

For a Student Struggling with Understanding the Classroom Reading Assignments

- **Suggest listening to audiobooks or identify a willing adult to read the assigned book to the student.** Recommend that students read along with the audiobook version or to follow the words alongside the reader. The more often a struggling reader is exposed to the way the words look, the better. Exposure to the page helps students learn the architecture of sentences. This also helps with spelling and conventions.
- **Suggest use of assistive technologies currently available that read material aloud to the student.** The Kindle, the iPad, or Google's Nexus tablet, would be examples of this kind of technology, but there are many similar devices being introduced into the market all the time. [Click here](#) to read a comparison of these tablets.
- If the book/content has been made into a film or covered in a film, suggest that the student watch it to help give a context to the story or content.
- **Offer extra time to finish reading assignments.** Dyslexic and struggling readers need more time to read assigned material.
- **Provide class syllabuses in advance.** Allow the student to read assignments ahead over the school breaks and the summer. This can help the student get a head start so that when the school year takes on its full momentum she is prepared and has had an opportunity to work ahead to absorb the increased volume of work.
- **Recommend reading books with larger fonts.** Hardback versions from the library are visually easier and E-readers offers the ability to adjust the font size as well.
- **Recommend books that may be shorter or less dense but equally rich in ideas and story for independent reading time.** ([Click here for a kid-tested reading list.](#)) It is important to recommend the book with enthusiasm, the same enthusiasm typically reserved for more sophisticated titles. Read well-written, easier books yourself, out loud to the class, and recommend them to all students so the struggling students can read them without shame. The objective is to get struggling readers to read AND to like it. ([For more on creating a classroom culture for struggling readers, click here.](#))
- **Recommend graphic novels.** ([Click here for a listing of kid-approved ones.](#)) Graphic novels provide struggling readers with a way of strengthening their vocabularies, build their reading confidence, and foster their appreciation of story. Graphic novels can also help support a reader's understanding of everything from Greek Mythology to Shakespeare.

For a Student Struggling with Written Expression

- **Suggest that the student dictate an outline or brainstorm ideas to another adult (teacher or parent) who can record them.** Depending on the circumstances, this can help students get started with their writing and help launch their ideas by generating an idea bank that they can draw from (they also won't get caught up worrying about how to spell those words).
- **Offer an opportunity to do work on a keyboard.** If students are so labored in their handwriting and/or symbolic memory that everything they write is minimalist and/or incomplete, keyboarding can free up expression. Instead of worrying about what shape each letter is, the computer determines that for them. Word processing also helps record ideas in a standard readable font and allows a student to recognize more readily what they have just written. **Note: if students are better served on the computer, have them immediately get to work on their keyboarding skills. This is not only a very important mechanical skill for all students, but also crucial for students who have handwriting issues.**
- **Suggest and/or provide the use of assistive technologies and software for help with spelling.** Something as basic as Microsoft Word can help with regularly misspelled words. It is a huge relief for students not to have to worry about the correct spelling of every word. It corrects basic words automatically. Franklin Spellers or similar handheld devices that assist in the spelling of words are also helpful, particularly when students are not using a computer to write.
- If the classroom has access to iPads or other tablets with speech-to-text capabilities, **encourage struggling writers to use speech-to-text apps to help them get their words down on the page.** They can brainstorm or do the actual composing without being hung up about spelling and the mechanical struggle of writing. **(Learn about how using speech-to-text on the iPad transformed a student's fifth grade year...[click here.](#))**
- **Encourage the student to find a personal spelling strategy that doesn't depend on memorization of word lists.** Some students are never going to be spellers, regardless of their heroic outcomes on Friday tests. Take the time to reassure those students that spelling is a mechanical, not an intellectual, skill. Because misspelled words do negatively impact clarity, students need to understand that it is important to find ways to identify misspellings and correct them. Editing may involve using the spell check on a computer, a handheld speller, or a helpful peer or adult in their lives. Every poor speller needs to find his/her most efficient and effective proofreading strategies. The world is full of people who will judge students negatively if they turn in work with misspellings. Consequently, they must figure out how to get the help they need, aside from carrying the correct spellings around in their hands.

Students who Struggle with Written Assessments and Tests

- **Experiment with offering ways to provide EXTRA TIME...**Students who struggle often need extra time. In fact, sometimes, extra time is all they need. Is there a way to offer your student who lacks a formal diagnosis extra time in a way that doesn't create equity issues or logistical ones? Aside from timed tests that are designed to check automaticity of a special skill, there are few instances that justify making speed more important than giving a student a full opportunity to express understanding. However, this can be challenging. Sometimes offering a chance for all students to return to finish an assessment up at recess, or during a study hall, is a way to make that work. Most often, students who do not need extra time will not take it. This is obviously an individual call because in certain situations, extending the test time may raise the potential for cheating or equity complaints.
- **Make it transparent to the student what is being assessed. Is it automaticity? Is it a spelling test? Is it understanding of the material? Is it a measure of writing skills? The student should be clear about what is being evaluated and so should the teacher.** For example, if the student can orally explain what he or she knows, but cannot make that clear in writing, consider having the student demonstrate his knowledge orally, in addition to the written version. If testing for geographical knowledge and the student misspells many of the counties, yet it is obvious that he knows the correct answer, that should count. Conversely, if the student turns in a final draft of a paper with misspellings, penalties should stand. Students need to find effective editing strategies. Giving struggling students a pass in that situation is misleading and doesn't ultimately help them.
- **Provide typed class notes for students who can't listen and write at the same time. This is not cheating.** Some students need to focus all their attention on listening and attending to the information being explained. Writing impedes their ability to take the information in. If teachers are interested in facilitating an understanding of the content, then we need to be willing to do whatever is necessary to make sure that happens. Sharing notes can liberate struggling students to concentrate in class, while note-taking helps others consolidate the information through another modality. Students who use the teacher's notes should also read them aloud into a recorder and play them back, discuss them, or rewrite them on their own time in order to reinforce their learning through another form of processing.
- Another modified option is to **provide the whole class with a structured outline of the main ideas with room for students to fill in the rest (it also helps to model a note-taking format).** Each student is different, but everyone benefits from processing information in multiple forms (listening, discussing, writing, drawing, reshaping, rhyming, applying, sorting, etc.) The teacher's job is to help students identify how they process information most efficiently and effectively.