



Ask Chris

This month Chris Turner answers a question about supplementary reading.

My student wants to read the *King James Bible*, but he only reads at a third grade level. How can I help him?
~ *Concerned Tutor*

You have touched on one of the most important areas where tutors can make a real difference for students—helping them to realize their individual dreams. Sometimes the gap between what a student wants to do and where they are starting from is very great. A tutor can help to bridge that gap in by working on real-life material with their student, in addition to working on the core skill books.

Motivation: Finding the Right Supplementary Materials

Perhaps the most important—and most difficult—task for tutors is to help students sustain their motivation for learning. Often students come to us when a pressing crisis has prompted them to seek help with reading or math. Unfortunately, many students get discouraged early on when they realize that it will take a long time to get where they want to go. There is no quick fix.

Tutors can help students to maintain their motivation by working with them on materials that are interesting, useful or important to them. This might be anything from a plumbing trade magazine to the *King James Bible*. Strongly encourage your student to bring outside reading material to your lessons. Use that to supplement the work you are doing in the skill books.

Sometimes, students are unable to find material that will be useful to them. In that case, you may have to do a little leg work or ask for help from the literacy council staff. Tutors and students have successfully used the newspaper, bills, trade magazines, manuals, textbooks, coupons, church bulletins, application forms, and picture biographies to stimulate their student's interest in reading. Often, finding and using the right supplementary material makes the difference between keeping or losing a student.

Levels: Bridging the Gaps

Unfortunately for the reading student, real-life material doesn't come in levels. Most everyday material is written at a high school level, while the majority of our students come to us reading at between a second and a fifth grade level. Fortunately, interest, experience and desire can help students succeed with material which is above their technical skill level. It is up to you to find ways to help your student move from what they already know to what they want to learn—from the known to the unknown—so that eventually they will be able to read the supplementary material independently. Initially, your student will need a great deal of help.

Choose Key Vocabulary Words as Sight Words

One of the most important ways you can help is to build your student's vocabulary. Use key words from the supplementary material as sight words for your student to learn.

Have your student make flash cards or personal dictionary entries with the new words, write sentences using them, and find other places where the word occurs to bring to class. Depending on what phonics skills you are working on—for example, long vowels—you may also want to use vocabulary words from your supplementary reading as phonics examples. If you are reading *Psalms*, for example, you might choose the following words to extend practice on long vowels: *thine, cleave, fear, spake, hidest*.

Use Parallel Texts, Tiny Passages or Study Aids to Mediate Difficult Text

In the case of something like the King James Bible, where the language is very difficult, it is important to find ways to make it more accessible. One way is to use two Bibles. There are many easy-to-read versions of the Bible. Teach your student to use the easier version as a key to unlock the more difficult King James version. For example where the King James version of Luke 18:1 reads, “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” the New Life Testament reads, “Jesus told them a picture-story to show that men should always pray and not give up.”

Students are easily overwhelmed by large amounts of difficult text. (Think of yourself trying to look something up in a computer manual). You can help by choosing short passages to work on. Often books and magazines have lists or short articles that might make a good starting place. In addition, there are a number of study aids for different subjects that can be helpful. For your student, an article from a church bulletin or religious magazine might serve as introductory reading to a passage from the Bible. We can help you find materials.

For example, when a student recently wanted to get her driver’s license, we were able to give her tutor samples of old test questions, the Driver’s Handbook, and a driver’s education book designed for literacy students. Although the student only read at about a fourth grade level, she was able to take and pass the written exam which is at an eighth grade level, after a few months of working on these materials. Familiarity with the concepts, learning key technical vocabulary, and persistence paid off.

In the next edition of the Challenger, I will discuss a key technique for working with supplementary material with literacy students—**Reading Aloud**.