

Working with learners who are reading at entry level

This resource for educators was developed by the National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults in 2010. It contains 4 modules:

- Module 1: Identifying strengths and learning needs
- Module 2: Vocabulary
- Module 3: Comprehension
- Module 4: The Reading Programme

Module 4: The Reading Programme

This module provides suggestions for designing a reading programme for adult learners at this level. It looks at:

- what to consider when designing a programme
- selecting and using appropriate texts
- monitoring learners' progress.

Module 4 has 3 sections:

1. Section A: Designing a reading programme
2. Section B: Selecting texts for learners reading at entry level
3. Section C: Monitoring learners' progress

Section A: Designing a reading programme

1. Introduction

- The previous modules in this professional learning course looked at the components of reading and provided some advice on what to focus on in order to accelerate learners' progress in reading.
- This module focuses on how to design a programme that provides opportunities for this development.

2. The main purposes of a reading programme

A reading programme designed for adults who are reading at entry level (or starting points) has two main purposes. It should provide:

1. intensive, focused teaching that explicitly addresses the learners' most significant next steps for learning (sometimes called 'strategic teaching')
2. plenty of opportunities for learners to practise what they are learning with texts that are meaningful to them.

3. The knowledge and skills that educators need

- Educators working with adults at entry level need a particular set of knowledge and skills. This includes:
 - knowledge of the reading process and how this is developed, i.e.
 - understanding what happens when we read
 - understanding how the different reading components develop as readers gain expertise
 - knowing how to assess learners' reading knowledge and skills in order to establish learning goals
 - knowledge of the characteristics of text – in particular, those that afford optimum opportunities for teaching and practice at this level
 - a repertoire of instructional strategies that can be used for specific purposes

4. Knowing the demands

- As with all literacy learning, at entry level the demands are still those posed by the complexity of the texts that adults need or want to read, and the

tasks associated with those texts (e.g. locating information or following instructions).

- However, rather than mapping a text against the progressions to see how complex it is and what learners need to do in order to read the text, educators will select texts and tasks that provide opportunities for learners to develop their knowledge and skills.
- In this respect, the “demand” is controlled by the educator. The knowledge and skills that learners need to develop are the demands that the programme should address.

5. Knowing your learners

- As we explained in Module 1 the Reading Assessment in the Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Tool will probably not provide enough detail to inform instruction for most learners at entry level. It is not designed to assess these learners.
- Instead, the Starting Points Assessment Guide has been developed specifically to support educators to find out about the strengths and needs of learners operating below the steps described in the progressions. This guide is published both in print and online. Each of the assessment procedures is available as a single PDF so that it can be easily printed and used with a learner.
- Use the information gathered through the procedures to develop a profile and learning plan with each learner. [Click here](#) to download the Starting Points Assessment Guide.

6. Exploring the Starting Points Assessment Guide

In Module 1 of this course we used the surveys and procedures provided in the Starting Points Assessment Guide and illustrated some of these being used with adult learners.

7. Knowing what to do

- Knowing what to do requires educators to have a repertoire of instructional strategies and approaches, as well as a selection of appropriate texts and tasks. The right mix of these will depend on the particular groups of learners.

- Learning is a function not only of the activity itself but also of the context and culture in which it takes place.

8. Using instructional strategies

- The term “deliberate acts of teaching” was coined by the team that developed materials for literacy teaching in the school sector. It arose from the need to be clear that teachers needed to provide strategic instruction as well as facilitate activities that engaged learners with text. Effective literacy practice is not just about establishing a text-rich environment!
- Instructional strategies -deliberate acts of teaching - that are most effective with learners at this level include: modelling, prompting, questioning, giving feedback, discussing and explaining. You can read more about these on pages 24 and 25 in [Teaching Adults to Read With Understanding: Using the Learning Progressions](#).

9. Instructional approaches

- Instructional strategies are the tools that educators use when they teach. Instructional approaches are the way those tools are used.
- The key instructional approach at this level is shared reading. Shared reading enables learners to read texts that they would be unable to read independently. The educator takes the lead, using instructional strategies such as modelling, questioning and prompting to focus on a specific learning goal. In subsequent re-readings of the texts, learners gradually take over.
- Note that ‘round robin’ reading – where learners take turns to read aloud – is not an appropriate instructional approach. It does not support learners’ comprehension as they tend to be only focused on their bit of the text.

10. Providing opportunities to practise

- Learners need plenty of opportunity to practise their developing skills. At this level, the activities that provide these opportunities need to be well-structured so that learners are supported and don’t get frustrated. They also need to be meaningful. And, of course, they should involve reading real texts.
- Learners should know what skills they are practising: activities should be purposeful. This also applies to reading in order to build “mileage”.

11. Getting started

- Sometimes it's difficult to know where to start when adults are reading at entry level because they appear to have multiple learning needs.
- Reading is a complex process. As readers process and make meaning from text, they draw on a wide range of knowledge, skills and strategies. It can be tempting to 'start from scratch' and use ready-made programmes that systematically cover these.
- However, many adult learners already have significant reading-related knowledge and skills. And they do not have the time – or need – to spend time on things they already know.
- Watch Professor Nicholson reflect on preparing a programme for the adult learners he assessed in [this clip](#).

12. The need for specialist literacy classes

- Learners at entry level will almost always be in specialist literacy classes. It is difficult to address their literacy-learning needs when literacy is embedded into a vocational programme. If this is the case then these learners will need the support of a specialist who is able to provide one-to-one or small group tuition.
- In a specialist literacy class, learners are likely to belong to one of the three broad profiles we discussed in Module 1. To make the programme manageable, it's important to know which profile best matches each learner. The programme can then be designed to meet the needs of these groups, with more intensive, focused instruction provided for individuals when necessary.

13. The three main profiles of learners at entry level

- *Profile 1:* Adults who have good listening comprehension skills but poor decoding skills. They can understand texts they hear, but cannot read these texts efficiently by themselves. This group includes adults who may have dyslexia. Their programme will have a strong focus on decoding and fluency.
- *Profile 2:* Adults with poor listening comprehension and good decoding skills. They can decode texts, but not understand them well. This group will include adults whose first language is not English. Their programme will focus on developing language.

- *Profile 3*: Adults with poor listening comprehension and poor decoding skills. This group will have multiple instructional needs, and will be more likely to need individualised support.

14. Make sure to include a focus on oral language

- A strong oral language component is important in the reading programme for all learners at this level.
- In Module 1: Section B we outlined the reasons for this, and provided some links to key resources.

15. Making the most of the ‘teachable moment’

Although most opportunities for intensive focused teaching should be planned, you also need to take advantage of the “teachable moment”. Build your expertise by focusing on a particular reading behaviour, such as activating prior knowledge, and looking for it as you observe learners engaging with text.

16. Next steps

- In this section we have emphasised that your reading programme needs to provide opportunities for:
 - deliberate teaching that focuses on what learners need to know (their next step)
 - plenty of practice, where learners can apply their developing skills and knowledge
- At the heart of the programme will be a range of texts that learners read – with your support - for an increasing variety of purposes.
- In the next section we will focus on finding and using these texts.

17. The context for teaching and learning

- The procedures used for assessing the specific knowledge and skills needed for decoding are not contextualised. However, learners need to apply and practise their developing skills and knowledge to real texts so that they see that decoding is purposeful and meaningful. This is unlikely to happen if learners are just using worksheets.

- Comprehension and vocabulary instruction should use real texts. This means that educators need to consider the contexts – the texts and activities – that are likely to motivate and engage learners.

Section B: Selecting texts for learners reading at entry level

1. Which texts?

- Engaging learners with texts is at the heart of an effective reading programme. This puts an emphasis of finding texts that support and engage learners.
- In this section we'll explore the kinds of texts that learners should be reading in their instructional programme. We'll also take a closer look at the *Collections* series. This set of materials has been produced specifically to support adult learners in New Zealand settings.

2. Using the word "texts"

- Although the everyday usage of the word "text" tends to be related to messages sent by mobile phones, it is still the term preferred when referring to a piece of spoken, written or visual communication. For example, a text can be a conversation, a poem, a web page, a speech or a poster.
- Reading programmes are mostly focused on written text. These texts will be fiction and non-fiction in electronic as well as print media.

3. The importance of using authentic texts

- Because reading is a meaning-making activity, it's important to engage learners with texts that are meaningful to them. This does not mean that they always need to be about familiar content, but that the texts are interesting and worth reading. Learners need to be able to connect to the text in some way, and have a purpose for reading it.
- Selecting texts to use for instructional and practice purposes is a particular challenge at this level. Unlike learners working at Step 2 and above on the learning progressions, learners at this level will not be able to use most everyday texts, such as newspapers, or specialist texts such as workbooks or manuals to learn and practise their skills.

4. Characteristics of texts for learners at this level

- A text's complexity is affected by the complexity of its content, structure and language - the kinds of information in a text and the ways in which that information is related and presented.
- Unlike early or emergent texts for children, texts for adults reading at entry level can include content that is quite abstract, complex and sophisticated – after all it's their reading that is the challenge, not their thinking.
- However, the structure and language in the text need to be controlled so that learners are able to read with enough fluency to maintain meaning. The next slide sets out some key characteristics of texts for adults reading at entry level.

5. Finding texts for New Zealand learners

Texts that are suitable for New Zealand learners include:

- selected titles in series that are published commercially
- resources that are created for New Zealand learners and shared on websites
- texts written by educators for specific instructional purposes
- environmental print
- texts created specifically for these learners

We'll look at these last two in more detail.

6. Environmental print

- Environmental print is the print that is found in public environments. Most adults will recognise this print, and will know what meaning it carries, so it can be a good place to start.
- You can find out more about using environmental print in your reading programme on pages 33-35 in [Starting Points – Supporting the Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy](#).

7. Reading Collections 1, 2, 3 and 7

- The Reading Collections series has been specifically published to support adult learners in New Zealand settings. The books and accompanying sound files are available free of charge. Materials have also been developed to support educators to use the books.

[Click here to access Reading Collections](#)

- Collections 1,2,3, & 7 contain stories and articles that were originally published for the school sector, for example in the School Journal. The various titles in the four books were selected and tested by educators working with adults. They have been re-edited for their new audience and redesigned to make them more appealing to adults.
- These four books are more suitable for learners working around steps 2- 3 on the Learning Progressions, although they include some texts that educators can use with all learners.

8. Collections 4, 5 and 6

- Collections 4, 5, and 6 have been specifically written for adults who are at entry level and around steps 1- 2 of the Learning Progressions. Most texts can be used with a shared reading approach, and the accompanying audio supports learners to re-read the texts on their own.
- The topics and themes were selected in consultation with educators. Each article or story has been written, edited and designed to a tight brief. The illustrations closely support the text. As with the rest of the series, the books are accompanied by audio and teacher support materials.
- Next, we'll take time to get more familiar with each book.

9. Someone I Could Look Up To

- This collection has four articles written specifically for New Zealand adult learners.
- Take time now to read these, listening to the audio at the same time.
[Click here to access page to download text and audio files](#)
- Identify texts that could be useful for your programme. You might decide to use excerpts, such as the instructions for growing potatoes on page 20.
- Read through the educator support material for more ideas.
[Click here for Educator Support Materials for Collections 4](#)

10. Making a New Life

- This collection has four articles written specifically for new New Zealanders. It has a particular focus on the way the English language is used.
- Take time now to read these, listening to the audio at the same time.
Click here to access page to download text and audio files

- Read through the educator support material for ideas. These materials have been specifically written for ESOL learners. [Click here for Educator Support Materials for Collections 5](#)

11. Second Time Lucky

- The articles and stories in this book are about work situations. The illustrations are particularly good, with great care taken to give them an adult feel. The collection includes a graphic story.
- Take time now to read these, listening to the audio at the same time.
[Click here to access page to download text and audio files](#)
- Read through the educator support material for ideas.
[Click here for Educator Support Materials for Collections 6](#)

12. Simplifying texts

- Sometimes it's useful (and even necessary) to simplify texts that have content that learners are particularly interested in or need to find out about.
- Earlier in the module we looked at the main characteristics of texts that make them easier to read. You can simplify texts by simplifying the **structure** and the **language**.
- Simplify structure by rewriting complex sentences – sentences with subordinate clauses- as simple or compound sentences. Change any sentences written in the passive voice to the active voice.
- Simplify language by using words that are likely to be in learners' sight vocabulary, or easily decodable (and then known by the learner), or supported by illustration or context. Remember, you can pre-teach a few words and phrases.

13. Linking reading and writing

- Reading and writing are strongly reciprocal, not only in how they develop but in how they are used. It's important to support learners to make links between the two. One example of how to do this is described in the section on language experiences on pages 40 and 41 in [Starting Points – Supporting the Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy](#).

- Although learners are often interested in reading texts written by other learners, don't use these as prime instructional material unless they really do afford the opportunities for instruction that are necessary in an effective programme.

Section C: Monitoring learners' progress

1. Introduction

- Although monitoring learners' progress is a feature of any effective teaching and learning programme, it's particularly important in an entry-level reading programme.
- In this section we'll look at the reasons for that, and suggest some action to take if learners are not making expected progress.

2. The importance of monitoring

- Reading programmes for learners at this level should be designed to provide intensive instruction that addresses learners' needs. As we discussed in Module 1, these needs will have been identified through diagnostic inquiry that is sufficiently fine-grained and specific to focus such instruction.
- You also need to set some expectations around the time-frame that should be needed for learners to make progress. It's important to maintain momentum. Many of these adult learners have already spent too much time not making progress.
- Monitor the impact of the programme within the timeframe that has been set. Extend, refine, modify or change the instructional approach if the learning need persists. Set new learning goals with students.

3. Finite vs dynamic knowledge and skills

- When you're setting timeframes for expected progress it's useful to distinguish between those items of knowledge and skills that are finite and those that are more dynamic. (You can refresh your understanding of these by reading page 4 in the [Starting Points Assessment Guide](#)).
- Think about the finite sets of knowledge and skills as the discrete items that are necessary in order to read. When learners are able to draw on them to decode texts fluently, they are able to use more of their cognitive resources to engage with meaning, examine texts critically, and use their reading more flexibly. When instruction is right, you should expect to see most learners getting finite skills and knowledge under control quite quickly.

4. Finite vs dynamic knowledge and skills – Vocabulary

- Vocabulary knowledge- knowing and being able to use words and phrases- is more dynamic.
- Some sets of words can be considered finite. These are the sight words that readers recognise instantly. Many of them are not phonetically regular, and just have to be learnt. See the Sight Word Recognition list on p. 54 in the [Starting Points Assessment Guide](#))
- Monitor this set closely; until they are under control, learners will struggle to get any fluency.
- In Module 2 we discussed vocabulary development. The vocabulary assessment that is available in the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool should be used to monitor learners' progress.

5. Finite vs dynamic knowledge and skills – Comprehension

- Reading comprehension is dynamic: it keeps developing throughout readers' lifetimes.
- Monitor learners' comprehension by keeping track of:
 - the level of complexity of texts that they can read and understand
 - the range of texts they read
 - their independence in engaging with texts
 - their ability to read for different purposes (for example to find information or follow instructions)
- Here's Dr Sue Dymock talking about monitoring comprehension:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVmdyuZ0aoY&feature=emb_logo

6. Keeping track of progress

- Record learners' progress in gaining control of the knowledge and skills they need to draw on to read (i.e. the finite set), as well as how well they are reading in terms of the texts and tasks they are engaged with.
- Forms and report templates are provided in Appendix B of the [Starting Points Assessment Guide](#).

7. Adjusting the reading programme

- A feature of focused, intensive programmes is that they need to be responsive to the impact they are having on learners. Although sometimes it might be a question of providing more time, often instructional

approaches need to be refined or modified to get the gain you're looking for. It's also possible that you might need to change tack and use a completely different approach.

- If learning difficulties are persistent, then you might need to seek specialist help. The eliminating questions we discussed in Module 1 might already have alerted you to this possibility.

8. Keeping learners involved in their learning

- The principles of adult learning are explained on pages 48 and 49 of [Starting Points – Supporting the Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy](#).
- It's important to find out what the learners think about their learning – what's made a difference and what hasn't.

9. A final note

- The four modules that comprise this learning course have covered the key points to consider when working with adults who are reading at entry level or starting points.
- We hope that by addressing these, you will gain a strong foundation for further developing the skills and knowledge needed to design and implement effective programmes.