Reach More Learners

**Automatically Decoding Words/ Impact of Memory and Language**

In order to become effective at reading words, students must develop their decoding skills to a seemingly ‘automatic’ level. Readers must be able to recognize words quickly and accurately. In truth, when we read we continue to employ the steps of decoding, but we do so in such a manner that it appears almost effortless, or automatic. Automaticity is crucial to building reading skills because students who are able to automatically decode words are free to think about the meaning of the words they are reading. Thus, skilled word decoding is a building block for reading comprehension.

Being able to read words rapidly with high or near perfect accuracy, or automatization, depends upon developing effective decoding skills as well as building a sight word vocabulary.

Here are some strategies to help students develop their ability to decode words automatically.

**Helpful Hints**

* Focus on the automatization of sound-letter associations. Incorporate times throughout the day for reinforcing phonological awareness, working on word attack strategies, etc..
* Teach students how to create words by blending chunks of letters together. Begin by showing students how to combine individual letters into chunks (e.g., /f/... /at/ makes /fat/). Have students who are skilled at chunking individual letters practice combining consonant blends with letter chunks (e.g., /fl/... /at/ makes /flat/), and combining consonant blends with vowel combinations (e.g. /fl/... /ee/... /t / makes /fleet/).
* Build students’ familiarity with the six kinds of syllables to help automatize segmenting and decoding skills:
  + (VC = Vowel/Consonant): Closed syllables where a consonant (or consonants) follow a vowel, (e.g., fun, sad).
  + (VCE = Vowel/Consonant/Silent E): Syllables where a consonant is between a vowel and a silent e (e.g., ice, hope).
  + (CV = Consonant/Vowel, or V = Vowel): Open syllables where one vowel is at the end (e.g., si in silent, e in event).
  + (VV = Vowel/Vowel): Dipthong syllables where two vowels combine to make one sound (e.g., boat, sail).
  + (CLE = Consonant/L/E): Syllables where a consonant plus the letter l is followed by a final e (e.g., simple, bubble).
  + (VR = Vowel/R): R-Combination syllables where a vowel is combined with the letter r (e.g. art, term).
* As students’ word analysis and syllabication skills develop, encourage them to focus upon roots, prefixes, and suffixes of words, e.g., decoding sadness in ‘one step’ by breaking it down into sad (root)+ ness (suffix).
* Encourage students to perceive chunks of letters within a word when reading, i.e., several letters together at once, rather than one letter at a time, for example, seeing the letters th as a unit, or the syllable ing as a unit, when reading the word thing.
* Give students opportunities to build their vocabularies. For example, do pre-reading activities in which students share what they know about a topic, thus activating their vocabulary related to the topic. Immerse students in reading materials to expose them to as much text as possible (Read, Read, Read!).
* Provide opportunities for students to develop reading fluency, the ability to read at a smooth and rapid pace. Encourage students to reread books they’ve read previously that are “easy” for them; have students read along with a book-on-tape or read along with you, etc.
* Focus on building students’ ability to recognize sight words, words that are taught as whole units because they are quite common, have unusual spellings, or cannot be sounded out, e.g. have, said, the, of, etc. Provide reinforcement by having students practice sight words in isolation (e.g., using flash card drills), and in context (circling sight words in their reading).