and
they will eat a human.

FIGURE 6.5. Example of independent writing.

CASE STUDIES

In this section, we encounter three cases representing different levels of beginning readers: emergent, preprimer, and primer. Each case includes (1) characteristics of the reading level, (2) initial diagnostic information, (3) a lesson plan that draws selectively from the toolbox of materials and teaching techniques, and (4) a description of the initial tutoring lesson along with brief commentary on later lessons.

The Emergent Reader

Characteristics

The emergent reader, or true beginner, knows most of the alphabet letters but may be unable to attend to even the beginning consonant sound in spoken words. Such a beginner possesses few sight words (3–10) and may have difficulty finger-point reading (i.e., matching spoken words to printed words in the act of reading). This is obviously a fragile stage in reading development—one that calls for careful tutor support. The emergent reader needs to read and reread simple texts in order to firm up finger-point reading skill and establish an initial sight vocabulary. He or she also needs to engage in word study and sentence writing to develop rudimentary decoding skills (e.g., the beginning consonant letter–sound) that can be applied in reading text. In our materials scheme, the emergent reader starts off reading level 1 books.

Initial Diagnostic Results

After 5 months in kindergarten, Antonio had made little reading progress. Tested by the school-based reading teacher, he achieved the following scores on the first-grade reading battery (see Table 6.6). Antonio could read only three of the 20

TABLE 6.6. Case Summary Sheet of an Emergent Reader (*Antonio—First Grade*)

	Word recognition		Oral reading			
	Flash	Untimed	Accuracy	Comprehension	Rate	Spelling
Emergent			—			
Preprimer	—	15				
Primer						
Late first grade						0

words (15%) on the preprimer word recognition list (*cat, me*, and *go*). Although he could not read the preprimer passage, he was able—with the tutor modeling—to echo read a simple level 2 passage (four words on each page). No score for oral reading accuracy was recorded. On the first-grade spelling task, Antonio was able to represent the beginning consonant on seven of the 10 words. (*Note*: J or /j/ is an acceptable phonetic substitution for the first part of the /dr/ blend in *drop* and *drive*.)

trap		bump	B
bed	B	drive	J
wish		plane	P
sister	S	ship	
drop	J	bike	B

As a precaution, the tutor assessed Antonio's alphabet knowledge; he was able to name 24 of the 26 lowercase letters.

Overall, the diagnostic results show a child at the very beginning stages of learning to read. Alphabet knowledge is a relative strength, but in terms of sight vocabulary, contextual reading ability, and phoneme awareness, Antonio is at the starting gate.

Lesson Plan

The lesson plan for the emergent reader draws from each of the areas in the tutor's instructional toolbox.

- *Reading materials*: level 1 and 2 books
- *Support reading*: echo- and partner-reading of leveled books; also independent rereading of these books
- *Sight vocabulary*: establishment of a word bank
- *Word study*: review of beginning consonant letter–sounds before moving to short-vowel word families
- *Writing*: sentence writing with tutor support

These materials and teaching activities are combined into a set lesson plan (35 minutes) that includes four parts:

1. Rereading three leveled books
2. Word study
3. Sentence writing
4. Introduce new book

The four parts of Antonio's lesson plan are interrelated. The knowledge gained through finger-point reading the simple texts (e.g., attention to the spoken word–written word match, use of beginning consonant cues, sight vocabulary) is applied in the sentence-writing activity. Conversely, the letter–sound knowledge that is exercised in the sentence writing is applied in the book reading. Even the seemingly isolated phonics work in Part 2 of the lesson is immediately put into practice each time the student finger-point reads a book or invents spellings in the sentence writing. The result is an integrated tutorial lesson that melds whole-to-part and part-to-whole learning in a meaningful way. (*Note*: Parts 1, 3, and 4 of the lesson were first introduced by Clay, 1993, in her Reading Recovery program. The word study activity in the second part can be traced back to the work of Henderson, 1990.)

The First Tutoring Lesson

1. *Rereading books* (12 minutes). (Actually, this is the second lesson because there could be no rereading of books in the very first lesson.) Antonio does a nice job rereading three level 1 books (see example in Figure 6.6). The tutor provides help on a few words, sometimes having Antonio use the picture as a word recognition cue (e.g., see picture of *toes* in the figure). Antonio's finger-point reading is erratic. However, when he occasionally mismatches spoken word to printed word,

FIGURE 6.6. Two pages from *In the Mirror* (Cowley, 1986a). Copyright 1986 by McGraw Hill Education. Reprinted by permission.

he is able to self-correct by going back and rereading the line. After the child finishes reading each eight-page book, the tutor goes back and points to individual words on several pages. Antonio cannot identify the words immediately, but he is able to return to the beginning of the line and finger-point over to the target word. (*Note*: These contextually identified words are not counted as sight words.)

2. *Word study* (8 minutes). Antonio sorts spoken words (picture cards) into columns by beginning consonant sound (e.g., /b/, /m/, and /s/). (See pp. 116–118 for a description of beginning consonant sorts.) He sorts the words tentatively but accurately. Antonio seems able to attend to the beginning consonant sound in a word. As his speed and confidence improve in this activity, sound–letter matching will be added.

3. *Sentence writing* (8 minutes). In response to the tutor's query, "What did you do over the weekend," Antonio produces the following sentence:

We*	P	K	aNd*	R.
(We	played	cops	and	robbers.)

With concentration, he is able to write the beginning consonant letter for each word. The tutor probes for an ending sound in *played*, but to no avail. After Antonio reads his sentence aloud, the tutor helps him complete the correct spellings of the high-frequency words, *We* and *and*.

4. *Introduce a new book* (7 minutes). Antonio and the tutor preview the first six pages of a new book (*Yuk Soup*; Cowley, 1986b), naming the pictures on each page. Next, they return to the beginning and echo-read the first two pages (i.e., tutor reads, then child reads). With the sentence pattern established ("In go some snails/ In go some feathers/ In go . . . "), Antonio attempts to finger-point read the remaining six pages. Relying on the sentence pattern and the picture cues, he does a good job, coming "off the track" on only one page. (*Note*: This new book will be one of the three books reread at the beginning of the next lesson.)

The Next Lesson

The next lesson builds directly on the one just described. Antonio rereads three books, sorts the same three beginning consonant sounds, writes a new sentence, and, with the tutor's help, reads a new level 1 book.

Two Months Later

After 2 months or 18 tutoring lessons, Antonio has progressed nicely. He now has a sight vocabulary of 25 words, which are reviewed at the start of each lesson.

He reads level 3 books independently, skillfully using beginning consonant and picture cues as word recognition aids. In word study, Antonio has progressed to the next stage—short-vowel word families (see pp. 118–121). He is fairly fluent in sorting short-*a* word families (*-at*, *-an*, and *-ap*) into columns, and he has committed a half dozen of these words to sight memory. In sentence writing, Antonio has become consistent in representing the ending consonant sound in his spellings; however, he still has difficulty attending to medial vowel sounds in words he wants to write.

I	WT	TO	BNS	HS	YSDRDAY*
(I	went	to	Ben's	house	yesterday.)

Overall, we can say that this emergent reader has made important steps forward. Antonio's sight vocabulary, phoneme awareness, and contextual reading skill have advanced significantly, as has his confidence in himself as a reader. What he needs is additional reading practice and word study in the presence of a knowledgeable, supportive tutor.

The Preprimer Reader

Characteristics

The preprimer (or early-first-grade) reader has a small sight vocabulary of 25–40 words, reads in a halting, word-by-word fashion, and spells phonetically, representing beginning and ending consonants and sometimes the medial vowel. Although more skillful and independent than the emergent reader, the preprimer reader still requires systematic instruction in contextual reading and word study. Immediate goals are to increase sight vocabulary and phoneme awareness, learn the short-vowel spelling patterns, and improve contextual reading fluency.

Initial Diagnostic Results

Tested in January of first grade, Barbara achieved the following scores on the First-Grade Reading Battery (see Table 6.7). Her flash score on the preprimer word list was 50%, but she could read only three of the 20 words (15%) on the primer list. Barbara's contextual reading followed the same pattern. She was able to read the preprimer passage with 92% accuracy, but was frustrated when reading the primer passage (78%).

Barbara's spelling score (0% correct) is a bit misleading because it fails to reflect the quality of her misspellings (note that the previous case study, Antonio also achieved a 0% score on the spelling task).

trap	TAP	bump	BP
bed	BAD	drive	JIV
wish	W	plane	PAN
sister	SDR	ship	CHP
drop	JP	bike	BIK

These spellings reveal considerable phoneme awareness, as Barbara consistently represents beginning and ending consonant sounds and a few medial vowels. She represents several long vowels with the corresponding letter name (e.g., JIV for *drive*; PAN for *plane*) and makes a sensible letter–name substitution for the short *e* sound in *bed* (i.e., BAD). She obviously lacks knowledge of consonant clusters (e.g., *sh, tr, pl*). Barbara needs to improve her awareness of medial vowel sounds and eventually learn the conventional spellings of short vowels. The more abstract long-vowel patterns can wait.

Although this child has fallen a bit behind her peers at the midpoint in first grade, she is ready to "take off" in reading. For the tutor, placing Barbara at the correct reading level (4) and word study level (short vowels) is the first order of business.

Lesson Plan

The lesson plan for the preprimer reader draws from the instructional toolbox in the following manner:

- *Reading materials*: level 4 books
- *Support reading*: mostly independent reading of these books, with the tutor providing assistance when needed
- *Sight vocabulary*: acquisition and review of sight words
- *Word study*: short-vowel word families (*a, i, o, e*, and *u*, in that order)
- *Sentence writing*: writing a sentence with tutor support, eventually evolving into partner writing of four-sentence accounts

TABLE 6.7. Case Summary Sheet of a Preprimer Reader (*Barbara—First Grade*)

	Word recognition		Oral reading			
	Flash	Untimed	Accuracy	Comprehension	Rate	Spelling
Emergent						
Preprimer	50	70	92			
Primer	15	30	78			
Late first grade						0

In structure, Barbara's lesson plan is identical to that used with Antonio, the emergent reader. The four parts of her lesson (rereading three books, word study, sentence writing, and reading a new book) are described in the section that follows.

The First Tutoring Lesson

1. *Rereading books* (14 minutes). (Again, this is the second lesson because there would be no books to reread in Lesson 1.) Barbara finger-point reads the first two level 4 books with ease. On the third book, *Seagull Is Clever* (Randell, 1996c; see Figure 6.7), she has trouble getting started, and the tutor decides to echo-read the first two pages. Given this support, Barbara is able to read the remaining eight pages independently, requiring help on only two words (*waves, shellfish*).

Barbara's finger-point reading is accurate, and she skillfully uses the beginning consonant letter–sound as a word recognition cue. After each book is read, the tutor goes back and points to individual words on several pages. Barbara is able to read several of the words immediately (e.g., *is, fish, not, up*). The tutor jots down these words and later places them in Barbara's word bank, which is reviewed at the start of each lesson.

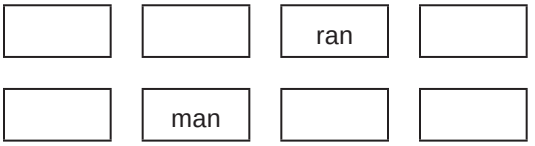
2. *Word study* (8 minutes). The tutor and child begin by sorting short-*a* rhyming words into three families.

hat	man	cap
pat	can	lap
sat	ran	tap
bat	fan	nap

Seagull is a big bird.
He is hungry.
He is looking for fish.

FIGURE 6.7. Two pages from *Seagull Is Clever* (Randell, 1996c). Copyright 1996 by Thomson Learning Australia. Reprinted by permission of Cengage Learning Australia.

Barbara has no trouble sorting the words into columns, and she can read down the columns, slowly but accurately (e.g., "hat—pat—sat—bat"). The tutor decides to play a memory game (see p. 119) in which the child has to visually remember pattern matches (e.g., *man—ran*). Barbara has some difficulty reading the word cards that she turns over, leading the tutor to think that they should spend more time on column sorting before playing the memory game.



3. *Sentence writing* (8 minutes). Barbara chooses to write a sentence about her dog, Barney. Initially, she spells with beginning and ending consonants only, leaving out the medial vowel in words (e.g., DG for *dog*; CN for *can*). The tutor decides to go back and probe for medial vowels:

MY	DG	C( )N	CH	A	B(O)N.
(My	dog	can	catch	a	bone.)

TUTOR: Barbara, let's look at your spelling of *bone* You got the beginning and ending sounds. I want you to say *bone* slowly and see if you can hear a sound right after the B. Say *bone* slowly.

BARBARA: /b —ō — n/. I hear *o*.

TUTOR: Good! Let's put an *o* in your spelling of *bone*.

The tutor tries the same strategy with the word, *can*, but this time Barbara is unable to attend to the /ă/ sound in the middle of the word.

4. *Introduce a new book* (5 minutes). Barbara and the tutor preview the first six pages of a new level 4 book (*Father Bear Goes Fishing*; Randell, 1996a), using the pictures to help predict the story line. After echo-reading the first two pages of the book, Barbara reads the remaining pages by herself. Her reading is halting, but she requires the tutor's help on only two words (*here* and *shouted*). Level 4 books provide appropriate challenge for this child.

The Next Lesson

Barbara rereads three books, the third being *Father Bear Goes Fishing*, which she reads with more confidence today. She sorts the same three short-*a* word families, writes a new sentence (the tutor again probes for medial vowels), and reads a new level 4 book.

Two Months Later

After 17 lessons, Barbara has made significant progress. She now has 50 words in her word bank (30 mastered words were sent home, and she is now working on her second set of 30). With the larger sight vocabulary and a newfound ability to "sound through" words (e.g., /d/-/ĭ/-/sh/), she is a more independent reader. Barbara is comfortable reading level 5 books and, in a week or so, should move up to level 6.

In word study, Barbara has worked through the short-*a*, -*i*, and -*o* word families and is ready to begin work on short *e*. Through the word-family sorts and games, she has increased her phoneme awareness (attention to the medial vowel), learned some consonant clusters, and committed a good number of short-vowel words to sight memory.

pet	red	tell
let	bed	sell
wet	led	fell
jet	sled	bell
get	shed	shell

In sentence writing, Barbara is now consistent in including the medial vowel in her spellings. However, she does not always use the correct letter to represent short vowels (e.g., SLAD for *sled*), and she seldom marks long vowels with an extra letter (e.g., CON for *cone*). Although long-vowel patterns have not yet been introduced in the tutoring lessons, short-vowel patterns have, and the tutor holds Barbara responsible for spelling short vowels conventionally. For example, in the sentence below, the tutor goes back and has the child attend to the misspelled vowel in *chicks* and the omitted consonant in *Friday*. In each case, she is able to correct the spelling.

I	GOT	FIV	CHEKS	ON	FIDAY.
I	got	five	chicks	on	Friday.

Given Barbara's progress, the tutor is considering a move to *partner writing*, where the child and tutor combine to write a four-sentence story (see p. 129). Such a change seems warranted, although it may add a few minutes to the writing portion of the lesson.

To sum up, Barbara is moving forward in reading. Her steadily increasing sight vocabulary and emerging knowledge of consonant blends and short-vowel patterns are very positive signs. Moreover, the child feels her growing skill as a reader and is investing herself fully in the tutoring lessons. Given time and continued work, she will learn to read.

The Primer Reader

Characteristics

The primer (or mid-first-grade) reader is qualitatively different from the preprimer reader. The primer reader possesses a large sight vocabulary (100+ words), well-developed phoneme awareness, and some knowledge of short-vowel spelling patterns. He or she uses context skillfully and has more reading stamina (i.e., can read longer stretches of text before tiring). The primer reader requires occasional word recognition assistance, but the most helpful tutor support is that which allows the child to anticipate meaning as he or she reads

Initial Diagnostic Results

Tested in the second month of second grade, Curtis achieved the following scores on the First-Grade Reading Battery (see Table 6.8). His flash word recognition score was strong on the preprimer list (90%) and borderline instructional on the primer list (60%). Similarly, he was able to read the preprimer passage with ease (98% accuracy) and attained an instructional-level score (93% accuracy) on the primer passage. Curtis was clearly frustrated at the late-first-grade level, scoring 35% on flash word recognition and 85% on oral reading accuracy.

Curtis spelled almost half (40%) of the 10 first-grade spelling words correctly, demonstrating some knowledge of short-vowel patterns and consonant blends (e.g., BED, TRAP, DROP). However, his six misspellings revealed gaps in short-vowel knowledge (e.g., WESH for *wish*; BOP for *bump*) and little awareness of long-vowel patterns (e.g., DRIV for *drive*; PLAN for *plane*; and BIK for *bike*).

trap	TRAP (c)	bump	BOP
bed	BED (c)	drive	DRIV
wish	WESH	plane	PLAN
sister	SISTR	ship	SHIP (c)
drop	DROP (c)	bike	BIK

TABLE 6.8. Case Summary Sheet of a Primer Reader (*Curtis—Second Grade*)

	Word recognition		Oral reading			
	Flash	Untimed	Accuracy	Compre-hension	Rate	Spelling
Emergent						
Preprimer	90	95	98			
Primer	60	80	93	100		
Late first grade	35	60	85	75	37	40

Overall, these test results reveal a child who has fallen a half year behind. At the start of second grade, Curtis is reading and spelling at a primer or mid-first-grade level.

Lesson Plan

The lesson plan for the primer reader draws from the instructional toolbox in a slightly different manner.

- *Reading materials*: level 7 books (trade books or basal readers written at the primer level)
- *Support reading*: guided oral reading of these books, with an emphasis on comprehension; also, reading of easier, level 6 stories to develop fluency
- *Word study*: review of short-vowel patterns and introduction of long-vowel and *r*-controlled patterns
- *Writing*: partner writing of four-sentence accounts evolving into independent story writing by the child

The structure of the lesson plan changes when a child reaches the primer reading level.

Preprimer lesson plan (35 minutes)	*Primer lesson plan (45 minutes)*
1. Rereading books (14)	1. Guided reading of new story (18)
2. Word study (8)	2. Word study (10)
3. Sentence writing (8)	3. Easy reading *or* story writing (10)
4. Introduce new book (5)	4. Tutor reads to child (7)

Whereas the preprimer lesson begins with the rereading of three short books, the primer lesson begins with the guided reading of a new, primer-level story each day. Rereading of a book can occur in Part 3 of the primer lesson, but "easy reading" usually means that the child reads a new, less challenging text (e.g., level 6) to help develop fluency and confidence. It can be difficult to fit both easy reading and story writing into Part 3 of the lesson. Some tutors, therefore, alternate these activities on a weekly basis—that is, easy reading one week, story writing the next. To sum up, there is less rereading of books in the primer lesson plan and a bit more emphasis on comprehension. Writing is still an important lesson component, but it does not occur each day.

The First Tutoring Lesson

1. *Guided reading* (18 minutes). Curtis and the tutor begin by previewing the first 10 pages of *Pepper's Adventure* (Randell, 1996b), a level 7 book. (*Note*: There are 15

pages in the book, with full-page pictures beside full pages of text; see Figure 6.8.) During the preview, Curtis uses the pictures to predict what is going to happen in the story; he says, "The little mouse is gonna get loose, but the kids will find him."

Returning to the beginning of the story, the tutor and Curtis echo-read the first page of text. This step serves to introduce the names of the mice (Pepper and Salt) and the lead character (Sarah). From this point on, Curtis reads the story by himself. He needs help with a few words (e.g., *upstairs, sorry, hiding*), but overall his oral reading is accurate and includes stretches of appropriate phrasing. At three points in the story, the tutor stops and asks Curtis what has happened thus far and what will happen next (e.g., "How did Pepper get free?" "What might happen to him in the yard?"). The child's answers are appropriate, and his predictions lead him to read the following pages with interest and concentration. Level 7 is the correct reading level for Curtis: not too easy, not too hard.

2. *Word study* (10 minutes). The tutor decides to review short-vowel patterns with Curtis to assess his mastery of consonant clusters and short vowels. She begins by flashing 20 short-vowel words to Curtis, one at a time. He reads 17 of the words correctly (e.g., *lap, flag, bit, trip, job, shot*), misreading only three words ("hide" for *hid*; "gin" for *grin*; "cloak" for *clock*).

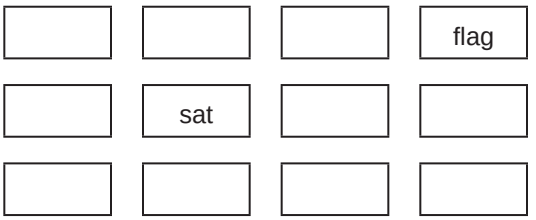
The tutor shuffles the 20 word cards, placing the three words Curtis missed (*hid, grin*, and *clock*) on the bottom of the deck. Then, she and Curtis proceed to sort the words into three short-vowel categories:

bag	hit	top
sat	big	not
flag	trip	job
lap		
		shot

Dad made a big new cage
for Pepper and Salt.
It had a wheel and a ladder
and a room upstairs.
Sarah played with the mice a lot,
and so did Nicky from next door.
"Don't take them outside,"
said Mom.

FIGURE 6.8. Two pages from *Pepper's Adventure* (Randell, 1996b). Copyright 1996 by Thomson Learning Australia. Reprinted by permission of Cengage Learning Australia.

Curtis reads and sorts the words correctly, even the three words he originally missed on the flash assessment. The tutor and child follow up with a short memory game, and again Curtis shows good knowledge of these short-vowel patterns. If he continues to perform in this manner, the review of the five short-vowel patterns should take only a few weeks.



3. *Easy reading* (10 minutes). The tutor brings out a level 6 book. After a short preview, Curtis reads the book independently. The tutor stops the reading at two points to ask the child to make a prediction. Curtis actually guesses the outcome of the story and is quite pleased with himself on seeing his prediction borne out.

There is time left over, so the tutor asks Curtis to think of topics he would be willing to write about next week. He decides on three: baseball, dirt-track car races, and his pet rabbit.

4. *Read to Curtis* (7 minutes). The tutor reads aloud the first half of Molly Bang's *Wiley and the Hairy Man* (1987). Curtis listens attentively, commenting on the story at several points. This read-aloud time serves as an apt reward for Curtis's diligent effort; it is also a pleasant way to end the lesson.

The Next Lesson

Curtis reads a new level 7 book and sorts the same three short-vowel patterns (/ă/, /ĭ/, and /ŏ/). A game of memory and a spell check follow the sorting. Curtis then reads two level 6 books, the tutor reading half of the second one, so that there is time for the read-aloud (*Wiley*) at the end of the lesson. Next week (lesson 3), a new short-vowel pattern (/ŭ/) will be introduced, and, in Part 3 of the lesson, Curtis will write a story about his rabbit.

Two Months Later

Eighteen lessons later, Curtis is reading late-first-grade material. In fact, he has completed five stories in a 1–2 basal reader (see Figure 6.9). Curtis is reading more fluently, benefiting from the word control in this pre-1990s basal reader. His comprehension is excellent, and he seems to enjoy the stories that the tutor selects. (*Note*: Only the most interesting stories from the basal are read.)

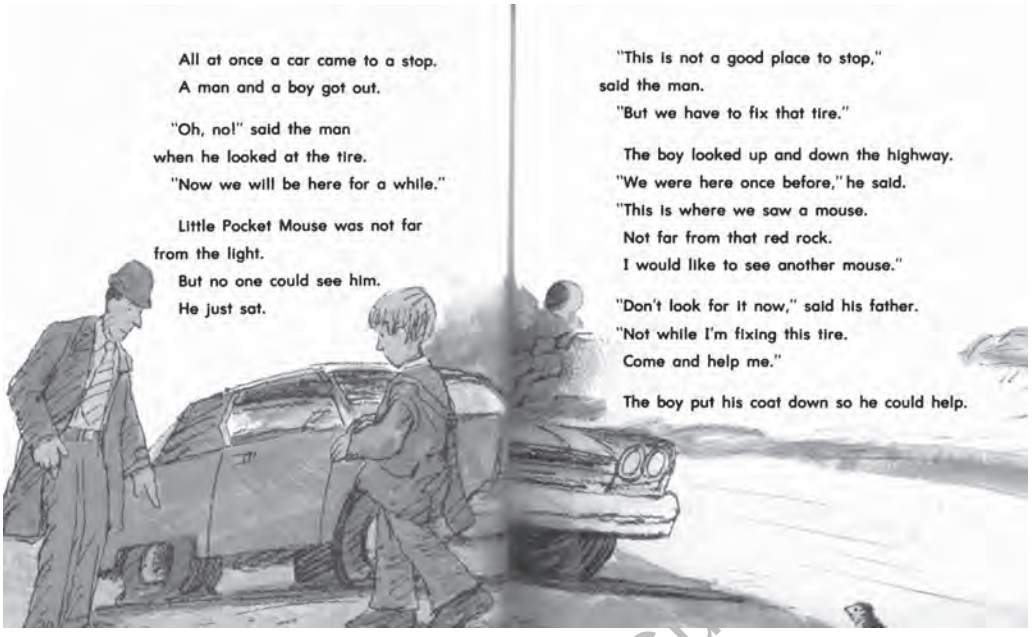


FIGURE 6.9. Two pages from *Toothless Dragon* (Eller & Hester, 1980). Copyright 1980 by McGraw Hill Education. Reprinted by permission.

In word study, Curtis has begun work on high-frequency vowel patterns: short, long, and *r*-controlled (see pp. 163–171). After reviewing short vowels for several weeks, he worked with the *a* vowel patterns (*cap, take, card, day*) and is now beginning to study the *i* patterns:

hit	ride	bird	night
dig	bike	girl	light
kick	drive	shirt	might
chin			bright

dime

Column sorting is supplemented by reinforcement games (e.g., Memory, Bingo) and daily spelling checks.

Curtis now does his "easy" reading at the primer level, where there are many interesting book choices. The tutor uses selections from Rigby's *PM Story Books* and Random House's *Step into Reading*, as well as books written by Mercer Mayer and Syd Hoff.

Writing has become an important part of Curtis's tutoring program. He started out partner writing four-sentence stories, but as his word knowledge and

self-confidence increased, he began to write independently. His most recent story, in edited form, is shown below.

Baseball
By Curtis Smith

In baseball there are four bases, first, second, third, and home. The pitcher stands on the pitcher's mound. The batter only gets three strikes. Sometimes, the umpire yells at you. My favorite player is Chipper Jones. He plays for the Atlanta Braves.

Curtis has improved in all areas—contextual reading, word study, and writing. In the second half of the year, he will read a mixture of basal stories and trade books and continue to sort, read, and spell one-syllable vowel patterns (*a, i, o, e*, and *u*). With hard work and a little luck, Curtis has a chance to "catch up"—to be a grade-level (2–2) reader by the end of the school year.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

The tutoring strategies described in this chapter can be adapted for use in first- and second-grade classrooms. Let us consider such adaptations across a set of issues that confront all primary-grade teachers of reading: assessment, individual differences, reading materials, and instructional procedures.

Assessment

At the beginning of the school year, a first-grade teacher needs to assess (or document) her students' reading ability so that she can place the children in appropriate instructional groups. The first-grade reading battery—briefly described in Chapter 3 (pp. 58–59) and applied in the case studies in the present chapter—can be used for this purpose. Remember that the assessment battery includes measures of word recognition, spelling, and oral reading.

I suggest that the teacher begin with the *spelling* task. Administer the first-grade spelling list to each child individually. Much information can be picked up by watching a six-year-old boy attempt to spell the 10 words. For example, does the child know how to write the alphabet letters; can he attend to the individual sounds in a word (/b/ /ĕ/ /d/ in /bed/); can he or she correctly match sounds to letters (/ĕ/—*E*)? With the test administered, the teacher assigns each child a *power score* (0 to 100% correct), and notes the nature of his/her misspellings (see Figure

Word	Felix (0%)	Maria (0%)	Thomas (30%)
1. trap	TP	TAP	TRAP (c)
2. bed	B	BAD	BED (c)
3. wish	W	WS	WECH
4. sister	S	SDR	SISTR
5. drop	JP	JRP	JROP
6. bump	BP	BOP	BOMP
7. drive	JF	JIV	JRIV
8. plane	P	PAN	PLAN
9. ship	—	SEP	SHIP (c)
10. bike	BC	BIK	BIK

FIGURE 6.10. Spellings of three first-grade children at the beginning of the school year.

6.10). Notice in Figure 6.10 that Thomas not only spelled three of the words correctly, but his misspellings were more sophisticated than those of his two classmates (e.g., SISTR vs. SDR and S). Note also that while neither Felix nor Maria spelled any of the words correctly, Maria's misspellings were more advanced; tellingly, Maria's spelling attempts (e.g., TAP, JIV) showed more phoneme (or sound) awareness than Felix's attempts (e.g., TP, JF).

Next, the teacher should administer the *word recognition* task to each child in the class. Begin with the preprimer list. There is no need to flash the individual words to first graders at the beginning of the school year. Simply move a blank 3″ × 5″ card down the list, allowing the child up to 3 seconds to read each word. Record errors in the untimed column. Figure 6.11 shows how the three children, Felix, Maria, and Thomas, fared on the word recognition task (preprimer level). Note how the word recognition scores parallel the spelling scores (see Figure 6.10), with Thomas again scoring higher than Maria, and Maria scoring higher than Felix.

Finally, the teacher administers the *passage-reading* task to each child, starting with the preprimer passage (Level D in the Fountas & Pinnell system). Oral reading accuracy scores were as follows: Felix—NA; Maria—78%; Thomas—93%. Felix was unable to read even the first line of the preprimer passage; Maria did get through the passage but missed approximately one out of every five words; and Thomas read the passage with acceptable accuracy, though at a slow pace.

The scores of the three children illustrate the spread of reading ability in a typical first-grade classroom at the start of the school year.

	Spelling (first grade)	Word recognition (preprimer)	Passage reading (preprimer)
Felix	0%	10%	—
Maria	0%	25%	78%
Thomas	30%	55%	93%

These scores can be used to place first-grade readers in appropriate instructional groups. They can also serve as *baseline* measures against which future gains in reading can be compared. That is, the same tasks (spelling, word recognition, and passage reading) can be readministered at the middle and end of first grade with only slight adjustments. For example, for *spelling*, if a child scores 40% or

Word	Felix (10%)	Maria (25%)	Thomas (55%)
1. and	0	0	✓
2. cat	✓	✓	✓
3. me	0	✓	✓
4. is	0	✓	✓
5. go	✓	✓	✓
6. play	0	0	✓
7. where	0	0	0
8. like	0	0	✓
9. thing	0	0	0
10. old	0	0	0
11. your	0	you	0
12. up	0	✓	✓
13. said	0	0	sad
14. big	0	dog	✓
15. for	0	0	far
16. by	0	0	0
17. dog	0	0	✓
18. not	0	0	✓
19. who	0	0	0
20. here	0	0	0

FIGURE 6.11. Word recognition performance (untimed) of three first-grade children at the beginning of the school year.

higher on a list (first grade), administer the next list (second grade). Stop testing when the child scores 30% or below on a spelling list. For *word recognition*, begin the "flash" presentation of the word lists at mid-first grade (see pp. 34–39). Stop testing when the child scores below 50% in the flash column on a given list (e.g., preprimer list [60%]—*Go on*; primer list [35%]—*Stop*). For *passage reading*, begin at the preprimer level and administer successive passages until the child's oral reading accuracy score falls below 90%. Along with 90% accuracy, minimum reading rates are 40 wpm for primer, and 50 wpm for late-first grade.

The three assessments—spelling, word recognition, and passage reading—can be administered in approximately 15 minutes. With 20 children in a class, this adds up to 300 minutes or approximately 5 hours of testing—a task that can be comfortably accomplished over a 2-week period.

Addressing Individual Differences

Most first- and second-grade teachers group students by ability for reading. Small groups (high, middle, low) allow instruction to be provided at the appropriate difficulty level. They also afford beginning readers more opportunities to interact with the teacher and the teacher more chances to observe the performance of individual children.

Figure 6.12 illustrates the rotation of three reading groups in a primary-grade classroom, from (1) teacher-guided instruction in the reading circle to (2) learning centers to (3) seat work. The tutoring strategies described in this chapter, particularly support reading and word study, pertain to the teacher-guided instruction in the reading circle. That is, the classroom teacher can adapt the tutoring techniques to fit the small-group context (see upcoming section, Instructional Procedures), and then use the learning center and seat-work contexts to reinforce skills

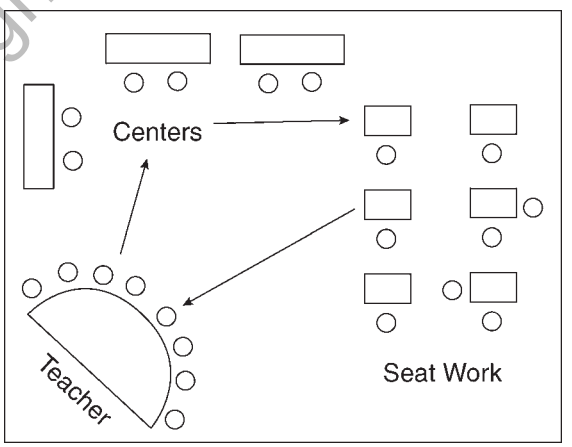


FIGURE 6.12. Rotation of reading groups in a first-grade classroom.

taught in the small group. It is important to keep the low-ability reading group small in number (four to six children, if possible) to provide struggling readers with more learning opportunities—more chances to read aloud and sort word patterns under the teacher's watchful eye.

Reading Materials

The teacher of struggling beginning readers needs a set of interesting reading materials that are carefully leveled in difficulty. Ideally, first-grade reading materials should include sufficient repetition of high-frequency words (e.g., *to, are, your*) and decodable words (e.g., *ran, sit, drop*), along with sentence patterns that allow beginning readers to anticipate upcoming words in text (see Cunningham et al., 2004). Unfortunately, and for many reasons, this is an ideal that is seldom realized, particularly in the basal reader programs that predominate in first- and second-grade classrooms.

The classroom teacher of struggling readers has two choices. He or she can use the imperfect sequence of stories found in a first-grade basal reader and try to compensate for material deficiencies through expert teaching (e.g., echo reading, rereading, slow pacing). Or the teacher can search for and, over time, develop a carefully leveled set of interesting stories that contain the characteristics previously mentioned: sight word repetition, phonics pattern repetition, and natural (as opposed to stilted) sentence patterns. Based on clinical experience, I strongly recommend the second alternative, although I realize it poses problems for new teachers or teachers in schools with limited resources. (See Table 6.2 and Appendix 6.1 for a possible sequence of first-grade reading materials. See Morris, 2003a, pp. 39–41, for a fuller discussion of the reading materials issue.)

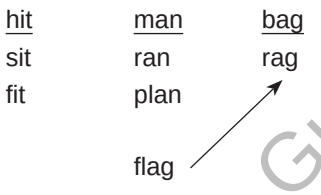
Instructional Procedures

The tutoring techniques described in this chapter transfer directly into a small-group instructional setting. To illustrate this point, let us consider readers at three developmental levels: emergent, preprimer, and primer.

For *emergent* or true beginning readers (see case study on pp. 132–136), language experience is an effective small-group activity. The group of five or six children discuss an experience (e.g., playing in the leaf pile), dictate a few sentences to be written down, and then choral-read the completed story with the teacher. In the 3-day language-experience cycle (see pp. 112–113), there is much teacher modeling, and individual children have a chance to finger-point read, identify individual words in the story, and use beginning consonants as a word recognition aid. Instead of, or in addition to, language-experience stories, "big books" and leveled books (levels 1 and 2) can be read and reread with the teacher. Again, learning goals for the emergent reader are (1) accurate finger-point reading, (2)

use of the beginning consonant cue, and (3) accrual of an initial sight vocabulary. Regarding word study in the small group, the emergent readers take turns sorting picture cards by beginning consonant sound until they eventually master this first stage of phoneme awareness.

For *preprimer* readers (see case study on pp. 136–140), who have small sight vocabularies and limited phoneme awareness, rereading leveled books and sorting words into short-vowel families is easily accomplished in a small-group setting. The lesson might begin by the children ($N = 6$) rereading, singly or in pairs, two preprimer stories introduced earlier in the week. Sitting around a table, the teacher monitors this rereading, providing word recognition support as needed. Next, the teacher leads the group in a short-vowel word sort:



The children take turns sorting words and then reading down the column to make sure the word belongs in that column. The teacher might follow up with a make-a-word activity, or she may have the children pair up to play Memory or Bingo with the short-vowel words. In the final 7 minutes of the small-group lesson, the teacher introduces a new book. She and the children preview the story by commenting on the illustrations; then they go back and echo-read the first four pages. At this point, the teacher elicits a prediction about what is going to happen in the story. The children respond and then proceed to take turns reading aloud one or two pages until the story is completed. (*Note*: This book will be one of the two stories to be reread at the beginning of the next day's lesson.)

For *primer* or mid-first-grade readers (see case study on pp. 141–146), the small-group lesson has a slightly different format. A new story is introduced each day at the beginning of the lesson. A picture walk may be used, or the teacher may have the children echo-read the first two pages before making a prediction. At this point, the teacher calls on individual children to read aloud, stopping the reading every now and then to ask questions and elicit further predictions. With four pages to go and the story's outcome at stake, the teacher asks the children to finish reading the story silently (or as silently as they can, for beginners often mumble the words as they read). With the guided reading completed, the teacher leads the children in a word study activity, usually involving short- or long-vowel patterns. Finally, if time allows, the children, working in pairs, might reread favorite stories introduced in earlier lessons. The goal here is to increase reading fluency.

In summary, if struggling readers are taught in small groups at the appropriate difficulty level, then the tutoring techniques described in this chapter can be used effectively in the classroom.

In this chapter I have described a toolbox of reading materials and teaching techniques that are appropriate for use with beginning readers. The emphasis was on balanced instruction that includes reading for meaning, word study, and writing. In addition, we considered case studies of beginning readers at three levels of development: emergent, preprimer, and primer. Although the period covered may seem short (i.e., early to late first grade), keep in mind that the *first* year of learning to read is a difficult, fragile time for the child who struggles. Moreover, the knowledge developed in the first year—including phoneme awareness, sight vocabulary, decoding skill, and emergent fluency—lays the foundation for future growth. In Chapters 7 and 8 we take up the broader and more complex terrain of reading difficulties from the second-grade to sixth-grade level. What will remain constant as we move from the beginning reader to the more advanced remedial reader are the notions of (1) teaching the child at the correct instructional level, and (2) providing balanced instruction that includes reading for meaning, word study, and fluency building.

Guilford Publications
72 Spring Street
New York, NY 10012
212-431-9800
800-365-7006
www.guilford.com