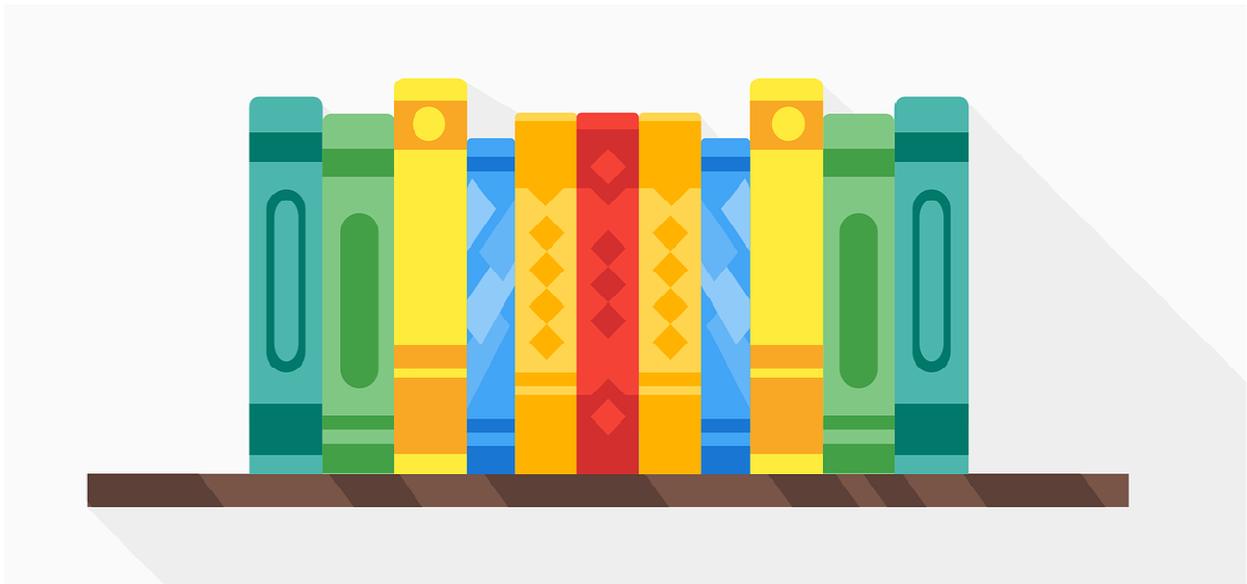


Teaching: Ten Principles of Teaching



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This article explains the basic principles of teaching. These principles apply to all subject areas.

Be prepared

Get the lesson organised before lesson time. (Know what you're going to teach, and how you're going to teach it, and what exactly you want your students to learn from this lesson.) Prepare any necessary teaching aids. Eliminate all but the most urgent distractions.

Teach one thing at a time

This is why my Courses teach parents and tutors to teach reading and spelling separately - even though, ideally, these two skills should be taught together. It takes a very gifted and experienced teacher to teach two major skills at once.

As well as teaching one thing at a time, you need to teach the basic major building blocks of the subject first, before teaching the complex major building blocks. In time, you will work your way through to the tricky important items.

One step at a time is the way to go. Leaping from one topic or skill to another just bewilders the students. Students need to feel that they're building up a coherent body of knowledge where the different parts relate to each other. You need to spell out for them the underlying principles on which the subject is based. In literacy, the major principle is the Alphabetic Principle.

Break the work up into bite-sized pieces

People cannot give something their full concentration for more than a few minutes at a time. And it's even harder to concentrate if you're having trouble doing the task.

So do a literacy activity for 10-15 minutes, then either stop the lesson (especially if the students are young) or change to a different activity e.g. have the student: read the words in the lesson, say the flashcard sounds, do a few revision words for a couple of minutes, and say the first (or last) sound of the objects sitting on a tray.

Your students will make much more progress by focusing on a well organised mini-lesson (or two or three mini-lessons a day), than they will by trying to learn too much at once. The brain needs time to 'wire in' what it's just been learning.

Base new knowledge on what is already known

New information is very hard to learn if you know nothing at all about the subject. But if you say, "You already know this about this subject!", then your students will find it easier to learn.

This is relevant in literacy teaching because you can say to your students, "You often say these sounds.... Can you hear them in these words?" By repeating words they already know, students can begin to distinguish this sound they've been saying for years, but not hearing! They'll be intrigued, and feel clever (They already know some of this stuff!), instead of feeling like idiots for not knowing the sound.

And when they've learnt that sound and letter to at least 80% accuracy (4 correct answers out of 5), then they're ready to learn more.

Teach using two or three learning styles

Plan lessons so they can be taught using at least two of the learning styles mentioned below. When students have trouble learning something, re-teach that fact using their strongest learning style.

The three learning styles are: **visual** (seeing); **auditory** (hearing and/or speaking or singing); and **kinesthetic** (doing - can include speaking and singing).

To work out someone's favourite learning style, see what sort of material they remember most easily. Everyone has a preferred learning style, and most people learn well in at least two learning styles. So, when you teach, make use of at least two learning styles.

People who remember pictures, diagrams, graphs, videos and demonstrations of how to do something, are visual learners. They like you to write on the board. If these literacy students are having trouble learning a sound, they find it useful to see two or three pictures illustrating things beginning with that sound.

Those who easily remember songs, music and poems just from hearing them, are auditory learners. They enjoy answering questions. If these students are having trouble learning a sound, they enjoy learning Silly Sentences that illustrate the sound (e.g. Naughty Nancy nicked Nana's knickers!

When people need to do something themselves, in order to really learn it, then they are kinesthetic (hands-on) learners.

When these students have trouble learning a sound, they like to make the shape of the letter with their hand, or form something into the right shape, or trace with a colourful texta over a faint line showing the letter, or make something that begins with that sound.

Each learning style also has a negative side: if you ask visual students to do a quick sketch of what is meant by the sounds: /k/ /a/ /t/, they might be inclined to launch into a life-sized oil painting - so it's a good idea to give them a 1 minute limit! When asked to recite a particular Silly Sentence, auditory students might like to recite ALL the Silly Sentences. When asked to shape something that begins with sound /d/, kinesthetic students might commence a complex D-shaped Lego dinosaur.

Require a response

All your students should have to **do** something in order to show you they've learnt what you've just taught them. When students know that no response will be required, what they're taught seems to detour around their brains.

So, when you teach something, see that your students give one (or more) accurate responses before going on e.g. repeat a sound after you, accurately sound out letters for blending, blend some sounds into a word, explain a rule in their own words, or say the sound for a flashcard.

A correct response means the information has gone through their brains - for a fraction of a second! You want a response - even if it's, "I don't know!" Because then you know what to do!

Practice

This is where a lot of good courses fall down. Remember, the 3 most important things to remember in real estate are: location, location, location. Well, it's the same with brain real estate. When you're teaching a student a new trick e.g. reading, you're not really teaching the student to read.

What's really happening is that you and the student are teaching the student's brain to read! And when you're training a brain, the 3 most important things to remember are: automation, automation, automation!

Every brain needs practice in order to learn something well and transfer it from its short-term memory to its long-term memory. To understand why practice is important, you could think of it this way:

When we learn something for the first time, a slight 'scratch' is drawn in our brains tracing the new link that has just been made.

For example, if I'm trying to link a sound with the letter that represents it, I hear the teacher say the sound and see her show me the letter. I remember this information long enough to repeat it. But if the lesson was interrupted at that point and didn't resume for 15 minutes, I probably wouldn't remember anything.

But if the lesson wasn't interrupted, and the teacher said the sound several times, and I repeat it each time, and I see the letter each time, and I hear the sound in a few words and repeat those words, and I read a few words containing that sound, and I saw the letter on a flashcard, and said the sound - I'd be much more likely to remember.

Remembering would be easier because each repetition would have re-scratched that initial scratch in my brain, so it was deeper and more permanent.

And if I did a little homework at night by sticking a flashcard for this new sign on my bedroom door, and said the sound once or twice each time I went past, I'd learn the sound even more quickly.

Do not Over Help

Do not rush to do something for students that you think they could do for themselves. For example, once students have a sound/sign combination in long-term memory, if they forget - don't immediately tell them what it is.

Instead, remind them of something related to how they learnt it - seeing (a picture), hearing (a song), doing (seeing something they made) and give them a minute to work it out for themselves.

Then, if they still can't remember, tell them. And if they forget it again later in that lesson, give them the answer, and add that item to the revision list!

Don't waste people's time

Teach what is relevant to today's lesson and do a little revision - especially of problem words. Avoid unnecessary work. Many courses teach a song, dance, poetry and activities, etc. for each letter.

But I recommend avoiding everything that isn't necessary. Use of flashcards is good because flashcards are a very speedy way to do revision, and they are visual and require an auditory response.

If students sound out the sounds /k/ /a/ /t/ correctly, but can't blend yet, then I recommend you become the student's Working Memory. The procedure for doing this is found in the [How Do I Begin Teaching Phonics at Home?](#) article, and in the Sample. These materials also show you how to teach sounding out and blending.

Move forward at the speed your students can cope with. Give them sufficient practice to get a minimum of 80% of their answers correct. If they give a wrong answer, put a dot next to that work and let them revise it every few days - until they can get it right repeatedly.

Teach Patterns and Rules

Some people treat the word 'rule' like a taboo word, but don't be put off! Human brains are pattern-seeking missiles - we like to understand WHY. And that's what rules are for; they help us see the patterns.

Patterns or rules help us understand what's happening, and help us remember WHY something is done a certain way. They help us make sense of what we're learning; and help us know what to do.

So, when you teach, explain any patterns or rules to your students, let them see several illustrations of that rule or pattern in use, then let them practice using it - until it's in long-term memory ie. automated.

Some people say that children can't remember rules or patterns, but they can. It only takes one or two small burns before a baby remembers the rule: Stay away from hot stuff!

And any parent can tell you how much pre-schoolers and older children enjoy pointing out when their parents are not obeying the rules!

To learn more about how to teach reading at home, go to:

www.teachreadingathome.com