

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
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Reading Intervention

Research-Based Principles for Struggling Readers	5
Recommended Instructional Model for Reading Intervention	6
Self-Selected Reading and Structured Writing.	6
Strategy & Skill Development	7
Guided Reading	7
Common Problem Areas.	9
Self-Assessment	9
Journal Writing	10

Brain-Based Learning

Teaching Students about Brain-Based Learning	16
My Brain Teaching Script.	18
My Brain Student Booklet	34

Reading Activities

Reading Activities Overview	44
Phonemic Awareness	45
Phonics	55
Vocabulary and Word Recognition	86
Fluency	103
Comprehension	115
Citations	127

Introduction

Meeting the needs of struggling readers is an ongoing challenge that schools and teachers have grown accustomed to facing. Within the past few years, scientific research has dictated much of the basis for new approaches to reading instruction. With the U.S. government mandating the use of this research-based approach, school districts have been actively adopting sounder and more balanced reading programs. Staff development also now heavily emphasizes teaching practices that implement the five components of reading instruction outlined by the National Reading Council (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension).

Though schools offer programs designed to give additional support to struggling readers, about one student in three still has trouble reading. Many remedial programs may be subjecting students to the same strategies and techniques that were not effective in their regular classrooms. Many struggling readers continue to experience the “been there, done that” syndrome and continue to falter, resulting in negative attitudes and behavior problems that further hinder their learning.

Strategies for Struggling Readers takes a unique approach that exposes students to brain-based learning. This resource offers students the opportunity to learn how the brain works and participate in brain-based instructional activities. By seeing how brain research ties into everyday learning, students develop a better understanding of how learning occurs and recognize their role in the learning process. Instruction in brain-based learning theory helps struggling readers discover the following information:

- * How people learn
- * How the brain processes information
- * What must happen for learning to become permanent
- * How chunking information increases working memory capacity
- * What types of practice are necessary for retention
- * Why time is a significant factor
- * Their role in learning
- * The importance of commitment



Introduction

The underlying philosophy of this approach is to deal openly and honestly with students' reading problems and to discuss how to address them. The activities have been specifically designed to improve struggling students' reading and overall academic skills. With this approach, students are always told why they are doing an activity and how it will help them. When students, especially those who have been exposed to the same unsuccessful instructional techniques, see this connection, they are very cooperative and willing to put forth their best efforts. Instruction becomes a mutual effort for students and the teacher as students begin to feel like they are part of the instructional process and realize that their attitudes and commitment are part of the solution.

The teacher is a crucial factor in the learning process, so teachers need to have strong backgrounds, understand the rationale behind their instruction, and know how it will improve student learning. With that in mind, *Strategies for Struggling Readers* also provides teachers with a knowledge base about teaching reading. Because it provides this support, this book is the ideal resource for teachers seeking to help their students who are still struggling to learn how to read.



Research-Based Principles for Struggling Readers

There are four research-based design principles that must be part of any successful intervention program (Allington, 2006). The suggested intervention program in this resource incorporates these four basic principles:

Principle #1 Provide expanded opportunities for students to read, and help them become engaged in that reading.

Research indicates that engaged students spend 500% more time reading than disengaged students (Guthrie, 2004). Reading volume has been widely neglected in intervention programs. Therefore, it is imperative to increase allotted reading time for struggling readers, and to find ways to make sure that students are engaged in their reading during that time.

Principle #2 Match text to struggling readers' actual reading levels.

Research has proven that using texts matched to struggling readers' actual reading levels results in greater gains, especially for students at the lowest levels of proficiency (Guthrie, Schafer, and Huang, 2001). Ideally, struggling readers should spend 80% of their school days working with texts that they can read with 90% accuracy. However, it is very common to see grade-appropriate texts assigned to struggling readers. If these readers are to succeed, intervention needs to be based on materials that they can read accurately, fluently, and with good comprehension.

Principle #3 Provide systematic and explicit strategy instruction.

Struggling readers need systematic and explicit instruction (in all areas of reading) provided by expert teachers who understand the beginning reading process. While one-on-one tutoring is the most powerful intervention, small-group instruction for students with similar needs has also proven beneficial.

Principle #4 Ensure articulation between intervention providers and classroom teachers.

Research indicates that there must be communication between intervention providers and classroom teachers, and that students must experience a balanced and coherent instructional program with an array of lessons and activities.



Recommended Instructional Model for Reading Intervention

Reading intervention programs can follow many different schedules and include many different components, or segments. Below is a list of recommended segments to include when assisting struggling readers. Suggested time allotments should be adjusted according to these factors:

- * Whether your school or district has an existing intervention program to follow
- * Whether you may pull students out of the classroom for intervention
- * Whether you can group students according to reading difficulties
- * Students' ages and abilities
- * The time you or the intervention teacher/staff have available

Segment #1 Self-Selected Reading and Structured Writing

Reading and writing at students' independent reading levels — 20 minutes

Self-Selected Reading

Self-selected, active reading sets a supportive tone for the instructional session. Having students choose familiar stories or books that are at their independent reading levels increases the amount of reading that students can accomplish. Pay special attention to reading rates during this segment. If a student **reads very slowly**, the text may be too difficult. Provide easier text and ask the student to read a second time for fluency. If a student **reads word-by-word**, use chunking strategies (see page 25 of the *My Brain Teaching Script*) and emphasize seeing more than one word at a time. Read the passage with the student, group appropriate words together, and then allow the student to read it alone. If a student **reads too fast**, causing inaccuracies or decreased comprehension, invite the student to read the text like a turtle or a snail (slowly).

During this segment, students should use the Give Me Five—S cycle as they read. Students should **select** their own reading materials, **scan** the pictures to preview the story, **skim** the story to find and write down a word of interest from each page, **summarize** what the story was about, and reread the story for **speed** (fluency). Use **Structured Writing** (page 7) to monitor comprehension. Finally, the teacher's job during this segment is to facilitate: to question, observe, model, monitor reading, and encourage students to verbalize strategies they use.



Structured Writing

Following Self-Selected Reading, students should write about or otherwise reflect upon what they have read. Have them complete copies of the **Reader's Review reproducible (page 12)** by responding to the prompts, scoring the book, and writing the reason for the score. (File these so that students can use others' reviews to help them choose books.) Each student can also write a brief reader's theater piece of a scene, draw pictures to complete a visual story sequence, audio- or videotape himself or herself reading out scenes, or change one story element (such as the ending, the setting, or a character). Other ideas include letting students choose a story and chorally read it as a class, or collaboratively write a rap, a song, or even stage directions for an interpretive dance.

Segment #2 Strategy and Skill Development

Explicit instruction in phonics, grammar, and word-attack strategies—30 minutes

Assuming someone has assessed students' reading capabilities, use the assessments to address each student's problem reading areas. Students may be aware of their difficulties, but they don't often know what to do about them. Review each student's assessment results individually to make him or her aware of strengths and areas needing attention, and then implement directed strategy and skill development instruction with emphasis on brain-based learning. Refer to the **objective bullets** in the activities section (pages 44-126) for specific ways to address different weaknesses.




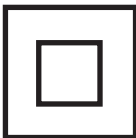




Segment #3 Guided Reading

Direct teaching of reading strategies and content standards—30 minutes

During this segment, make content more comprehensible through direct instruction of strategies that will ensure active reading. These strategies are outlined on page 8 and are represented by pictures on the **Strategies Bookmark Reproducibles (page 13)**. They combine elements of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension instruction and demonstrate applying word-attack skills and using context to gain meaning. Help students internalize the strategies by introducing the bookmark, choosing skill-based activities to teach its strategies, and relating them to student reading selections.

Strategies Bookmark Instruction for Unknown Words

When students come across unfamiliar words, do not tell them the words. Direct them to the Strategies Bookmark. Describe how each picture prompt relates to a strategy, and provide sufficient guidance about using the strategies. After students are familiar with the picture prompts, encourage them to refer to their bookmarks as they read independently. Note that many strategies have some overlap, as do the activities listed for teaching each one.

Strategy	Picture Prompt	Ask students to try the following steps:	Activities
*1 Does it make sense?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about what you already know about the subject. • Guess what the word might be. • Consider if that word makes sense in the sentence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Click and Clank; Give It Meaning; See It, Say It; Letter Snatcher
*2 Look for key words and clues.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for key words in the sentence (nouns and descriptive words). • Look for clues in the pictures in the book. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word Association; What's Missing?; The Missing Link; Relationship Box; See It, Say It; Collaborative Reading
*3 Listen to how it sounds.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the beginning, middle, and ending sounds of the word. • Sound out the letters. • Guess the word and say it in the sentence. • Consider if it sounds right. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All phonemic awareness activities, Short Vowel Response Cards, Short Vowel Sound Puzzle, Syllable Spot, Vowel Combination Response Cards
*4 Look for little words in big words.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for hidden words to help pronounce the bigger, unfamiliar word. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scavenger Hunt, Which Word Doesn't Belong?
*5 Search for similarities.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look and listen for similarities among words. • Consider if words sound the same. • See if words have the same letter patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any activity that trains students to look for spelling patterns in words is relevant: Rhyming Riddles, Rhyming Words, Speedball Vowels, Word Line, Short Vowel Flashcards, Word Swap, What Makes Long Vowels Long?, Silent Race, Switcheroo, Word Sorts, Long Vowel Classification, Find and List
*6 Try a popper.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound out the first letter of an unfamiliar word. • Continue reading the rest of the sentence. • See if the word "pops" into your head! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poppers, Letter Snatcher, see also page 29 of the My Brain Teaching Script
*7 Backtrack and read again.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread the sentence. • Notice clues you missed the first time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative Reading; Criss-Cross Sentences; What's Missing?; Give It Meaning; The Missing Link; Letter Snatcher
*8 Skip it and go on.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skip the unfamiliar word. • Keep reading the sentence. • Use the sentence context to understand the word. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's Missing?, Give It Meaning, The Missing Link, Letter Snatcher

Segment #4 Common Problem Areas

Supervised assessment and correction of skills—20 minutes

Use this segment (and the Self-Selected Reading segment) for one-on-one diagnosis and instruction. This is the most valuable segment of the intervention program because you will address specific needs. During these assessment segments, observe and diagnose individual problems and demonstrate corrective strategies. The common problem areas segment helps students as they work individually or in small groups on areas in which they need additional practice. Common problems can include things like trouble with unknown words, ignoring punctuation, or irregular reading rates. Depending on their needs, students may be working on phonics, language development, silent reading comprehension, or reading fluency. This is the perfect time to incorporate additional support programs that are available at your school.

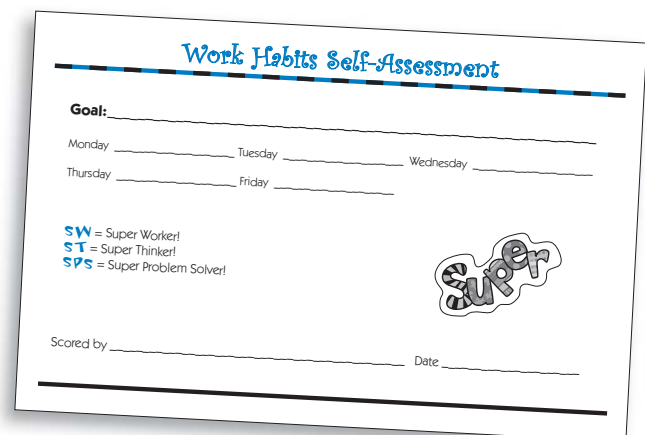
Segment #5 Self-Assessment

Goal setting and evaluation — 5–10 minutes

Obviously, reading and understanding text is difficult for struggling readers. To reach these students, you must replace their failures with successes. Self-assessments help students see their progress and understand that their attitudes and hard work result in positive change. The self-assessment reproducibles (pages 14–15) emphasize work habits, skills and strategies, attitudes, and individual goal setting.

Work with each student to choose a goal for the week, such as *I will look for silent e in words* or *I will increase my reading speed*. Be sure each selected goal relates to the skill and activities being emphasized, and to each student. During this segment, refer to students' goals and acknowledge their efforts to meet those goals. At the end of the instructional period, have students assess how they did that day using the self-assessment reproducibles. Make sure students have time to concentrate on a particular area and complete the self-assessment forms before moving to new goals. Students need to internalize the assessment criteria before they choose their own goals.

You may choose to share assessments with classroom teachers (if they are not the ones providing intervention) to demonstrate students' achievements and changing attitudes. Students may want to revisit their assessments to see how far they have come. For these reasons, it is a good idea to take a few minutes at the beginning of the intervention program to have students make self-assessment folders in which to keep the forms.



The image shows a 'Work Habits Self-Assessment' form. At the top, the title 'Work Habits Self-Assessment' is written in a blue, stylized font. Below the title, there is a line for 'Goal:'. Underneath the goal line, there are five lines for daily assessment, labeled 'Monday', 'Tuesday', 'Wednesday', 'Thursday', and 'Friday'. To the left of these lines, there are three small blue boxes with the following text: 'SW = Super Worker!', 'ST = Super Thinker!', and 'SPS = Super Problem Solver!'. To the right of these lines, there is a large, stylized graphic of the word 'SUPER' in a bubbly, outlined font. At the bottom of the form, there is a line for 'Scored by' and a line for 'Date'.

Segment #6 Journal Writing

A dialogue about the learning process — 10–15 minutes

Incorporating journal writing helps students develop and build on written language skills and gives students a chance to apply these skills and incorporate self-assessment. Depending on students' needs, entries can serve different purposes.

Initially, you will write the entries, focusing on how each day's activity helps students improve their reading. As students recognize how their participation affects their progress, they can write their own entries. Prior to the instructional block, write a starter prompt on the board, such as *Today I _____*. *It helped me _____*. Cover the prompt until the end of the session, then have students copy and respond to it. Eventually, use journal writing to dialogue with students about their hard work, attitudes, and progress, and to give them opportunities to write self-assessment entries in addition to using the self-assessment reproducibles. Consider asking students' permission to share their journal entries with classroom teachers to help relate their progress.

Partner Journaling

In order to be successful, students need to feel safe in their environment and connected to their peers and teachers. When struggling readers connect with their teachers and classmates, they tend to take more responsibility for the environment in that classroom. Partner journaling can be used to foster these connections because it gives students opportunities to share about themselves in a deeper way. Before introducing partner journaling, make topic cards. Each week, write six or seven topics on an index card for each student. Let students keep the cards in their journals for reference. These topics should be relevant, interesting, and of a reflective nature. (See **Journal Writing Topics**, page 11, for examples.) Then conduct journaling sessions in this order:

- 1 To introduce journaling, model writing an entry. Choose a topic and write it on a transparency. Then write some superficial things about it.
- 2 Next, model how to “go deep inside yourself” by reflecting on why you feel as you do, why the topic is important to you, and how it has affected you and others.
- 3 Then, ask students to choose topics from their topic cards or make up their own topics.
- 4 Ask some volunteers to share their topics. Model how to ask pertinent questions that expand each idea or make it more personal. Let other students ask questions.
- 5 Once students have adequate experience with this process, have them choose partners (different partners each time). Partners should not have the same topics.
- 6 Encourage students to ask each other *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why* questions to help them expand their topics. Partners should “dig down deep” to share how they think and feel.
- 7 Students should then write their entries independently.

Journal entries do not need to be lengthy. The goal is to give students a means to connect socially and emotionally; style, spelling, and structure should be taught in directed writing lessons. (Punctuation may be addressed because it can interfere with readability.)

