

PART 2: A Closer Look at Reading and Comprehension

Reading and Comprehension - This folder contains the basic reading material for each Section:

- Reading Passage *
- Cloze Activity
- True-False Comprehension check
- Beginner Story *
- Beginner Cloze Activity *
- Beginner Comprehension Activity

* Activities that appear consistently in every one of the 18 Sections.

Reading Passage

The Reading Passage represents the Core Lesson content for each Section. The passage generally incorporates most, if not all, of the Core Vocabulary terms for that Section. Core Vocabulary words appear in the passage in bold typeface. The Reading Passages are brief, (typically one-page), didactic, non-fiction articles.

Pre-Reading Discussion Questions are provided in a box at the top of every Reading Passage. Instructors should use these, and any others questions they wish, to generate a discussion of students' experiences and beliefs relevant to the particular topic. The discussion is designed to activate students' prior knowledge, and to give them opportunities to use vocabulary terms in context.

Here are a few examples of typical Pre-Reading Discussion Questions:

Why might someone (including you or your family members) go to a health professional when they **aren't sick**? (Section 5)

Do you always understand everything a health professional tells you? What do you do when you don't understand? (Section 9)

Can taking over-the-counter or prescription medications be dangerous? How do you know how much to take, and how often? How do you find out what the risks and precautions are? Who can you ask if you have questions about medications? (Section 15)

For beginning level ABE and ESL classes, it is recommended that instructors read the Reading Passages aloud while students follow along, reading silently. Instructors are modeling fluid phrasing and intonation. On occasion the instructor may pause and indicate to the class that *they* are to read the next word aloud. Be selective about where you pause. Typically you will pause to let students read an easily decodable or important key word. It will often be the last word in a phrase or sentence. This way the instructor can tell whether students' eyes are tracking in time with the oral reading. Follow up the reading with a brief discussion of the concepts.

Cloze Activity

The Cloze Activity is a recap of the Reading Passage, except that the Core Vocabulary words and phrases have been replaced by blanks which students must fill in. As previously mentioned, for most native English speakers the Core Vocabulary word meanings are not particularly challenging. The challenging part will be decoding and spelling (yes, even copying) the words to fill in the blanks. For example, in the very first Section the blanks require insertion of the following phrases: “diagnose your problems,” “nurse practitioner,” and “physician’s assistant.” Instructors should analyze the difficulty level of the words before asking students to do this activity. Labored copying of long “strings of letters” is not a valuable use of beginning readers’ time. For this reason it is recommended that the cloze activity be done orally as a group response activity. In some cases you may decide to skip it entirely until students have significantly improved decoding/encoding skills. With better readers, you can demonstrate that you sometimes have to read all the words in the sentence and think about which word makes sense when it’s put in the blank.

True-False Comprehension Checks

A few of the Sections provide a follow-up True or False activity based on the Reading Passage. Instructors may read the statements aloud while students mark their worksheets.

Instructors can easily create similar exercises for additional lessons by simply extracting statements, in order, straight from the Reading Passage, and occasionally turning them into false statements. The entire activity may be done orally. Make the statements and ask students to hold up an index card with either a ‘T’ or an ‘F’ to indicate their answer. Ask students to rephrase false statements to make them true.

Beginner Story

The Beginner Stories are ideally suited to beginning and low-intermediate level ABE students. They provide a more entertaining, “readable” text for beginning level readers which illustrates the key concepts from the Reading Passage (core lesson) in a short story format. These stories will likely be too difficult for beginning ESL students to read, but instructors may decide to paraphrase them and recount them orally to students, (accompanied by lots of gestures, and vocal and facial expressions) to communicate the gist of the core lesson.

The same **Pre-Reading Discussion Questions** seen in the Reading Passage appear in a box at the top of every Beginner Story. If you have already asked students these questions there is no need to repeat them. They are provided here in case instructors wish to go straight to the Beginner Story without doing the Reading Passage first.

After the Pre-Reading Discussion Questions, each Beginner Story begins with **an introduction which should be read aloud by the instructor**. The introduction or “lead-in” sets the stage and the general context for the story. Here are a few examples of typical Beginner Story introductions:

This passage is about a mother named Olivia, who is very good about taking her son to the doctor for his regular well-child visits. (Section 5)

This passage is about a man, Son Ling, who needs to have a medical test called a colonoscopy. He has trouble understanding what the doctor is telling him. (Section 9)

This passage is about a woman who starts taking a new prescription medication for her allergies. She fails to read the ‘Cautions’ on the medication information sheet. Find out what happens. (Section 15 Beginner Story)

What makes the Beginner Stories “**readable?**”

- The fact that they are in a story format means that they are more easily visualized than non-fiction articles. This is especially important for beginning readers, who need coaching and practice to “flex” that part of the brain that creates and updates mental images while reading or listening. Being able to visualize the ideas and events as they unfold is a key strategy for making sense of any text.
- The stories are written at an approximate grade equivalent (GE) 2-3. The sentence structure is not complex, nor, for the most part, is the vocabulary.
- There is a considerable amount of word and phrase repetition (a device that aids beginning readers).
- The stories are short enough that completing one story per class session is likely to be very doable.
- The stories use language and syntax that is natural sounding. The storylines, dialogues, and many of the phrases are quite predictable. This gives beginning readers the opportunity to utilize and strengthen other reading strategies besides decoding. Those strategies include anticipating and predicting what words will come next, based on what makes sense and on what “sounds right” in English.
- While far from being phonetically controlled, the texts nevertheless utilize a large proportion of decodable words, or words which play fair phonetically. They therefore support an instructional emphasis on decoding. At the same time, the Beginner Stories afford beginning readers essential practice dealing with the realities of sight words, and words which require some decoding flexibility. In the “real world” of English, these are unavoidable.
- The characters and events in the stories “bring to life” most of the health literacy concepts. Many students will find it easier to discuss those ideas in the context of characters to which they can relate, rather than in abstract terms. There is also plenty of research to show that teaching beginning readers to recognize story structure (in other words characters, setting and plot) helps improve comprehension.

Most instructors will be very familiar with techniques for reading with beginning level students. The following tips are suggestions to consider.

Tips for Guided Reading

Research has shown that explicitly teaching students how to answer questions, and how to self-monitor their comprehension by asking themselves questions as they read, results in improved comprehension. Instructors must consciously demonstrate and model these strategies, which good readers employ automatically.

- Always begin by discussing students' **background experience and knowledge**.
- Always **read aloud the introduction** or “lead-in” to the story, which establishes the context.
- **Read the first paragraph or two aloud to students.** Their job is to listen, to visualize, and to retell. Say, “Tell me what these words make you picture.” Encourage detail. Help students create a vivid mental picture of what’s going on BEFORE it’s their turn to read.
- Students take turns reading a paragraph or two aloud. The main focus here should be on students **getting the picture**. That means the instructor’s job is to model asking questions **AS YOU GO ALONG** about what’s being read, in order to be sure everyone is getting the gist of it. Explicitly teach students to stop periodically on their own and ask themselves, “Can I say what’s happening in my own words?”
- The types of questions you ask should vary. Some will require straight **literal recall**, such as “So, what symptoms brought Sou Ling to the doctor?” It’s a recall question because the answer is right there in the text. Asking students to recap what’s happened so far is also a form of recall question. Say, “So tell me what’s going on? What’s happened so far?”
- Some questions should require students to think and **infer information**. The answer is likely there in the text but you have to put 2 + 2 together to get it, for example, “Why do you think Sou Ling sounded afraid when he heard the test was done at the hospital?”
- Some questions should require even more **critical thinking** on the students’ part, such as “If you were Dr. Lee, what could you do to help explain a colonoscopy to Sou Ling?” or “What do you predict the doctor will do next?”
- Sprinkle questions throughout the reading, but don’t be obsessive about it. You don’t want to overly disrupt the flow.
- In reference to not disrupting the flow, supply students with sight words and words that don’t play fair phonetically if they get hung up on them. Some words may be perfectly regular phonetically, but if you haven’t taught the concept yet then just supply the word so they can keep reading.

- Assist students as necessary in actively decoding words that DO follow general phonics principles taught to date. Don't be afraid to tell a student, "Use what you know." Ask leading questions to guide them to the answer, like "Is there a digraph in that word?" or "Do you see an r-controlled vowel?" or "Is there a suffix at the end?"
- Re-read sentences over which students have stumbled, so they can be heard correctly.
- Use the questions which follow each Beginner Story to generate discussion. The main purpose of these questions is to encourage not only a **recap or summary of the main point** of the story, but to find out how the story's characters and events might **relate to your students' personal experiences**.

To watch a Literacy Solutions' [Tutoring Techniques](#) video clip demonstrating a portion of a Guided Reading activity with a beginning level ABE student, [CLICK HERE](#)

Other Reading Options:

- For texts that are too difficult, **the instructor can read the remaining text aloud**, continuing to ask questions. Students should continue visualizing, making predictions, recapping and paraphrasing the story.
- **Students read silently** to themselves, up to an agreed-upon point. Discuss what's happened and ask a variety of questions before they continue, to make sure they are on track.
- The instructor and students **take turns reading aloud**. Throw a critical thinking curve ball at students and ask THEM to ask YOU comprehension questions after you have read. Model giving complete and thoughtful answers.
- Students can **take turns reading with a partner**, although you must have frequent agreed-upon stopping points so you can do a group comprehension check.
- Ask students to answer certain questions by raising a "True" or "False" card, or make "thumbs up if you agree; thumbs down if you disagree" statements. In this way everyone in the class can be engaged in answering the same question.

Re-read the Story

Perhaps in the next lesson you will decide to re-read the same story. The reason for doing this is to focus on phrasing, fluency, and building students' self confidence through repetition and practice. Instructors may want to try **Echo Reading** for a paragraph or two. The instructor models reading aloud one sentence, which students "echo" by imitating the intonation and phrasing.

Another excellent opportunity for re-reading of the story is the **Beginner Cloze Activity**.

Beginner Cloze Activity

Every one of the 18 Sections contains a Beginner Cloze Activity. The Beginner Story is reprinted with blanks left in several words. This one simple activity packs a lot of punch. It's a wonderful means of providing beginning level students practice with **fluency, comprehension, phonemic awareness and phonics.**

The activity gives students a reason to re-read the story, which by now will be familiar. Re-reading familiar texts allows students to pick up the reading pace, (whether oral or silent) since they already have an idea of what words are coming next. They get a chance to “feel” what it feels like to be a better, smoother reader. They get more practice recognizing common sight words and other words which eventually should become automatic.

Replacing **small parts of words** with a few scattered blanks in each paragraph serves two purposes. First, it keeps students from flying along at such a clip that they don't even realize what the words they are pronouncing (either out loud or in their heads) mean. Many poor readers have a tendency to be “word callers,” who, despite the fact they may pronounce the words correctly, don't comprehend what they read. When word callers encounter a blank, it serves as a low level hurdle, requiring them to shift to a lower gear in order to analyze what's missing. That act engages their brain from the standpoint of comprehension. They have to work a little bit to figure out what the text is talking about in order to figure out what's missing. That's a good thing.

Secondly, the blanks are a great way to focus students' attention on the sequence of sounds in words and to review sound-letter correspondences. Sometimes the blank will represent initial or final consonants. Sometimes just the vowel sound is left blank. Other times the blank represents a missing beat or syllable. Students supply the missing sound(s) by printing the letter or letters in the blank. In other words, the activity absolutely reinforces and gives practice applying phonemic awareness and phonics skills.

Beginner Comprehension Activities

A number of Sections contain additional comprehension activities based upon the Beginner Story. Two different types of comprehension activities are modeled. They are simple enough to create that instructors should consider adding similar exercises to other Sections, according to their students' needs.

True or False Activity

Students **read the statements** on the given worksheet and decide if they are true or false. Instructors can easily create similar **oral exercises** for additional lessons. Simply make statements about characters or events in the Beginner Story, and occasionally turn them into false statements. Make a statement and ask students to hold up an index card with either a ‘T’ or an ‘F’ to indicate their answer. Ask students to rephrase false statements to make them true. This is also a **great opportunity to give students practice hearing and using new vocabulary in context.** Here are a few examples:

“True or False? Alice was **proactive** in scheduling her dental checkups.” - or -
 “True or False? It would be **inconsiderate** to call a doctor's office to cancel an appointment.”

Sequencing Activity

Most beginning readers will highly benefit from this activity, but it is especially useful for “word callers,” and those students who have difficulty visualizing while they read. Making mental pictures of what’s happening as the text rolls along is a critical comprehension skill. Some students will naturally visualize, but many need extra practice, encouragement, and training to do so. They also need their attention drawn to context clues in the text that indicate whether something happened before or after something else.

Students, working either alone or in pairs, cut the provided sentences into strips. (Some instructors, especially one-to-one tutors, might find it easier to print the sentences onto index cards.) The sentences are decodable and familiar, since they come straight from the Beginner Story. Students read each sentence, physically moving the strips or cards around as they gradually decide what the best way to order or sequence them is. The activity requires critical thinking, visualization, attention to context clues, and a considerable amount of re-reading.

Instructors should help students reflect and troubleshoot by asking them to explain why they put a particular sentence where they did. They can also “act out” the sentences in the order they were placed, to help students “see” when they have made a mistake.

Paperclip the strips or index cards together and keep them in ziplock baggies to reuse in later lessons for review.

Note: Both the **True or False** and the **Sequencing Activity** can be conducted in a fun “game show” type of atmosphere, with students working alone, in pairs, or on bigger teams. The additional use of props such as microphones or call-bells (which substitute for the buzzers found on TV game shows) can heighten the excitement and increase participation.