

Teaching Students with Low Reading Levels

By Dave Batty

A. The attitude of the teacher

1. **Accept** them as they are today
2. Don't **pity** them
3. **Demonstrate patience!**
4. Don't **excuse** them from classes

You may need to arrange for special help for them which would help them complete the classwork. But whatever you do, don't say – "He can't read." Don't even say it to other staff.

B. Evaluate the student

1. **Ask them about their educational background**
2. **Test their reading level**

Basically what we want to do is to find out if they have an above 5th grade reading level or below 5th grade reading level. If the student has below a 2nd grade reading level that will also give you some special input on where to start them.

One test that is easy to administer is the **San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability** which gives you a general ball-park idea of their reading level. This is available free online. Just Google the name above, or download it at www.iTeenChallenge.org

This test takes about 10 minutes to administer. The instructions are included in the PDF file that includes the reading test.

3. Testing for learning disabilities

It is very possible that some TC students have special needs. Some may have reading disabilities or learning disabilities that have a direct effect on their reading and comprehension. A more in-depth evaluation by a trained teacher would need to provide this kind of assessment.

Some of your students may have autism or ADHD. You may want to ask if your student has had any previous diagnosis with these issues. You would need to have a trained professional provide diagnosis of these issues.

Check with one of your local universities or colleges, or even the public schools which have special diagnostic testing for reading problems. Many times they will administer the tests at no or minimal cost to your student.

At Teen Challenge in Cape Girardeau, MO, they had a student in the program that was failing all of his tests and work. They had an arrangement with Cape Girardeau State School to come down for testing and found out this student was partially blind and partially deaf. Teen Challenge sent him home to get fitted for glasses and hearing aids. This story does not have a happy ending. He manipulated his doctor into believing that he didn't have any problems with seeing and hearing.

4. How their life-controlling problems affect their world view

C. Use of the GSNC & PSNC class materials

1. Mainstream your students with low reading levels

If they have above a 3rd grade reading level they should be able to do the ***Personal Studies for New Christians*** and the ***Group Studies for New Christians*** classes. If their reading level is lower, then you may need to provide special assistance for the student to successfully complete their classwork.

Maybe they will say, “I can’t answer these questions.” And what they really are saying is, “I can’t write long sentences like Joe does who has graduated high school and can write a paragraph in 5 minutes.” Have them write down their own answer, even if it is only a few words. They may say, “I don’t know how to spell.” That’s OK. Tell them to write it down the way it sounds. Even if they just put down 3 words, that is OK. Because the way they will learn to write is by writing.

When meeting with the student to discuss his work, ask him to read his answer out loud to you and then explain it in a little more detail.

2. Dividing your student population into classes based on reading level

Depending on the size of your program, if you have more than 12 students, I would encourage you to consider dividing your GSNC classes into more than one group. Do not tell the students, but assign them to group A or group B based on their reading level.

3. Scripture Memorization Class

The Scripture Memorization Class in the PSNC should be used with students who have low reading levels. Their reading level does not affect their ability to memorize. Don’t let anyone manipulate you into believing that because they have a low reading level they can’t memorize the Bible verse. What they need is someone to work with them to show them how to do it.

The methods that are given in the Scripture Memorization Class Student Manual are very appropriate. Again, when they go to fill out that worksheet and they say, “I can’t do this.” Sit down and go over it verbally with them, discussing it with them. OK, once you do that, then tell the student to sit down and go back and write down those ideas. “But, I can’t spell the words,” says the student. Just have them write down as much as they can to summarize the things that we talked about. The more you make them write it down, the better they will get at it.

Also require them to memorize all the scriptures for their GSNC classes.

4. Character Qualities class

This PSNC class can be done by students with low reading levels, but again, you may need to do it verbally to begin with, but work with them on it. Place expectations on them.

5. Personal Reading Class

This PSNC class can also be done by students with low reading levels. But you may have to make some adjustments. Instead of having the student read the book, have the student listen to an audio version of the book, or listen to Christian tapes. There are a lot of Christian tapes available for us today besides sermons. Have them listen to it and take notes on it with using simple sentences. Then have them explain their responses to you verbally.

D. Remedial Reading Materials

1. Firm Foundations series

The prime resource that I would suggest for you to use with students who need to improve their reading has been developed by **Literacy and Evangelism**, www.literacyevangelism.org . The series is called “Firm Foundations”.

With every new lesson they introduce new words. They use a picture of that word to introduce it. They have some exercises to work on this and it explains it. And then there are two stories. One story is a “secular” story. There is another story that brings in Biblical concepts. One example lesson: “It says a lot of men were with Jesus. They had to be fed. A lad let Jesus have 5 buns and two (picture of fish with word). With the buns and the fish Jesus fed all the men.”

The Firm Foundations curriculum provides you with an opportunity to teach them how to read and also teach them some of the very basic concepts in the Bible. So it teaches them how to read and it is a tool for evangelism. It is a very effective tool.

Once you go through this lesson with the student orally you can have them sit down and review the chapter, and also do the exercises in the Firm Foundations Workbook. They can also copy the stories from this chapter to work on their spelling and comprehension.

You can use the Firm Foundations curriculum with a person at ground zero reading level. The first book is actually called a **Pre-reading Program**. It teaches the 40 most common words in the English language. **These 40 words make up 40% of a person's total vocabulary.** So if a person knows these 40 words they can read 40% of everything they need to read. The problem then is that the other 60% of the words don't make sense with just knowing 40%. But this is a good starting point. If a person knows these 40 words they have in their hands some good tools.

The Firm Foundations curriculum is also available in Spanish and other languages.

2. Which Bible translation should students with low reading levels use?

There are two versions of the Bible that I would recommend using with students who have low reading levels.

New Life Bible

New International Readers Version (this is a simplified version of the NIV Bible, written at a 3rd grade reading level.)

I would recommend they do all their GSNC and PSNC class work with this easy to read translation. I would not allow them to use the King James Version or the New KJV.

Audio versions of the Bible are also a good option. However, if your student is going to use this, then have them also follow along in the printed version at the same time.

Another activity is to have them copy the verses from the Bible.

Questions for Discussion

An audio version and transcript of this session is available on www.iTeenChallenge.org