Sample Tutoring Lessons

Introduction

Volunteers are more successful when they come prepared. In some situations, volunteers may be following the guidelines or structure of the program or the teacher. In other situations, volunteers may need to develop their own lesson plans with minimal input from a teacher or supervisor. If you are not following a prescribed plan, here is a basic lesson framework that may be helpful. Generally, in a 45 – 60 minute session, it is good to plan 3 – 5 reading, writing and language activities that will occur each time, thus providing some consistency, but also variety. One successful structure includes:

- Warm up time: friendly chat and oral rereading of familiar book by child(ren) (5 – 10 minutes)
- Introduction and reading together of new book (5 – 10 minutes)
- Game, writing or other activity to extend reading experience or reinforce skill (10 – 15 minutes)
- Reading aloud by tutor (10 – 15 minutes)

Within this overall plan there is room for variation in response to the learners’ interests and needs, or the teacher’s requirements. At the same time this plan offers a predictable structure so that children know what to expect from their work with a volunteer. Furthermore, this structure is adaptable to various levels. When tutoring, keep in mind that:

- Having a lesson plan can provide a predictable structure for you and the student. But remember to be flexible as well.
- You can include the child by offering some, but not too many choices: “Would you like to read this book about a bear, or this one about Jake who keeps getting into trouble?” “Shall we play a game or write first?”
- By observing the child and listening for clues to his or her special interests you can show that you really care what he or she thinks.
- The teacher or child may have some specific assignments that need to be built into the plan as well.
- Sometimes a simply printed plan, outlining the sequence of activities is useful as a shared reference. You can allow the child to check off each activity as it is completed—this provides some rewarding physical evidence of what you both have accomplished for the session.
Sample plan for Sam:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Sam Re-reads “The Cat in the Hat”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Sam Reads a new book title:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Sam and Naomi Play Concentration</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4) Naomi reads: “Stone Soup” to Sam</td>
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</tbody>
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Sample Lessons for Emergent/Early Readers

*Very Beginning Reader – Usually Kindergarten through First Grade* (30 – 45 minutes)

1. **Warm Up:** Child reads aloud from a short, familiar book (5 minutes)

   This emphasizes the value and pleasure of rereading familiar materials, and provides good practice to build fluency.

2. **Tutor introduces and supports child’s reading of a new book** (10 – 15 minutes)

   This gives the child a chance to learn and apply strategies for figuring out the meaning of a new text. (see Pre-reading Strategies on Literacy Guide page) Before having the child read, tell him or her the title of the book, and discuss the picture on the cover. Draw out the child’s ideas and predictions. “What do you see in this picture?” “Yes, this is a chicken, or a hen, named Rosie. And there is a fox.” “What do you think this story might be about?” Next, help the child look through the pictures, covering the words, (this is called a picture walk). As you talk about what might happen in the story, use the language of the text as much as possible.

   These pre-reading activities are very important for helping the child become familiar with the concepts and language patterns of a book — building “background knowledge.” Sometimes you might read the whole book out loud first, pointing to the words, and encouraging the student to notice or join in whenever there is a repeated pattern or refrain. “Did you notice that every page ends with the words: ‘that’s mine!’?” Then ask the child to read the text as independently as possible, but with your help as needed.
Hint: Be ready to help in a supportive way, but try not to jump in too quickly to correct every mistake (miscue). Keep the focus on helping the child make sense and on learning more about print. When the child pauses before a new word, or makes a mistake, wait a little bit to see what the child does, and to allow time for the child to think. If possible give a cue such as “look at the picture” or “does that make sense? Could Rosie go through the fence?” Often children can figure out some words, or correct their mistakes if they’ve previewed and talked about the book with you and are allowed adequate thinking time.

3. A brief game related to the reading, or to practice a skill (10 minutes)

Games such as Mix-up Fix-up, or Concentration can be made on the spot, using sentences or words from the story or the child’s dictation. Other games like Fishing for Sounds, or Picture Sort should be prepared in advance. (See Sample Games document)

—or—

3. Drawing and writing or dictation (10 – 15 minutes)

The goal is to encourage students to use writing and drawing to communicate their ideas. Personal writing also helps children develop understandings about the structure of the English language: phonics, handwriting, the way words look on a page, and punctuation. Ask student to draw a picture about something that is personally meaningful. Then ask that she or he write something below the picture (a descriptive word, label, sentence—whatever the child is able and willing to do). Ask that he or she read back what has been written. If the child is very reluctant to write, you can offer to take dictation. Write down whatever the child says about the picture using large, clear print. Then be sure to read back what you wrote, pointing at the words as you read.

4. Read Aloud to Child (10 – 15 minutes)

This is an important opportunity to model reading for pleasure, and to share a variety of good literature that a child is not yet ready to read independently. Also, this is a way for children to be exposed to new vocabulary, concepts and different kinds of story structures. When selecting a text to read out loud, be sure the student knows he or she will not be expected to read this text—now it’s your turn. Try to respond to your child’s interest and attention level: is he or she listening? Is the story line too complex? Are there words the student doesn’t know? You can model good reading and comprehension skills by asking questions and making comments: “I wonder what they mean when they say: ‘he rumbled like a volcano.’ Does a volcano make noise? Can a person sound like a volcano—how do you think that would sound?”
5. End of session

Wind up with some positive comments about the child’s work and attitude, and suggest the plan for the next session. “You really worked hard today on your reading and writing. I can see that you are learning lots of new words. And you listened so well to “Jamaica and Brianna” (Havill, 1993). Would you like to hear another story next time about Jamaica tagging along with her brother? When we see each other on Thursday, you’ll get to read “Rosie’s Walk” (Hutchins, 1968) again and a new book. And we’ll do another Mix-up Fix-up. And maybe you can bring back that book about turtles you want me to read to you.”

6. Documentation of Tutoring Session

After you have finished working with your student, take a few minutes to write down what activities and books you used, how the student responded, and what you observed about his or her progress. Also make a note of how you would like to follow up in your next session.

Sample Lessons for Early Fluent/Fluent Readers

Usually Second Through Third Grade (45 – 60 minutes)

1. Warm up Child rereads aloud from 1 – 3 familiar books (5 – 10 minutes)

Or, if the child is reading longer books over several sessions, such as The Fire Cat (Averill, 1969), or Frog and Toad are Friends (Lobel, 1970) have him or her look through the parts read so far, using pictures and discussion to refresh memory of the story. Then have the child reread the last chapter or few pages completed in the last session. This emphasizes the value and pleasure of rereading familiar materials, and provides good practice to build fluency and expression. Tell the child it is like an athlete practicing throwing or dribbling a ball before a game.

2. Tutor introduces a new book or previews a new chapter for the child to read, and supports the child in reading (15 to 20 minutes)

This gives the child a chance to learn and apply strategies for figuring out a new text. (See Pre-reading Strategies on Literacy Guide webpage). Before having the child read, discuss the title and cover pictures of the book or chapter heading, drawing out the child’s ideas and predictions: “What’s going on in this picture here? What do you think a ‘fire cat’ does?” Help the child go through the book looking at the pictures and talking about what might happen in the story. (This is called a “picture walk” or Preview, see Glossary). As you discuss the pictures, use the language of the story. Point out or ask the child to find particular key words in the text. “Yes, you were right, in the picture the fireman is rescuing Pickles, it says he ‘picked up Pickles and tucked him into his coat.’ Can you point to the word ‘tucked’?” Or, “Now that Joe has rescued Pickles, what can he do with him? He wants to take him back to the firehouse but he has to ask the head
of the firehouse, ‘the chief’. Have you heard that word before? There he is sitting at his desk. Let’s look at that word ‘chief’.

These two pre-reading activities are very important for helping a child become familiar with the concepts and language of the book—building Background Knowledge, and they can be done quickly. Once completed, ask the child to read the text as independently as possible, but with your help when absolutely necessary. Hint: Be ready to help in a supportive way, but you don’t have to correct every mistake (miscue). Keep the emphasis on using strategies to make sense of the text rather than getting the exact pronunciation, word, or punctuation.

Also, it is important to allow students plenty of time to think about unfamiliar words. If they make a mistake or pause before reading a difficult word, don’t jump in and give them the word right away. Instead, wait for a minute, then ask “would you like help with that word?” or remind them of a strategy or cue they can use. “What’s going on in the picture? What word that starts with ‘cl’ would make sense in that sentence? How can Joe get up the ladder?” Often children can figure out some words, or correct their mistakes if they’ve previewed and talked about the book with you and are allowed adequate thinking time.

3. A brief game related to the reading, or to practice a skill (10 – 15 minutes)

Games such as Monopoly/Read Around, Concentration, or Go Fish can be made “on the spot” using words or sentences from the text just read. Other games such as “read around”. (See Sample Games document)

—or—

3. Drawing and writing (10 to 15 minutes)

The goal is to encourage students to use writing and drawing to express their ideas or convey messages. Writing also helps children learn about and experiment with the structure of the English language.

Ask a student to draw or write about something that is personally meaningful. It can be just a few words or a sentence or two, or a longer piece. It can be a response to or a take-off of the book just read, or an original story or an anecdote. At the end, ask the child to read back what has been written. Give positive feedback to the message first, before commenting on or correcting the spelling or handwriting.

Hint: Remember that all writing and reading development is not always even, and some children have had less experience with writing. Don’t be surprised if an advanced reader is just emerging as a writer or somewhat reluctant to try. Encourage drawing and labeling or short sentences, or even offer to take dictation or provide story frames (see Copy Cat or Story Frames in Glossary) or a dialogue journal in which you write notes to each other.
4. Read aloud to child (10 to 15 minutes)

This is an important opportunity to model reading for pleasure, and to share a variety of good literature that a child is not yet ready to read independently. This also is a way for children to be exposed to new vocabulary, concepts and different kinds of story structures. When selecting a text to read out loud, be sure the student knows that he or she will not be expected to read this text — now it's your turn. Try to be alert to your child’s interest level — is he/she listening, is the story line too complex, are there words the student doesn’t know? You can model good reading and comprehension skills by asking questions and making comments: “I wonder what they mean when they say: ‘he rumbled like a volcano.’ Does a volcano make noise? Can a person sound like a volcano—how do you think that would sound?” Or, “Hmm, it says the moon was just coming up, and there was a hint of frost in the air. So it must be night time. And on the other page it showed pictures of all the pumpkins in the field. I know they grow ripe in September and October. Even though the story doesn't say so, all that information makes me think that it must be an early evening in the fall, probably near Halloween.” Also, be sure to allow the child time to study the pictures and comment or ask questions during or after reading.

5. End of session

Wind up with some positive feedback about the child’s work and attitude, and suggest a plan for the next session. “What a good job you did today. You really worked hard on your reading and writing. I can see that you are learning lots of new strategies… You listened so well to the first chapter of Charlotte’s Web (White, 19??) we'll continue with that next time to find out if Fern gets to keep the baby pig… When we see each other on Thursday, you'll be able to read the next chapter of The Fire Cat to find out whether Pickles can stay in the firehouse. Do you think he will? Maybe you can write your own story about a cat or dog who gets into trouble. Be thinking about that, and if we have time, we will play a new game to practice reading and spelling those rhyming words.”

6. Documentation of the tutoring session

After you have finished working with your student, take a few minutes to write down what activities and books you used, how the student responded, and what you observed about his or her progress. Also make note of how you would like to follow up in your next session.

Reading Aloud to Children: Helpful hints

Listening to literature read aloud is one of the most valuable and pleasurable experiences beginning readers and writers can have. It is so important to a child’s developing literacy, that reading aloud to the child(ren) should be a part of every individual or small group lesson. Here is a chance to model good reading and thinking strategies and to expose young learners to the rich variety of literature that exists—fiction, nonfiction; poetry, biography; humor, fantasy… Immersing young learners in
various types of literature helps them understand the critical features of written language, and the varying structures of different genres. When this exposure is accompanied by supportive and relaxed discussions, children are able to extend their world view, and develop important critical thinking skills.

- **Plan enough time** in each session (10 – 15 minutes) to read aloud, to enjoy, and to discuss a story, poem, or information text.
- **Choose stories or texts that respond to children’s expressed interests and experiences.** For very young children or Emergent readers/listeners choose books with vivid pictures, a strong story line, engaging characters and evocative language. Humorous and predictable books are particularly successful.
- **Preview the book yourself,** so you can anticipate questions or reactions. If possible practice reading it through so you can decide where to pause for emphasis or to elicit questions, predictions or reactions.
- **Introduce the book, pointing out the cover illustration, title and author.** Invite some predictions or comments that help the listeners connect the book to their own experience or to other books heard or read. Or give a brief explanation about why you chose to read this book. “This is the story of a boy who goes on an unusual trip. I chose it because you just came back from a trip.” Or “This is the story about a special friendship between a mouse and a whale. I have read this many times. I wonder what you will think about it.”
- **Read with expression** that reflects the tone of the story or the characters. And not too fast. Vary your pace so you can pause for emphasis, or to allow time for child(ren) to think about what’s happening or what might come next.
- **Allow time for children to study the pictures** as you read, and to make comments and ask questions about the story.
- **Encourage predictions,** and then help children confirm or revise these as the story unfolds. Try to honor many ideas and interpretations, not just the “correct” ones. Instead of accepting or rejecting comments or ideas as right or wrong, use comments such as “that’s one possibility, let’s see what the author has in mind.” or “Well that’s an interesting idea. How did you think of that?”
- **Watch the children’s expressions** and body language and be sensitive to signs of boredom or confusion; you may need to change your reading plan, change the book or do more preparation.
- **Save time at the end of the story to get reactions.** Ask open-ended questions that don’t have right or wrong answers, and that can’t be answered with a yes or no reply. For instance, ask what the child liked (or disliked) about the book, and why? You may ask what s/he thought about the characters or how the problem was solved? Find out if the book made the listener think of any personal experience or other book heard or read.
- **Point out parts of the story you particularly noticed or liked** — special language patterns or phrases, or parts of texts that made you feel or visualize something. Ask child(ren) if they noticed other parts.
- **Vary the length of time you spend reading aloud.** Don’t be constrained by time. Some longer stories or chapter books can be read over several sessions, if the time in between is not too long, and if you plan good stopping places. Don’t
spoil a story by rushing to finish it. Children need to see that pleasurable reading involves time to savor language, ideas and pictures.

- **Remember that for some children, listening to stories is a new experience,** and they need to develop that interest and ability. Start with short, interesting selections, with strong pictures. In some cases allowing active children to manipulate play dough or to draw while listening may help. Be responsive to facial expressions and body language, and if the book is not working, don’t be afraid to stop, without being punitive. Next time you might find a better selection.

- **Encourage discussion about the story.** Ask the child questions about what’s going on, and encourage the child to predict what will come next — but be sure not to turn a discussion into a quiz!

- **Most important: Have a Good Time!**

### Writing Activities

Writing and Reading really go hand in hand, reinforcing and extending each other.

There are a range of writing activities that you can incorporate into your tutoring sessions with children at any age and writing level. The most important things to remember when introducing any of these activities is that writing should be viewed as:

- enjoyable
- a way of expressing thoughts and feelings
- a way of communicating with others

Additionally, positive and continuous experiences with writing in a variety of ways, helps children learn and practice a number of skills, including phonics.

Unfortunately, many children are reluctant to write because they have had little positive experience doing so and they are afraid of using incorrect spellings, or of writing letters that look sloppy. Just as in reading, beginning writers should be encouraged to focus on the meaning of what they want to say rather than the form so they can begin to think of themselves as capable of writing. Otherwise they will be unwilling to take the risks to put down their own ideas in any detail. Instead, they will simply stick to writing simple thoughts or words that they already know how to spell correctly. Eventually, as students become more comfortable and experienced with writing, the process of editing and re-writing can be introduced.

With this in mind, here are some ways to engage your students in writing:

- Invite the student to draw a picture and then write about it. To avoid spending all the time on drawing, you might set a time limit for this activity. You can suggest: “Let’s make a plan. How about drawing a picture for 5 minutes, then write two (or some) sentences about it. OK?”

- Give your student a journal to write in regularly. For example, you may want to have a “journal writing time” for 5 or 10 minutes during each session. Students
should be encouraged to write on any topic they wish: for Emergent and Early writers, illustrations with labels should be acceptable, or “interactive” writing, where you take turns doing the writing.

- Invite students to write about something personal that happened: a class trip, taking the dog to the Vet. Or relate the writing to a book you have just read together: change the ending, or write about a favorite part or character; or make up a new story with the same characters or same problem.
- Have your student write a note or letter to you (and you can write one back), or to a family member or teacher or friend.
- Encourage writing for other useful purposes. For example, if the student is planning a birthday party she can make a list of the things she’ll need for the party. Or, have your student make a list of books he has read, or wants to read.

For students who are not writing words yet, or are just beginning, you can modify some of these activities:

- Your student can draw a picture and dictate a story; you can encourage students to “pretend” write, or to write just one or two letters to represent a word (i.e.: “M” under a picture of Mommy — you might need to help them hear the sound, or find the letter on a chart); you can then write the full word the child uses to describe his or her picture (i.e.: Mommy) and have the child trace over it.
- Suggest a “copy-cat” story for children who are just beginning to write. Have them write a story that is a take-off of a story you have just read. For example, if you’ve just read a version of “There was an old lady who swallowed a fly” then your student might write “There was an old cow who swallowed some hay… “

Always have students read over what they’ve written. (With a very emergent writer whose spelling is far from conventional, discreetly make a note to yourself so you’ll remember what the text said).

- Give positive feedback on the content of their work once students have read through their writing. “That must have been fun to go to a birthday party” or “You did a good job of writing about your cat. I learned that he likes to sleep a lot.” At this stage, it is important to focus on the meaning of what was written rather than the form (spelling, or handwriting or punctuation) because we want students to know that writing is for conveying meaning first and foremost, and we want them to keep trying. As they become more comfortable and experienced, then the process of revising and editing can be introduced.
- Sometimes while rereading the students will catch missing words, or mixed up sentences. Encouraging them to correct their own work is a valuable experience and gives them a sense of independence and ownership of their writing. But don’t expect them to correct everything. In fact, for very novice emergent writers who are just beginning to try writing, don’t correct anything. For early writers, you might have them correct just one thing: a reversed letter, or adding a few more sounds to a word you think they can spell, or putting in a period. (To support further growth in spelling see Sample Games document)
Spelling Hints:

Children are often reluctant to write because they feel they can’t spell. Here are a few things to help:

- Remind them that you are interested in their ideas first, and you’ll worry about spelling later — and stick to that promise;
- Encourage them to use “invented spelling” (spelling words the best way they can) for now even if they just put one letter down to represent a whole word.
- Avoid talking about spelling as “correct” or “incorrect”, “right” or “wrong.” Remember that children learn to spell just the way they learn to talk and read, in stages, over time, with lots of experience and practice.
- Talk about how people learn to spell by doing a lot of reading and writing, and that there are lots of ways to learn how to spell words over time.

Talk about some of these ways to figure out spelling:

For Emergent and Early writers:

- Say a word and listen for the sounds, especially the beginning sound and then maybe the end sound.
- Think about where you saw the word and look for it in a book or around the room to copy
- Help the child use a picture – letter chart (i.e.: “A” and Apple, “B” and Box, etc.)

For more advanced writers who are already writing fairly comfortably suggest the following:

- Close your eyes and see if you can remember the way the word looked
- Think of a word that rhymes with word you’re trying to spell (“If you can spell cent, you can spell rent.”)
- Write down the word three times, using three possible spellings, and see which one looks right.
- Think about parts of the word, which parts do you know? (i.e.: ‘going’ — ‘go/ing’)
- Look in a dictionary or other book.

Developing a Language Experience (or Dictated) Story

The Language Experience approach to teaching reading and writing builds on the learner’s own language and knowledge and is an effective way to encourage self-expression and build awareness of the connections between oral and written language.

- What I can think about, I can talk about.
- What I can say, I can write.
- What I can write, I can read.
• I can read what I can write and what other people can write for me to read.*
  (Van Allen & Halversen)

Think how meaningful and powerful a child’s own dictated story can be as a reading
text, to be read over and over again.

1. Be prepared with pencil and eraser, lined paper and drawing paper.
2. Together, identify a topic the child would like to tell about: (such as a retelling of a story
   heard or read; a personal experience; a set of directions for a game or object; a story
   related to the child’s illustration).
3. Talk briefly about the topic, and explain that you will write what the child tells you to
   write. Then, as the child watches and dictates, write down in clear, well spaced, large
   print, the child’s exact words, including dialect or grammatical variations.
4. From time to time, stop and read aloud to the child what you have written so far,
   pointing to the words, and having the child confirm that you are getting down his ideas
   accurately.
5. If it is a long dictation, you may want to write only two or three sentences on a page,
   leaving plenty of room for illustrations. This is especially important for an Emergent or
   Early reader, so as not to overwhelm with too much print.
6. At conclusion of dictation, read back the whole piece, pointing to the words and
   encouraging child to follow along. Praise the good ideas. If there is time, and the child is
   still attentive, reread the piece chorally. (You can save that for a follow up session, if
   necessary.)
7. Save the piece in child’s folder to reread in future sessions; be sure to return to this
   story as you would to any other reading text — to be savored and practiced. A very
   special dictation might be illustrated and given a cover and title page.
8. You may develop some related activities, such as choosing key sentences or particular
   phrases or words to use in games. (See Sample Games)

After several re-readings of the piece the child may master it and be able to share it with
friends or family. But this may not always be a reasonable expectation, especially with a
long dictation. When the child is practicing reading his or her own story, respond to
approximations or miscues, just as you would in any reading. Be supportive and help
the child, and enjoy the experience!