

WHEN READING CLICKS

A Practical Instructor Training Manual for Beginning-Level Adult Readers

Simple strategies • adult learning challenges • real-life practice

Designed for adult basic education, community programs, church-based education, tutoring, small groups, and hybrid instruction

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Working title and edition wording may be customized.

Before You Begin: Meet Denise

Denise is 47. She has raised three children, worked for years, managed a household, and learned how to solve problems that never came with written directions. But when someone hands her a form, she quietly says, “Can I take this home?” She has spent years making sure other people do not discover how hard reading can be for her.

Then Denise comes to your class. She does not need to be treated like a child, and she does not need another stack of pages that prove what she cannot do. She needs an instructor who can find the exact place where reading begins to break down, teach one useful strategy, and help her experience a real success.

What do you do first? Start with the person, not the problem. Find what Denise can already do. Listen for where the reading process stops working. Teach one small step. Use it in something that matters to her. Then name the win. That is the heart of When Reading Clicks.

A NOTE TO THE INSTRUCTOR

You may be an experienced teacher, or you may be a volunteer who has never taught reading before. You do not need to know everything before you can help an adult today. This manual will show you what to notice, what to try, and what to say when a learner gets stuck. Keep every lesson adult, private, and respectful. Use fictional practice forms instead of real bank, medical, immigration, password, or identification information, and never place personally identifiable learner information into an AI service.

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Quick Start: What Do I Do With a Learner Tomorrow?

If you have a learner arriving tomorrow and you do not have time to read the entire manual first, start here. The purpose of the first meeting is not to prove how much the learner cannot do. The purpose is to learn what the learner can already do, identify the first teachable gap, and make sure the learner leaves having experienced a genuine win.

The first-meeting sequence

1. Welcome the learner as an adult. Ask what the learner wants reading to make easier in daily life.
2. Choose one short, private reading sample. Avoid asking the learner to read aloud in front of a group without preparation.
3. Notice the first point of difficulty: letters and sounds, blending, word recognition, long words, smooth reading, vocabulary, or understanding.
4. Teach one small thing immediately. Do not spend the entire meeting testing.
5. Use the new skill in something that matters: a work schedule, appointment card, short message, application, sign, menu, or other adult task.
6. End by naming the progress specifically: "You broke that word into parts and read it without guessing."
7. Write down the next step before the learner leaves.

THE FIRST AHA

A learner can read a difficult-looking word and still have a foundational gap. A learner can also stumble through a short passage and understand it deeply. Reading is not one skill. It is a system of skills. Find the part of the system that is weak instead of labeling the whole reader as weak.

The CLICKS Framework: The Signature Teaching Cycle

When Reading CLICKS is the organizing framework for this manual. It gives volunteer tutors, classroom teachers, and program staff a repeatable way to respond when a learner gets stuck. The framework is intentionally simple enough to remember without a flowchart, yet flexible enough to use with phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, digital literacy, and real-life reading.

C — Check where the breakdown begins

Do not begin by assigning more pages. Observe the exact point where the task stops working. Can the learner identify the letters? connect letters to sounds? blend? recognize the word? read the sentence smoothly? explain the meaning?

L — Link the skill to something that matters

Use the learner's goals to choose examples. A sound pattern is easier to value when it helps read a work word, appointment instruction, child's school note, text message, or application.

I — Instruct one small step explicitly

Model the skill. Think aloud briefly. Show the pattern. Then let the learner try with support. Explicit does not mean childish; it means clear.

C — Challenge and coach

Give just enough varied practice for the learner to use the skill rather than repeat the demonstration. Add an adult learning challenge, partner task, sorting activity, short reading, or real-life simulation.

K — Keep the gain through retrieval and review

Bring the skill back later that day, the next lesson, and again after time has passed. Durable learning comes from retrieving a skill, not simply seeing it once.

S — Show the learner the win

Name the strategy the learner used and the result. "You slowed down, found the two chunks, and read the whole word." Specific feedback helps the learner understand that progress came from a repeatable process.

A PHRASE TO REMEMBER

Do not ask, "What is wrong with this reader?" Ask, "Where is the reading process breaking down, and what is the smallest useful thing I can teach next?"

PART I — See the Reader Before the Reading Problem

The chapters in Part I establish the teaching stance that makes the rest of the manual work. Adults are more willing to practice difficult skills when instruction preserves dignity, connects with real goals, and produces visible progress.

Chapter 1 — Adult Dignity, Strengths, and the Return to Learning

Why adult reading instruction feels different

Adults bring developed language, life knowledge, problem-solving ability, work experience, family responsibilities, and strong opinions to the classroom even when print skills are limited. A lesson can therefore be academically basic without being intellectually childish. The instructor's job is to keep the reading demand at the right level while keeping the topic, tone, and purpose adult.

Many learners have had years of practice hiding difficulty. They may memorize forms, rely on a spouse, avoid certain jobs, ask others to “look this over,” or choose products by shape and color rather than print. These workarounds are evidence of resourcefulness. They also mean an instructor should not assume that a confident conversational adult has equally strong print skills.

Build from competence

Start every lesson by identifying something the learner can already do. This is not empty praise. It is diagnostic information. If a learner can explain a complex work process orally but cannot read a short written version of that process, the gap is not thinking; the gap is access to print. That distinction changes how the instructor teaches.

Use strengths as bridges. A learner who remembers spoken information well may benefit from saying a sound or word before reading it. A learner who is visually strong may benefit from word families, chunk marking, and consistent page design. A learner who has strong practical reasoning may engage quickly with realistic forms, schedules, labels, and workplace problems.

What not to do

Do not use babyish clip art, children's stories, stickers, or sing-song directions unless the adult learner specifically enjoys them. Do not ask a learner to disclose why school was difficult. Do not make oral reading a public performance. Do not compare one adult's speed with another's. Do not turn every error into a correction. Select the error that reveals the skill you are teaching.

A Trick That Helps

Use the phrase “Let's find the part that is making this hard.” It moves attention away from the learner as the problem and toward the task as something the two of you can investigate together.

Chapter 2 — Confidence Without Pretending the Work Is Easy

Confidence is built by evidence

Adult learners often know when praise is vague. “Good job” can feel disconnected from what happened. Better feedback names the action: “You went back to the vowel, tried the sound again, and then the word made sense.” That kind of response teaches a strategy and gives the learner evidence of progress.

Create tasks in which success is likely but not automatic. If every item is effortless, the learner is not growing. If every item is a struggle, the learner is practicing frustration. A useful practice set often contains mostly familiar material with a smaller amount of new challenge.

Private risk, public respect

Offer learners a chance to rehearse before reading aloud to a group. Use partner practice, silent preview, echo reading, or choral reading. A learner may choose to read publicly after preparation, but the instructor should not use surprise oral reading as a measure of commitment.

The micro-success cycle

Use a short cycle several times in a lesson: model one thing, practice it together, let the learner do it independently, use it in a real context, and name the win. Five small successes in one hour are more powerful than one long worksheet finished with help.

A Trick That Helps

Keep a visible “I can now...” list in the learner’s folder. Write skills in everyday language: “I can read words ending in -ing,” “I can find the due date on a bill,” “I can break a long word into chunks.” Review the list when motivation drops.

Chapter 3 — Find the Breakdown Before You Teach the Lesson

Reading is a system

The strongest early decision an instructor can make is to locate the first weak link in the reading process. A learner who cannot reliably connect letters with sounds needs different instruction from a learner who decodes accurately but reads so slowly that meaning is lost. A learner who reads smoothly but cannot explain unfamiliar words needs vocabulary and comprehension support, not more phonics worksheets.

This manual uses a simple sequence: print awareness and letter knowledge → sound awareness → letter-sound connection → blending and decoding → word recognition → longer-word strategies → fluency → vocabulary → sentence and passage comprehension. Writing interacts with every part of this sequence.

The six-question quick diagnostic

Ask these questions in order. Stop at the first area that is consistently weak: (1) Can the learner name common letters? (2) Can the learner give common sounds for those letters? (3) Can the learner blend a few sounds into a word? (4) Can the learner read common short words without guessing? (5) Can the learner read a short sentence smoothly enough to preserve meaning? (6) Can the learner explain what the sentence or passage means?

One missed item is not a diagnosis. Look for patterns across several examples. The pattern tells you where to teach.

Use errors as clues

If a learner reads “appointment” as “apartment,” the learner may be using the first letters and guessing from a familiar word. If a learner reads every word correctly but cannot answer a simple question, decoding may be stronger than comprehension. If the learner repeatedly loses the line, the issue may involve tracking, vision, print density, or attention rather than word knowledge alone.

A Trick That Helps

Write down what the learner actually said, not just “wrong.” The difference between the printed word and the spoken response often reveals the strategy the learner is using.

Chapter 4 — The Informal Reading Profile

What to observe

An informal reading profile should be short enough that the learner still has energy to learn something that day. Observe letter knowledge, basic sound knowledge, blending, common word reading, a few longer words, a short oral reading sample, and a brief comprehension conversation. Add a writing sample such as name, address on a fictional form, a short message, or a sentence dictated by the learner.

Record both strengths and needs. “Reads familiar signs and common work words” is as important as “confuses b and d.” A profile that lists only deficits encourages narrow instruction.

Three levels of help

Mark whether the learner completed each item independently, with a prompt, or only after a model. This is often more useful than a simple right-or-wrong score. It shows how much support the learner needs to be successful.

Do not over-test

If you already know the learner cannot blend three simple sounds, there is no benefit in requiring a long list of difficult words. Move to teaching. Assessment should answer an instructional question, not exhaust the learner.

A Trick That Helps

Use the rule “test to decide, teach to improve.” The moment you know what you need to decide the next step, stop testing and start teaching.

Chapter 5 — Build Lessons Adults Want to Return To

The 60-minute lesson architecture

A practical lesson can follow this pattern: 5 minutes for connection and goal; 10 minutes for review; 15 minutes for explicit instruction; 15 minutes for guided practice or a learning challenge; 10 minutes for real-life application; 5 minutes for retrieval and a next-step plan. The exact minutes are flexible. The important feature is movement between explanation, practice, and use.

For a 90-minute class, add a second skill application, a short break, and time for writing or digital practice. For one-to-one tutoring, keep transitions conversational and use the learner's own goals to choose materials.

Plan for multilevel groups

Use one adult topic with different reading demands. For a workplace schedule, one learner might identify days and times, another might read short instructions, and another might answer inference questions. Everyone works on the same meaningful context without pretending everyone is at the same reading level.

End with retrieval

Ask the learner to do one thing from memory before leaving: read three target words, explain the strategy, locate information on a new sample, or teach the trick back to you. Retrieval tells you more than “Do you understand?”

A Trick That Helps

Plan the real-life task first, then decide which reading skill the learner needs in order to do it. This reverses the common pattern of teaching disconnected worksheets and hoping relevance appears later.

PART II — Teach the Reading System in Small, Clear Steps

Adult foundational reading instruction should be explicit enough to remove mystery and adult enough to preserve dignity. Current adult literacy resources continue to emphasize the major components of reading—alphabetics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—while recent professional learning also highlights reading purpose, effective questioning, metacognition, and critical thinking for early-level learners. The chapters that follow translate those ideas into teachable moves.

Chapter 6 — Sound Awareness for Adults: Hear It Before You Read It

Why this matters

Some adults can name letters but have difficulty noticing or manipulating the sounds inside spoken words. If the learner cannot hear that map begins with /m/ or cannot blend /s/ /a/ /t/ into sat, phonics instruction may feel like memorizing arbitrary symbols.

Keep it oral and brief

Sound-awareness practice does not need childish pictures or long drills. Use adult words and spoken tasks: “What sound do you hear first in rent?” “Say job without /j/.” “Which begins the same: pay, phone, map?” Five focused minutes can be enough.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “I am going to say three sounds slowly: /m/ /a/ /p/. Listen. Now I will push them together: map. Your turn with /r/ /e/ /d/.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Have the learner move one coin or paper square for each sound. The physical movement makes invisible sounds visible without making the task feel like a children’s worksheet.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Sound Sort: Say 12 adult-relevant words. The learner places each card under a target beginning sound. Do not show the printed word until after the oral sort.

Chapter 7 — Letter-Sound Connections Without Endless Worksheets

Teach what is needed

Do not assume that knowing the alphabet song means the learner knows letters automatically in print. Check uppercase and lowercase letters and the most common sounds. Teach a small set at a time and mix known letters with new ones.

Use high-utility patterns

Choose letters and patterns that quickly create useful words. Once a learner knows a small set of consonants and short vowels, build real words such as job, bus, map, pay, gas, rent, help, and stop as soon as the sound patterns allow.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “This letter is m. The sound is /m/. Watch my mouth. /m/. Now you say it. I am going to mix m with letters you already know so you have to recognize it, not just remember where it was on the page.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Use “name it, sound it, find it, use it.” The learner names the letter, says the sound, finds it among other letters, and then reads it in a word.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Letter Hunt: Give the learner a realistic flyer or sample form. Circle every target letter for one minute, then read two words containing it.

Chapter 8 — Blending: The Point Where Sounds Become Reading

Why learners get stuck

Some learners can give every sound in a word but cannot smoothly combine them. They may pause so long between sounds that the word disappears from working memory. Blending needs to be taught as an action, not assumed.

Continuous blending

When possible, hold sounds that can be stretched and slide into the next sound: mmm-aaap → map. Keep the sounds connected instead of separating them with long pauses. Stop and restart if extra “uh” sounds appear after consonants.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “Do not guess the word. Keep your voice moving. Watch: sss-aaa-t. Sat. Now you do it with me.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Use a finger slide under the letters. The finger should move continuously while the voice blends. The motion reminds the learner not to stop after every sound.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Blend and Build: Put letter cards on the table. The learner builds a word, slides a finger under it to blend, then changes one card to make a new word.

Chapter 9 — Stop the Guessing Habit

Why guessing develops

Adults who have struggled for years often survive reading by using the first letter, context, memory, or the shape of a word. Those strategies can sometimes produce the right answer, which makes guessing feel successful even when it prevents accurate decoding.

Correct the strategy, not the person

When the learner guesses, do not simply say “wrong.” Ask the learner to point to the letters and read all the way through. Context is useful for checking meaning after decoding; it should not replace looking at the print.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “That word would make sense in the sentence, but let’s see whether the letters agree. Start at the beginning and read through every part.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Cover everything after the first chunk, read the chunk, reveal the next chunk, then put the whole word back together. This interrupts the quick-guess pattern.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Guess or Prove? Show a short sentence with one bold word. Offer two possible words that both make sense. The learner must use the letters to prove which word is actually printed.

Chapter 10 — Longer Words: Make Big Words Smaller

The confidence problem

Long words can trigger a shutdown before the learner attempts them. The instructor's first job is to make the word look manageable. Mark chunks, syllables, prefixes, suffixes, and familiar word parts.

Useful chunks

Teach common endings such as -ing, -ed, -er, -ly, -ment, -tion, and -able as they appear in the learner's real materials. Teach common beginnings such as re-, un-, pre-, dis-, and mis-. Avoid turning the lesson into a terminology test; the learner needs the strategy more than the label.

Instructor Says

Instructor: "We are not reading this whole word at once. I see a part I know at the end. Let's box it. Now the word is smaller."

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Use "find a part you know." Circle an ending, underline a familiar root or small word, then read what remains. Reassemble the word and say it naturally.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Chunk Race—Against Yourself: Give five real-life long words. The learner marks useful chunks, reads them, then repeats the same set later and notices which words now require less help.

Chapter 11 — High-Frequency Words: Automatic Does Not Mean Memorized by Shape

The goal

Common words should become quick enough that they do not consume all of the learner's attention. But automatic recognition is stronger when the learner notices how letters and sounds work together rather than memorizing the outer shape of the word.

Map the word

Say the word, stretch or segment the sounds, connect sounds to letters, notice any unusual part, read the word, write it, and retrieve it later. For words with irregular spelling, identify the regular parts and explicitly mark the unexpected part.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “The word is said. We hear /s/ /e/ /d/. The first and last parts are easy to match. The middle spelling is the part we need to remember.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Put only five to eight target words in the learner's active review stack. Retire words that are consistently automatic and replace them with new ones.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Word Wallet: Keep a small ring or envelope of useful words chosen from the learner's life. Shuffle, read, sort, write, and use them in short messages.

Chapter 12 — Fluency: Smooth Enough to Keep the Meaning

What fluency is

Fluency is not simply speed. It includes accuracy, appropriate pace, phrasing, and expression that reflect meaning. A learner who reads one word at a time may spend so much attention on decoding that little attention remains for understanding.

Use short repeated reading

Choose a short passage the learner can mostly decode. Model one sentence, read together, let the learner reread, and discuss meaning. Repeated reading is most useful when it is brief, supported, and connected to comprehension.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “Listen to how these words belong together: ‘Please call / before five o’clock.’ Now read the phrase with me. We are not racing; we are making it sound like speech.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Add light slash marks where natural phrases break. Remove the marks after practice so the learner learns to see phrasing independently.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Beat Your Best—Smoothness Edition: The learner rereads the same four sentences and rates each attempt: choppy, smoother, or sounds like talking. Avoid public speed rankings.

Chapter 13 — Vocabulary: Teach the Word and the World Around It

Why vocabulary matters

A learner can pronounce a word accurately without knowing what it means. Comprehension depends on meaning. Teach words that unlock daily life, work, health, finances, family communication, and the topics the learner wants to read.

Four useful moves

Say the word in plain language, connect it to something known, show it in more than one sentence, and ask the learner to use or explain it. Add a picture or gesture when useful, but keep the explanation adult.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “Due means something is expected by a certain time. If a bill is due Friday, Friday is the last day to pay on time. Tell me something else that can be due.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Teach word families of meaning, not just spelling. For employ, connect employer, employee, employment, and unemployed so one root opens several useful words.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Meaning Match: Match word cards to short adult situations instead of dictionary definitions. Example: overdue → “The payment was supposed to be made last week.”

Chapter 14 — Comprehension: Read With a Purpose

Purpose changes attention

Before reading, tell the learner what the reading is for. “Find what time the office closes” creates a different reading process from “Read this page.” A clear purpose reduces unnecessary load and makes success visible.

Teach three question types

Start with find-it questions where the answer is stated. Then use think-and-connect questions that require combining clues. Finally, ask apply-it questions that connect the text to a decision. Early-level readers can think critically even when the text itself is simple.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “Before we read, here is what we are hunting for: What should the employee do if she will be late? Keep that question in your mind while we read.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Read the question first, underline one or two key words, then scan or read for those ideas. This is especially powerful with forms, schedules, notices, and short passages.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Evidence Detective: The learner answers a question and must point to the word, phrase, or sentence that helped prove the answer.

Chapter 15 — Writing Makes Reading Stick

Reading and writing reinforce each other

Writing requires the learner to retrieve sounds, letters, word patterns, vocabulary, and sentence structure. A learner who can read a word but cannot write or build it may not yet have a durable representation of the word.

Start with meaningful writing

Use names, lists, short texts, appointment notes, work messages, forms, goals, and one-sentence responses. Dictation can be useful when it practices the exact pattern being taught.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “You just read the word payment. Now say it slowly, write the parts you hear, and then compare your writing with the printed word.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Use “say it, tap it, write it, check it.” The learner says the word, taps or marks the sounds/chunks, writes it, then checks against the model.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Fix the Message: Give a realistic two-line text with one missing word, punctuation mark, or spelling pattern. The learner repairs it and explains the change.

Chapter 16 — Memory, Review, and the Power of Coming Back Later

Why a good lesson can disappear

Performance during a lesson is not the same as long-term learning. A learner may read a word perfectly after six immediate repetitions and forget it next week. Plan for spaced retrieval across time.

A simple review schedule

Revisit a new skill near the end of the lesson, at the next lesson, a few lessons later, and in a new context. Mix old and new items. Retrieval should become gradually less supported.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “I am bringing this word back because remembering after time has passed makes the learning stronger.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Keep a “Bring Back” list. Every lesson includes three older words, one older strategy, and one older real-life task.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Memory Mix: Shuffle six known words with two new words. The learner sorts them into “automatic,” “need a second,” and “teach me again.” Use the result to plan review without shame.

Chapter 17 — Reading on Screens: Digital Literacy Is Reading Too

Why digital print is different

A learner may read a paper form successfully and still struggle online because screens add scrolling, menus, icons, passwords, links, pop-ups, and changing layouts. Digital reading requires navigation as well as word recognition and comprehension.

Teach navigation explicitly

Model how to identify a button, tab, link, field, checkbox, drop-down menu, and error message. Use practice accounts or fictional forms. Teach the learner to pause before clicking and read the full instruction.

Instructor Says

Instructor: “First we are not typing anything. We are going to look at the screen and name what each area is asking us to do.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Use the “Stop—Read—Choose” rule before clicking: stop, read the label or message, then choose the action. This reduces accidental clicks and builds independence.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Screen Hunt: On a safe practice page or screenshot, the learner finds a search box, menu, submit button, back button, and help link, then explains what each does.

Chapter 18 — AI as an Instructor Tool, Not a Replacement for Teaching

Appropriate uses

AI can help an instructor create extra practice sentences, simplified passages, vocabulary examples, role-play scenarios, and multiple versions of a worksheet. It can also help generate ideas for adult learning challenges. The instructor remains responsible for accuracy, reading level, tone, and appropriateness.

Protect learner information

Do not enter names, dates of birth, Social Security numbers, bank information, medical details, immigration information, passwords, or other sensitive learner data into an AI tool. Use fictional profiles and invented documents.

Verify everything

AI can produce inaccurate facts, awkward reading passages, or poor phonics examples. A word list may include exceptions that undermine the pattern being taught. Read every item before using it. If the lesson teaches a sound-spelling pattern, check every example yourself.

A TRICK THAT HELPS

Ask AI for structure, not authority. For example: “Create ten fictional workplace sentences using short-vowel CVC words plus these five high-frequency words. Keep the tone adult.” Then edit the output before class.

LEARNING CHALLENGE

Human Check: Give instructors an AI-generated practice set with three intentional problems. Their task is to find the items that are inaccurate, too difficult, childish, or unsafe. This builds digital literacy for teachers as well as learners.

PART III — They're Stuck. Now What?

This section is designed for the moment an instructor thinks, "I know the learner is struggling, but I do not know what to try next." Each scenario names what the instructor sees, what may be happening, what not to do, and the next move to test.

1. The learner looks at the first letter and guesses the whole word

What may be happening: The learner may be using partial visual information and context instead of reading through the word.

What not to do: Do not ask the learner to guess again or give a picture clue that encourages more guessing.

Try this: Cover the later part of the word. Read the first chunk. Reveal the next part. Then reread the entire word and check whether it makes sense in the sentence.

A Trick That Helps: "Let's prove the word with the letters."

2. The learner knows letter names but not the sounds

What may be happening: Alphabet knowledge may be memorized as a sequence rather than connected to reading.

What not to do: Do not assign long alphabet-copy pages.

Try this: Teach two or three high-utility letter-sound connections, mix them with known letters, and immediately use them to build or read words.

A Trick That Helps: "Name it, sound it, find it, use it."

3. The learner can say the sounds but cannot blend them

What may be happening: The sounds may be separated by pauses, overloading working memory.

What not to do: Do not repeat "sound it out" louder or faster.

Try this: Model continuous blending with a finger slide and let the learner blend with you before trying alone.

A Trick That Helps: "Keep the voice moving."

4. Every long word causes the learner to stop

What may be happening: The learner may see the word as one large visual problem and have no chunking routine.

What not to do: Do not simply pronounce the word and move on every time.

Try this: Mark a familiar ending or beginning, divide the remaining word into manageable parts, read the parts, and rebuild the whole word.

A Trick That Helps: "Big words are smaller parts put together."

5. The learner reads accurately but very slowly

What may be happening: Decoding may still require so much attention that fluency is not automatic.

What not to do: Do not turn the lesson into a speed contest.

Try this: Use short supported repeated reading, phrase marks, and rereading for meaning.

A Trick That Helps: "Smooth enough to keep the meaning."

6. The learner reads smoothly but cannot explain the passage

What may be happening: The difficulty may be vocabulary, background knowledge, attention to purpose, or comprehension rather than decoding.

What not to do: Do not automatically move back to easier phonics work.

Try this: Set a specific purpose before reading, preteach one or two key words, and ask the learner to point to evidence for answers.

A Trick That Helps: "Know what you are hunting for."

7. The learner forgets words that were mastered last week

What may be happening: Practice may have been massed in one session without spaced retrieval.

What not to do: Do not assume the learner was not paying attention.

Try this: Bring the words back in short mixed review across several lessons and contexts.

A Trick That Helps: "Remembering later makes it stronger."

8. The learner loses the line while reading

What may be happening: Dense print, tracking difficulty, vision, fatigue, or attention may be interfering.

What not to do: Do not interpret line loss as laziness.

Try this: Increase spacing, reduce text density, use a plain index card or reading window, and ask whether the learner has had recent vision care when appropriate.

A Trick That Helps: “Make the page easier to navigate.”

9. The learner freezes when asked to read aloud

What may be happening: The learner may understand the text but experience anxiety from past public reading experiences.

What not to do: Do not force cold oral reading as a confidence-building exercise.

Try this: Offer silent preview, partner rehearsal, echo reading, or choice. Let public reading follow preparation.

A Trick That Helps: “Practice privately before performing publicly.”

10. The learner can read a word on a flashcard but not in a sentence

What may be happening: Recognition may depend on the exact practice format rather than flexible reading.

What not to do: Do not keep using the same isolated cards only.

Try this: Move the word through levels: card → phrase → sentence → new sentence → real-life sample.

A Trick That Helps: “Change the place, keep the word.”

11. The learner understands spoken instructions but not written ones

What may be happening: Language and reasoning may be stronger than print decoding.

What not to do: Do not simplify the idea until it becomes childish.

Try this: Keep the adult concept, shorten the written language, teach the key words, and gradually rebuild the print demand.

A Trick That Helps: “Simplify the print, not the adult.”

12. The learner reads the words but misses important small words

What may be happening: Function words such as not, before, after, if, and except may carry crucial meaning even though they look easy.

What not to do: Do not focus only on long vocabulary words.

Try this: Highlight meaning-changing small words and compare two sentences that differ by one small word.

A Trick That Helps: "Small words can make big changes."

13. The learner confuses similar-looking words

What may be happening: The learner may be attending to overall shape instead of internal letter order.

What not to do: Do not ask the learner to memorize the word as a picture.

Try this: Compare the words side by side, underline the letters that differ, read each through, and use each in a sentence.

A Trick That Helps: "Find the part that changes the word."

14. The learner can answer literal questions but not inference questions

What may be happening: The learner may need explicit practice connecting clues rather than more difficult text.

What not to do: Do not jump to a long passage.

Try this: Use two-sentence situations and ask, "What do these clues tell us?" Require the learner to name the clues.

A Trick That Helps: "Clue + clue = a reasonable conclusion."

15. The learner avoids writing

What may be happening: Writing may feel permanent and expose spelling difficulties more visibly than reading.

What not to do: Do not begin with a full paragraph.

Try this: Use oral rehearsal, sentence frames, word banks, copying only after meaning is clear, and short authentic writing such as a text or list.

A Trick That Helps: "Say it before you write it."

16. The learner does well one-to-one but shuts down in class

What may be happening: The challenge may be social risk, pace, noise, or task comparison.

What not to do: Do not assume the learner lacks motivation.

Try this: Preview tasks, assign a supportive partner, use private response options, and avoid public ranking.

A Trick That Helps: “Reduce the audience, not the expectation.”

17. The learner reads paper well but struggles online

What may be happening: Navigation demands may be the barrier, not reading itself.

What not to do: Do not assume general computer knowledge.

Try this: Teach the screen vocabulary and navigation sequence explicitly using a safe practice page.

A Trick That Helps: “Stop—Read—Choose.”

18. The learner wants to prepare for a test immediately

What may be happening: The learner may have an urgent goal but foundational gaps may block progress.

What not to do: Do not spend months on disconnected basics before touching goal material.

Try this: Use goal-relevant items now, identify the foundation beneath them, and teach that foundation through the goal context.

A Trick That Helps: “Teach the foundation through the destination.”

19. The learner says, “I’m just not a reader.”

What may be happening: The statement may reflect years of accumulated evidence from school experiences.

What not to do: Do not argue with a motivational speech alone.

Try this: Create a task the learner can complete with a new strategy and name the strategy afterward. Let success challenge the old conclusion.

A Trick That Helps: “Evidence changes identity more than slogans do.”

20. The learner seems to understand but always waits for help

What may be happening: The learner may have learned that the tutor will rescue quickly.

What not to do: Do not fill every silence.

Try this: Use a prompt ladder: wait → ask what the learner notices → point to the relevant part → remind the strategy → model only if needed.

A Trick That Helps: “Give help in steps, not all at once.”

PART IV — Adult Learning Challenges and Games That Teach Something

Games can increase attention, repetition, retrieval, and willingness to try—if they preserve adult dignity and are tied to a specific skill. CAST’s UDL Guidelines 3.0 explicitly emphasize joy and play as part of engagement, but play does not require childish materials. In this manual, most activities are called learning challenges because the purpose is practice, not entertainment alone.

Five rules for adult learning games

- No public humiliation, elimination, or ranking by speed.
- Use adult topics and real-life print whenever possible.
- Let the learner compete against a previous attempt more often than against another person.
- Name the reading skill before or after the activity so the learner knows what is being practiced.
- Keep setup simple enough that volunteers can repeat the activity without expensive materials.

1. Find It Fast

Skill target: Scanning and locating information

Materials: Two fictional forms, schedules, labels, or notices

How to play: Ask one specific question at a time: “What day is the appointment?” “Where is the phone number?” The learner points to the answer and reads the surrounding line.

Variation: Use a timer only to compare the learner with the learner’s own previous attempt.

2. Guess or Prove?

Skill target: Accurate decoding

Materials: Short sentences with two plausible word choices

How to play: Both choices make sense in context, but only one matches the printed letters. The learner must read through the word and prove the choice.

Variation: Use pairs such as form/from, plan/plant, paid/pain, then move to longer words.

3. Chunk and Build

Skill target: Long-word decoding

Materials: Index cards cut into word parts

How to play: Build words such as pay|ment, employ|ment, help|ful, re|turn, appoint|ment. Read each part, then the whole word.

Variation: Mix real and nonsense combinations and ask which creates an actual word.

4. Word Wallet

Skill target: Automatic word recognition

Materials: Small card ring or envelope

How to play: Keep 5–8 useful words. Shuffle and read. Retire automatic words and add new words from real life.

Variation: Ask the learner to use two words in a text message or note.

5. Meaning Match

Skill target: Vocabulary

Materials: Word cards and situation cards

How to play: Match a vocabulary word to a plain-language real-life situation.

Variation: Have the learner create a new situation for one word.

6. Evidence Detective

Skill target: Comprehension

Materials: Short passage and questions

How to play: After answering, the learner must point to the word or sentence that supports the answer.

Variation: Use one question that requires combining two clues.

7. Sentence Repair Shop

Skill target: Writing and comprehension

Materials: Short realistic messages with one problem

How to play: The learner fixes a missing word, punctuation mark, capitalization, or confusing sentence.

Variation: Ask which error could change the meaning most.

8. Read and Do

Skill target: Functional comprehension

Materials: Simple written directions and safe classroom materials

How to play: The learner follows a one- or two-step written direction exactly.

Variation: Increase complexity gradually: “Circle the total, then underline the due date.”

9. Sort the Sounds

Skill target: Phonological awareness

Materials: Coins/cards and spoken words

How to play: Learner sorts spoken words by beginning or ending sound before seeing print.

Variation: Reveal printed cards afterward and connect sound to spelling.

10. Change One

Skill target: Phonics and blending

Materials: Letter cards

How to play: Build a word, then change one letter to make a new word: map → mat → sat → sit.

Variation: Ask the learner to say which sound changed.

11. Word Family Ladder

Skill target: Pattern recognition

Materials: Whiteboard or paper

How to play: Start with a known pattern and change the first sound: pay, day, say, way. Then use each in an adult sentence.

Variation: Include a “rule breaker” word and discuss why it does not belong.

12. Smooth Talk

Skill target: Fluency

Materials: Four short sentences

How to play: Learner marks phrase breaks, reads with support, then rereads without marks.

Variation: Rate choppy/smooth/sounds like talking rather than words per minute.

13. Question First

Skill target: Purposeful reading

Materials: Short notice plus question card

How to play: Learner reads the question first, underlines key words, then reads the notice to answer.

Variation: Use a second question that requires a different reading purpose.

14. Small Word, Big Difference

Skill target: Comprehension

Materials: Sentence pairs

How to play: Compare sentences differing by not, before, after, unless, except, or only. Discuss how meaning changes.

Variation: Learner writes or dictates a new pair.

15. Real or Not?

Skill target: Decoding

Materials: Mix of real and decodable nonsense words

How to play: Learner decodes each item, then decides whether it is an actual English word.

Variation: Use sparingly and explain that nonsense words check decoding without memory.

16. Three Clues

Skill target: Vocabulary

Materials: Target words

How to play: Give three clues without saying the word. Learner identifies the word and explains the connection.

Variation: Learner gives the clues next round.

17. Work Schedule Hunt

Skill target: Functional reading

Materials: Fictional weekly schedule

How to play: Ask questions about start time, day off, shift change, or total hours.

Variation: Add a short supervisor note that changes one day.

18. Appointment Puzzle

Skill target: Functional reading

Materials: Fictional appointment card

How to play: Learner locates date, time, location, arrival instructions, and phone number.

Variation: Add two appointment cards and ask which is earlier.

19. Menu Math-Reading Mix

Skill target: Reading plus numeracy

Materials: Simple adult menu

How to play: Learner reads item names and finds requested information.

Variation: Add a budget question if math is appropriate.

20. Form Field Match

Skill target: Forms literacy

Materials: Blank fictional form

How to play: Match information cards to fields such as last name, city, emergency contact, date.

Variation: Discuss which fields are private and should not be shared publicly.

21. Message Order

Skill target: Sequencing

Materials: Four sentence strips

How to play: Put a short realistic message or procedure in logical order.

Variation: Remove transition words first, then add them back and notice how they help.

22. What Comes Next?

Skill target: Inference and sequencing

Materials: Three-sentence scenarios

How to play: Learner predicts the most reasonable next event and names the clues.

Variation: Offer two plausible options and discuss evidence.

23. Headline to Detail

Skill target: Main idea

Materials: Short adult-interest paragraph

How to play: Learner selects the best heading from three choices.

Variation: Learner creates a new heading in five words or fewer.

24. Word Part Hunt

Skill target: Morphology

Materials: Flyer or workplace page

How to play: Find words with a target ending or beginning, circle the part, and discuss how it affects meaning.

Variation: Sort by suffix or prefix.

25. Sticky Note Summary

Skill target: Comprehension

Materials: Short passage and sticky note

How to play: Learner writes or dictates the most important idea in one sentence.

Variation: Limit to seven words for an extra challenge after meaning is clear.

26. Teach It Back

Skill target: Metacognition

Materials: No special materials

How to play: Learner explains the day's trick to the instructor as if teaching a new student.

Variation: Instructor deliberately makes a common error for the learner to correct.

27. Memory Mix

Skill target: Spaced retrieval

Materials: Old and new word cards

How to play: Sort words into automatic/need a second/teach me again. Review only what needs review.

Variation: Repeat at end of lesson and next session.

28. Screen Hunt

Skill target: Digital navigation

Materials: Screenshot or safe practice webpage

How to play: Find buttons, links, boxes, tabs, and error messages and explain each function.

Variation: Use a phone screenshot if that is the learner's main device.

29. Safe or Sensitive?

Skill target: Digital/privacy literacy

Materials: Fictional information cards

How to play: Sort information into okay to practice publicly vs private/sensitive. Discuss why.

Variation: Add AI scenarios: “Would you paste this into a chatbot?”

30. Job Posting Detective

Skill target: Workforce reading

Materials: Simplified fictional job posting

How to play: Find pay, hours, required skills, location, and how to apply.

Variation: Ask which requirement is essential versus preferred.

31. Bill Basics

Skill target: Financial reading

Materials: Fictional utility bill

How to play: Find account number label, amount due, due date, contact number, and late-payment wording.

Variation: Never use a learner’s real bill unless fully de-identified and the learner chooses to use it.

32. Health Label Hunt

Skill target: Health literacy

Materials: Fictional OTC-style label

How to play: Locate dose, frequency, warning, and age information.

Variation: Use only fictional educational labels; remind learners to follow real medical labels and professional advice.

33. Two Truths From the Text

Skill target: Comprehension

Materials: Short passage

How to play: Learner states two facts supported by the passage and one statement not supported; partner identifies the unsupported one.

Variation: Use with a group after private reading.

34. Build the Question

Skill target: Question awareness

Materials: Answer card plus short passage

How to play: Give the answer and ask the learner to create a question the passage can answer.

Variation: Compare a thin/fact question with a thicker/why question.

35. One-Minute Word Sort

Skill target: Word patterns

Materials: Word cards

How to play: Sort by vowel pattern, suffix, meaning, or number of chunks. Accuracy matters more than speed.

Variation: Redo later and compare organization, not ranking.

36. Choose the Best Text

Skill target: Functional writing

Materials: Three versions of a short text message

How to play: Learner chooses which message is clearest and most appropriate for work or an appointment.

Variation: Revise the weakest message together.

37. Picture Only After

Skill target: Vocabulary/context

Materials: A realistic photo plus printed word/sentence

How to play: First decode the word from print; then use the image to confirm meaning.

Variation: Discuss how pictures help meaning but should not replace reading the letters.

38. Clue + Clue

Skill target: Inference

Materials: Two-sentence scenarios

How to play: Learner highlights two clues and states the reasonable conclusion.

Variation: Ask what additional clue would make the conclusion stronger.

39. Read, Cover, Remember

Skill target: Retrieval

Materials: Short sentence or 3-item list

How to play: Read, cover the text, say what was remembered, uncover, and check.

Variation: Use with directions, not just word lists.

40. Exit Ticket Choice

Skill target: Metacognition

Materials: Three prompt cards

How to play: Learner chooses one: “A trick I used,” “A word I can now read,” or “A real-life task I can do better.”

Variation: Save tickets to review progress monthly.

PART V — Ready-to-Teach Lessons With Instructor Scripts

These lessons are models, not a rigid sequence. Select the lesson that matches the learner's profile. Each lesson uses the CLICKS cycle and includes an adult application. Replace sample words with equally appropriate words from the learner's goals when the target pattern remains the same.

Lesson 1 — Prove the Word, Don't Guess It

Suggested time: 45–60 minutes

Primary target: Accurate attention to all letters in a word

Sample words/material: form/from, plan/plant, paid/pain, work/word, rent/rest

Adult application: a fictional work notice

Connect

Instructor: “Today we are going to practice something strong readers do: they use the letters to prove the word instead of letting the sentence trick them into guessing.”

Model

Instructor: Show form and from. Point to each letter. “These words look close. If I only glance, I might guess. I am going to read all the way through.”

Coach

Plan: Use three word pairs. Ask the learner to underline the letters that are different and read each word.

Challenge

Plan: Play Guess or Prove? with short sentences in which both choices could make sense.

Apply

Plan: Use the fictional work notice. Ask the learner to locate one key word and prove it from the letters.

Retrieve

Instructor: Cover the examples. Ask: “What will you do next time a word looks familiar but you are not sure?”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day's strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 2 — Keep the Voice Moving

Suggested time: 45–60 minutes

Primary target: Blending sounds into words

Sample words/material: map, sat, sit, run, job

Adult application: a simple map or sign list

Connect

Instructor: “You already know many of these sounds. Today the goal is to make the sounds work together as one word.”

Model

Instructor: Use a finger slide under m-a-p while blending continuously.

Coach

Plan: Blend together, then remove your voice and keep the finger support.

Challenge

Plan: Play Change One with letter cards.

Apply

Plan: Read two short labels or signs that contain practiced words.

Retrieve

Instructor: Ask the learner to demonstrate the finger-slide trick on one new word.

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 3 — Big Words Are Smaller Parts

Suggested time: 60 minutes

Primary target: Chunking longer words

Sample words/material: payment, helpful, return, appointment, employment

Adult application: an appointment notice and job-related sentence

Connect

Instructor: “Long words look harder than they are. Today we are going to make them smaller before we try to read them.”

Model

Instructor: Write payment. Box -ment, underline pay, read the parts, then the whole word.

Coach

Plan: Mark chunks in helpful and return together.

Challenge

Plan: Chunk and Build with cards.

Apply

Plan: Read appointment in a realistic notice and employment in a short job sentence.

Retrieve

Instructor: Ask the learner to explain: “What is the first thing you can do when a word looks too big?”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 4 — Read the Question First

Suggested time: 60 minutes

Primary target: Purposeful comprehension

Sample words/material: before, after, due, call, bring

Adult application: a fictional appointment card

Connect

Instructor: “Good readers do not always read every page the same way. Sometimes we are hunting for one answer.”

Model

Instructor: Ask: “What time should the patient arrive?” Underline time/arrive, then scan the card.

Coach

Plan: Answer two find-it questions with support.

Challenge

Plan: Find It Fast using a second card.

Apply

Plan: Learner answers a question from a fictional work schedule.

Retrieve

Instructor: Learner tells the two-step trick: question first, then hunt for the answer.

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 5 — Small Words Can Change Everything

Suggested time: 60 minutes

Primary target: Meaning-changing function words

Sample words/material: not, before, after, only, except

Adult application: short workplace and appointment instructions

Connect

Instructor: “Some of the most important words on a page are very small.”

Model

Instructor: Compare “Call after 5” and “Call before 5.” Discuss the consequence.

Coach

Plan: Read four sentence pairs and circle the small word that changes meaning.

Challenge

Plan: Small Word, Big Difference.

Apply

Plan: Read a short fictional policy with not or except.

Retrieve

Instructor: Ask the learner to name one small word that can completely change instructions.

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 6 — Make Reading Sound Like Talking

Suggested time: 60 minutes

Primary target: Fluency and phrasing

Sample words/material: Please call / before five., Bring your ID / to the office., The bus leaves / at 7:10.

Adult application: short realistic messages

Connect

Instructor: “Reading smoothly helps your brain keep the meaning.”

Model

Instructor: Read a sentence word-by-word, then naturally. Ask which was easier to understand.

Coach

Plan: Add phrase slashes and echo read.

Challenge

Plan: Smooth Talk with four sentences.

Apply

Plan: Read a short voicemail transcript or supervisor note.

Retrieve

Instructor: Remove slashes and reread one sentence naturally.

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 7 — Word Families of Meaning

Suggested time: 60 minutes

Primary target: Vocabulary and morphology

Sample words/material: employ, employer, employee, employment, unemployed

Adult application: a fictional job posting

Connect

Instructor: “One useful word can unlock several other words.”

Model

Instructor: Write employ in the center and add employer/employee around it. Explain each in plain language.

Coach

Plan: Match each word to a short situation.

Challenge

Plan: Meaning Match.

Apply

Plan: Find employer or employment in a job posting and explain it.

Retrieve

Instructor: Learner explains two words without looking at definitions.

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 8 — Read, Cover, Remember

Suggested time: 45–60 minutes

Primary target: Working memory and retrieval

Sample words/material: bring ID, call Monday, pay by Friday

Adult application: short directions and lists

Connect

Instructor: “Remembering what we read is a skill we can practice.”

Model

Instructor: Read a two-part direction, cover it, repeat it, uncover and check.

Coach

Plan: Use three short directions.

Challenge

Plan: Read, Cover, Remember.

Apply

Plan: Use a fictional appointment checklist.

Retrieve

Instructor: Learner teaches the cover-and-check process back to the instructor.

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 9 — Forms Without Fear

Suggested time: 60–75 minutes

Primary target: Reading labels and matching information to fields

Sample words/material: first name, last name, city, phone, emergency contact

Adult application: fictional application form

Connect

Instructor: “A form is not one big reading assignment. It is many small questions.”

Model

Instructor: Cover most of the form and reveal one field. Read the label and decide what kind of information belongs there.

Coach

Plan: Complete a fictional identity card, then transfer the information to a form.

Challenge

Plan: Form Field Match.

Apply

Plan: Learner completes the non-sensitive sections of a fictional application.

Retrieve

Instructor: Ask: “What should you do before writing in a box?” Answer: read the label and decide what it is asking for.

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 10 — Digital Stop—Read—Choose

Suggested time: 60 minutes

Primary target: Digital navigation and careful clicking

Sample words/material: search, submit, back, next, required

Adult application: safe screenshot or practice webpage

Connect

Instructor: “Online reading adds buttons and choices. We are going to slow the screen down.”

Model

Instructor: Point to a button. “Stop. Read the label. Then choose whether this is the action I want.”

Coach

Plan: Identify five screen elements.

Challenge

Plan: Screen Hunt.

Apply

Plan: Complete a fictional online form screenshot sequence without entering real personal data.

Retrieve

Instructor: Learner says and demonstrates Stop—Read—Choose.

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 11 — What Do the Clues Tell Us?

Suggested time: 60 minutes

Primary target: Inference with short text

Sample words/material: late, closed, wet, empty, waiting

Adult application: two-sentence adult scenarios

Connect

Instructor: “Sometimes the answer is not printed in one sentence. We put clues together.”

Model

Instructor: “The lights were off. The sign said CLOSED.” Ask what we can reasonably conclude and name both clues.

Coach

Plan: Use three two-sentence examples.

Challenge

Plan: Clue + Clue.

Apply

Plan: Read a short work scenario and infer the next appropriate action.

Retrieve

Instructor: Learner states the formula in everyday words: “I use more than one clue to make a reasonable conclusion.”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

Lesson 12 — A Five-Minute Win Lesson

Suggested time: 20–30 minutes

Primary target: Confidence plus one micro-skill

Sample words/material: choose 3 current learner words

Adult application: one real-life sample

Connect

Instructor: Name one skill the learner has already improved.

Model

Instructor: Teach one tiny strategy connected to a current error.

Coach

Plan: Practice three examples only.

Challenge

Plan: Use a 3-minute matching, sorting, or Find It Fast activity.

Apply

Plan: Use the skill once in a real-life sample.

Retrieve

Instructor: Learner completes the sentence: “Today I learned to...”

A TRICK THAT HELPS

End the lesson with one independent success. If the final task is too difficult, step back to a version the learner can complete with the day’s strategy, then record the next teaching step.

PART VI — Reproducible Instructor Toolkit

The following pages are designed to be copied or recreated for instructional use. They are intentionally simple and low-cost. Programs may add their own logo, contact information, and local policies. Keep completed forms private and follow the program's confidentiality procedures.

Handout 1 — Learner Goal Conversation

What would you most like reading to make easier in your life?

Where do you use reading now: work, home, church, phone, transportation, health care, shopping, school, other?

Is there something you avoid because reading feels difficult?

Do you prefer working one-to-one, with a partner, or in a small group?

Would you rather read silently first before reading aloud?

What is one thing you already feel confident doing with reading?

What would make you say, “This class is helping me” after one month?

Handout 2 — Informal Reading Profile

Area	Independent	With Prompt	Needs Teaching	Notes
Letter names	☐	☐	☐	
Common letter sounds	☐	☐	☐	
Blend 3 sounds	☐	☐	☐	
Read common short words	☐	☐	☐	
Read high-frequency words	☐	☐	☐	
Read longer words by chunks	☐	☐	☐	
Read short sentences smoothly	☐	☐	☐	
Explain vocabulary	☐	☐	☐	
Answer stated-detail questions	☐	☐	☐	
Use clues for inference	☐	☐	☐	
Write a short meaningful message	☐	☐	☐	
Navigate basic screen elements	☐	☐	☐	

Instructional starting point: _____

First real-life application to use: _____

Handout 3 — Error Pattern Log

Printed word/text	Learner response	What I noticed	Strategy to try next

Look for patterns, not isolated mistakes. Record exactly what the learner said when possible.

Handout 4 — CLICKS Lesson Planner

C — Check: What is the exact breakdown?

L — Link: Why does this skill matter to this learner?

I — Instruct: What one small step will I model?

C — Challenge: What guided practice or learning challenge will we use?

K — Keep: What older skill will I retrieve today, and when will I bring this new skill back?

S — Show the Win: What specific progress will I name?

Handout 5 — A Trick That Helps: Learner Strategy Card

When a word looks too big

Find a part you know. Mark it. Read the parts. Put the word back together.

When you want to guess

Point to the letters. Read all the way through. Then ask whether the word makes sense.

When a sentence feels choppy

Read it again in groups of words so it sounds more like talking.

When you cannot find an answer

Read the question first. Underline the key words. Hunt for those ideas in the text.

When a small word is easy to skip

Circle words such as not, before, after, only, and except. Ask how the word changes the instruction.

When you forget a new word

Say it, read it, write it, use it, and bring it back later.

When a screen feels confusing

Stop. Read the button or message. Choose only after you know what it will do.

When you make a mistake

Do not start the whole page over. Find the exact part that changed the meaning and fix that part.

Handout 6 — Bring It Back Review Tracker

Skill / word	Today	Next lesson	Later review	New context	Status
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Handout 7 — Twenty Five-Minute Wins

- Read three known words and one new word; explain the strategy used on the new word.
- Find the due date on a fictional bill.
- Circle every word ending in -ing in a short paragraph.
- Read a two-line text message and explain what the sender wants.
- Blend five three-sound words with a finger slide.
- Choose which of two similar-looking words is actually printed and prove it.
- Read one sentence three times until it sounds like speech.
- Match four vocabulary words to four real-life situations.
- Read a question first, then locate the answer in a short notice.
- Find one small word that changes the meaning of an instruction.
- Write one useful word from memory, then check it.
- Break three long words into chunks.
- Read a work schedule and name the first workday.
- Identify five buttons or fields on a screenshot.
- Put three sentence strips in logical order.
- Explain one reading trick back to the instructor.
- Find the phone number on a fictional appointment notice.
- Sort six words by beginning sound.
- Choose the clearest of three short work text messages.
- Read, cover, and remember a two-step direction.

Handout 8 — Progress Notes That Describe Learning

Avoid notes such as “did good” or “still weak reader.” Record observable skills and support levels. Examples:

- Read 8 of 10 short-vowel words independently; used finger slide successfully on two unfamiliar words.
- Read appointment after chunking ap/point/ment; later recognized the word in a new sentence without help.
- Located date and time on a fictional appointment card independently; needed prompt to notice “arrive 15 minutes early.”
- Read a four-sentence passage accurately; comprehension improved when the purpose question was given before reading.
- Used Stop—Read—Choose to navigate a practice webpage and correctly identified submit versus back.

My note from today:

Handout 9 — Thirty-Day Instructor Launch Plan

Week	Instructor focus	What to practice
1	Learn the learner and find the breakdown	Goal conversation, informal profile, one immediate teaching win
2	Teach one foundational routine	Use CLICKS; repeat one signature trick; begin Bring It Back review
3	Connect skill to real life	Use at least two authentic-style tasks and one adult learning challenge
4	Check progress and adjust	Repeat selected profile items, compare support level, update “I can now...” list

At day 30, ask the learner: What feels easier now? What still feels hard? What do you want us to work on next?

Handout 10 — Instructor Self-Observation Checklist

- ☐ I connected the lesson to an adult goal or task.
- ☐ I taught one small skill explicitly instead of giving only independent work.
- ☐ I modeled the strategy before expecting independent use.
- ☐ I gave the learner time to think before rescuing.
- ☐ I avoided public ranking, childish materials, and surprise oral reading.
- ☐ I used specific feedback that named the strategy or progress.
- ☐ I included retrieval of something taught earlier.
- ☐ I ended with a task the learner could complete successfully.
- ☐ I recorded the next instructional step.
- ☐ I protected privacy and used fictionalized practice documents.

Suggested Scope and Sequence for Beginning-Level Readers

This is a flexible sequence, not a lockstep curriculum. Begin at the learner's first consistent gap. Continue to revisit earlier skills as new ones are added.

Stage	Primary focus	Example adult application
1	Letter knowledge and sound awareness	Names, signs, short labels
2	Letter-sound connection and blending	Common short words, workplace labels
3	Accurate short-word decoding	Messages, forms, simple directions
4	High-frequency word automaticity	Short notices and schedules
5	Longer-word chunking and word parts	Appointment, employment, transportation vocabulary
6	Fluency and phrasing	Short paragraphs, voicemail transcripts, instructions
7	Vocabulary and sentence meaning	Bills, health information, job postings
8	Passage comprehension and inference	Work scenarios, informational passages, civic/community text
9	Integrated reading-writing-digital tasks	Applications, online forms, email/text, goal-related study

Current Professional Resources and Free/Low-Cost Materials

Resource review current as of August 2026. Websites and licensing can change. Before reproducing or adapting any outside material, check the specific item's current license and terms. Linking to a resource does not automatically grant permission to copy it into a locally published manual.

LINCS — Literacy Information and Communication System

U.S. Department of Education adult education resource system. Especially useful for evidence-based reading instruction, adult reading components, professional development, beginning alphabetics tools, and Teaching Skills That Matter.

<https://lincs.ed.gov/>

LINCS: Evidence-Based Reading Instruction

Professional resources organized around alphabetics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These four components are a useful backbone for instructor training.

<https://lincs.ed.gov/professional-development/resource-collections>

LINCS: Reading Skills for Today's Adults

Adult reading materials designed to support fluency and comprehension through guided and repeated reading.

<https://lincs.ed.gov/professional-development/resource-collections/profile-398>

LINCS: Beginning Alphabetics Tests and Tools

Teacher-friendly tools and instructional practices for beginning alphabetics. Use as a professional resource; follow the site's terms for copying or adaptation.

<https://lincs.ed.gov/professional-development/resource-collections/profile-851>

LINCS: Teaching Skills That Matter in Adult Education

Framework connecting adult education to transferable skills such as communication, critical thinking, adaptability, interpersonal skills, and navigating systems through relevant adult content.

<https://lincs.ed.gov/federal-initiatives/teaching-skills-matter-adult-education>

ProLiteracy Teacher Training Plus — Adult Foundational Education

Free professional-learning recordings for instructors teaching foundational reading. Current offerings include phonics, fluency, vocabulary, writing, comprehension, purpose for reading, effective questioning, and critical thinking for early-level learners.

<https://www.proliteracy.org/courses/teacher-training-plus-adult-foundational-education/>

ProLiteracy Resources

Research, reports, toolkits, webinars, and instructional resources for basic literacy, digital literacy, health literacy, financial literacy, workforce skills, and more. Some materials are free; permissions vary by resource.

<https://www.proliteracy.org/resources/>

COABE Adult Educator Resources

A large, free-access adult education resource portal with thousands of resources across reading, writing, workforce, digital literacy, HSE, ESL, and professional development. Check each item's listed license before reuse.

<https://adulthoodresource.coabe.org/>

CAST Universal Design for Learning Guidelines 3.0

Current UDL Guidelines (version 3.0, released in 2024). Useful for designing flexible, inclusive learning and for thinking about learner agency, belonging, multiple forms of representation and expression, and the role of joy and play.

<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

BCcampus Open Education — Adult Basic Education

Includes BC Reads: Adult Literacy Fundamental English and Adult Literacy Fundamental Mathematics collections. Many BCcampus materials are openly licensed, but verify the license on the individual resource before adapting.

<https://open.bccampus.ca/projects-and-grants/completed-opened-projects/>

World Education / IDEAL Consortium

Current adult digital-learning professional development, including 2025–2026 sessions on reading/writing, digital resilience, AI fluency, and technology integration for adult learners.

<https://ideal.worlded.org/>

ProLiteracy / Learning Chocolate resource note

ProLiteracy currently highlights Learning Chocolate as a free web-based vocabulary practice option using multimedia exercises. Review the site directly before assigning learners and consider program privacy requirements.

<https://www.proliteracy.org/resources/>

Research-Informed Principles Behind This Manual

Teach component skills explicitly

Adult reading research and professional development commonly distinguish alphabetics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Instruction improves when the instructor identifies which component is limiting performance rather than treating reading as one undifferentiated skill.

Use purposeful, adult-relevant text

Current adult-education frameworks emphasize real-world relevance, transferable skills, and authentic tasks. Relevance should shape practice examples, not replace systematic teaching.

Use supported repeated reading for fluency

Repeated and guided oral reading can help build fluency when the passage is appropriate, the learner receives support, and comprehension remains part of the task.

Teach comprehension actively

Purpose setting, effective questioning, metacognition, summarizing, evidence use, and inference can be taught even with simple text. Easy text does not require shallow thinking.

Design for learner variability

UDL 3.0 encourages reducing barriers, supporting learner agency, honoring different ways of engaging and expressing learning, and recognizing belonging and joy as meaningful parts of learning.

Use games as practice, not decoration

A game is valuable when it increases meaningful repetitions, retrieval, feedback, or application of a target skill. Adult dignity and voluntary participation matter more than competition.

Protect privacy in digital and AI-supported learning

Digital practice should use fictional or blank documents when possible. Instructors should avoid sharing personally identifiable or sensitive learner information with online tools and should verify generated content before use.

Appendix A — Fifty Instructor Phrases That Keep the Learner Thinking

- “Show me the part that made you stop.”
- “What do you notice first?”
- “Point to the letters and read all the way through.”
- “Let’s make the word smaller.”
- “Find a part you already know.”
- “Keep your voice moving.”
- “Try it with me first.”
- “Now try it without my voice.”
- “What changed between these two words?”
- “Which letter proves your answer?”
- “Does the word you read match all the letters?”
- “Now that we read it, does it make sense here?”
- “Read the question first. What are we looking for?”
- “Where is the evidence?”
- “Which small word changes the instruction?”
- “Say the sentence the way you would say it to someone.”
- “Let’s read it again so the meaning stays together.”
- “What does this word mean in this situation?”
- “Give me another example.”
- “Use that word in something from your life.”
- “Say it before you write it.”
- “Tap the parts, write it, then check it.”
- “I’m going to give you a little less help this time.”
- “Take a moment. I won’t answer it for you yet.”
- “What strategy did you use?”
- “What could you try before asking me?”
- “Teach that trick back to me.”
- “Let’s bring back something from last week.”
- “You remembered it after time passed—that is stronger learning.”
- “This is not a speed race.”
- “We are working for smooth and accurate.”
- “You may preview it silently first.”
- “Would you like to read it together or take the first sentence?”
- “The idea is adult; we are just making the print easier to enter.”
- “Let’s cover the parts we do not need yet.”
- “One box at a time—forms are many small questions.”
- “Stop. Read. Choose.”

- “What will happen if you click that?”
- “Is this practice information safe to share?”
- “We will use a fictional example instead of your real information.”
- “This answer is stated right here.”
- “This answer needs two clues.”
- “What is the most important idea?”
- “Say it in your own words.”
- “What should the person do next?”
- “Which choice is clearly impossible?”
- “Cross out what cannot be right.”
- “You did not guess that word; you figured it out.”
- “You used the strategy without my reminder.”
- “Write that on your ‘I can now...’ list.”

Appendix B — Adult-Relevant Practice Word Banks

Work and Employment

job, work, shift, pay, paid, wage, boss, team, form, hire, train, hours, schedule, employee, employer, employment, application, position, required, available, supervisor, department

Money and Bills

cash, cost, rent, bill, due, late, fee, total, save, spend, bank, check, deposit, payment, balance, account, budget, receipt, monthly, amount

Health and Appointments

call, pain, rest, dose, take, visit, date, time, clinic, doctor, nurse, health, appointment, medicine, warning, before, after, daily, refill, emergency

Family and Home

home, child, school, note, meal, bus, room, clean, repair, address, contact, parent, family, teacher, meeting, permission, pickup, return

Digital Life

phone, text, send, back, next, search, click, link, email, login, password, submit, required, online, account, message, error, download, upload, settings

Community and Transportation

bus, stop, road, turn, left, right, map, route, office, library, church, center, closed, open, entrance, exit, arrival, departure, transfer

Important: A word bank is not a teaching sequence. Choose words that match the learner's current sound-spelling knowledge and goals. Some useful adult words are not easily decodable for a beginning reader and will require explicit word-specific teaching.

Appendix C — Short Original Practice Passages

A New Shift

Mia has a new work shift. She will work Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. Her shift starts at 8:00. On Friday, Mia must come in at 7:30 for a team meeting. She writes the new time on her phone so she will remember.

- Which days does Mia work?
 - What time does her normal shift start?
 - Why is Friday different?
 - What did Mia do to help herself remember?
-

The Appointment

Ray has an appointment on May 12 at 10:00. The card says to arrive 15 minutes early and bring a photo ID. Ray plans to leave home at 9:20 because the clinic is across town.

- What time is the appointment?
 - What does Ray need to bring?
 - Why should Ray arrive before 10:00?
 - What is one reason he may leave at 9:20?
-

The Late Fee

A bill is due on the 18th. A late fee will be added after the 18th. Lena cannot pay the full amount today, so she calls the number on the bill to ask about payment options before the due date.

- When is the bill due?
 - What may happen after the 18th?
 - What does Lena do before the due date?
 - Why might calling early help?
-

The Bus Change

The number 4 bus usually stops on Pine Street. A sign says the stop will move to Oak Street on Thursday because of road work. The new stop is beside the library.

- Which bus is changing?
- What day does the change happen?
- Where will the bus stop?

- Why is the stop moving?

The Work Text

Sam gets a text from his supervisor: "Please come at 9:30 tomorrow instead of 8:00. The morning meeting was moved. Reply YES if you received this." Sam reads the message twice and replies YES.

- What time should Sam come to work?
 - What changed?
 - What does the supervisor ask Sam to do?
 - Why might Sam read the message twice?
-

Appendix D — Learning Challenge Quick Index

If the learner needs...	Try...
sound awareness	Sort the Sounds
letter-sound practice	Letter Hunt / Change One
blending	Change One / Blend and Build
less guessing	Guess or Prove?
long words	Chunk and Build / Word Part Hunt
automatic words	Word Wallet / Memory Mix
fluency	Smooth Talk
vocabulary	Meaning Match / Three Clues
literal comprehension	Find It Fast / Evidence Detective
inference	Clue + Clue / What Comes Next?
forms	Form Field Match
workplace reading	Work Schedule Hunt / Job Posting Detective
financial reading	Bill Basics
digital navigation	Screen Hunt / Safe or Sensitive?
writing	Sentence Repair Shop / Choose the Best Text
metacognition	Teach It Back / Exit Ticket Choice

References and Professional Resource Notes

Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE). Adult Educator Resources. Current portal reviewed August 2026. <https://adulthoodresource.coabe.org/>

CAST. Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, Version 3.0 (2024). <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

LINCS, U.S. Department of Education. Adult Education and Literacy resources, including Evidence-Based Reading Instruction collections, Beginning Alphabetics Tests and Tools, Reading Skills for Today’s Adults, and Teaching Skills That Matter. <https://lincs.ed.gov/>

ProLiteracy. Teacher Training Plus — Adult Foundational Education. Free professional-learning series reviewed August 2026; sessions include phonics, fluency, vocabulary, writing, comprehension, purpose for reading, questioning, and early-level critical thinking. <https://www.proliteracy.org/courses/teacher-training-plus-adult-foundational-education/>

ProLiteracy. Resources archive. Reviewed August 2026. <https://www.proliteracy.org/resources/>

BCcampus Open Education. Adult Basic Education resources, including BC Reads: Adult Literacy Fundamental English and Adult Literacy Fundamental Mathematics. <https://open.bccampus.ca/projects-and-grants/completed-opened-projects/>

World Education / IDEAL Consortium. Adult digital learning professional development and EdTech Strategy Sessions. Reviewed August 2026. <https://ideal.worlded.org/>

Reading Horizons. Adult Education and Reading Horizons Elevate resources. Reviewed August 2026. <https://readinghorizons.com/solutions/adult-education/>

This manual paraphrases general instructional principles and creates original examples, activities, scripts, passages, and forms. It does not reproduce proprietary curriculum pages. When using outside resources, check the current license for the specific item before adapting, reposting, or including it in a published product.

Closing: The Goal Is Not a Perfect Lesson

The goal is an adult learner who leaves with more access to print, more useful strategies, and more evidence that reading can become manageable. The strongest instructor is not the one who can explain the most reading terminology. It is the one who can notice where the process breaks down, choose the next useful step, teach it clearly, connect it to real life, and help the learner keep the gain.

When a learner gets stuck, return to the CLICKS framework: Check the breakdown. Link the skill to something that matters. Instruct one small step. Challenge and coach. Keep the gain through retrieval. Show the learner the win.

THE FINAL AHA

The learner does not need to become “good at school” before reading can improve. The learner needs instruction that makes the hidden parts of reading visible, practice that feels adult and purposeful, and enough repeated success to make the strategy belong to the learner.

Appendix E — Recommended Student Reading for Christian Adult Education

This list is intentionally narrower than a general adult-literacy reading list. For use with When Reading Clicks, supplemental reading should be adult-respectful, instructionally useful, and consistent with biblical Christian teaching. Local leaders should still preview the exact edition or download before placing it in a classroom library, because publishers and editions can change.

Christian Content Standard

- No profanity, crude language, explicit sexual content, occult or New Age teaching, gambling, or material centered on recreational drugs or alcohol.
- Do not use material that normalizes or celebrates conduct that directly conflicts with biblical Christian teaching.
- Difficult life topics may be used when they are handled carefully, respectfully, and redemptively rather than sensationalized.
- Never assume that every title in a commercial series is appropriate simply because one title is appropriate.
- Preview the exact book or file before use. If a title does not fit the ministry's standards, choose another resource.

A Simple Reading Ladder

The goal is not to push a learner into the hardest book possible. Choose a text the learner can read with enough success to understand the message, use the strategies being taught, and experience the satisfaction of finishing something written for adults.

Recommended Online Program: Reading Horizons Elevate

For foundational reading practice with older learners and adults, Reading Horizons Elevate is the strongest online program I would investigate first. It is designed for learners from grade 4 through adulthood and uses explicit, systematic, sequential instruction in phonics and decoding. Its older-learner focus is important: adults who have already felt embarrassed by reading difficulty should not be asked to learn through a program that looks as though it was made for young children.

Why it fits When Reading Clicks

Use the online program for private, individualized practice with foundational skills, then bring the skill back into the human lesson. An instructor can ask, "What did you practice online?" and immediately use that same pattern in a work message, appointment card, form, Bible passage, or other approved adult reading material. The software should support the relationship between instructor and learner, not replace it.

A practical blended-learning pattern

10–20 minutes online practice → 5 minutes talking through the strategy with the instructor
 → 10 minutes using the strategy in an adult real-life reading task → one short retrieval check later in the lesson.

Christian-use note

Reading Horizons Elevate is a secular commercial reading program, not a Christian curriculum. A ministry should preview learner-facing content before adopting it and use its foundational reading instruction only when the content fits local standards. Christian formation, Scripture reading, and faith-based discussion should continue to come from materials the ministry has intentionally approved.

Resource: <https://readinghorizons.com/solutions/adult-education/>

Very Beginning Readers

Bite-size Manna — Gospel of Mark, Units 1–6. Manna Publications began placing these large-print, eight-page Bible teaching units online in 2026. They are designed especially for readers who have learning or reading difficulties. Their short length makes them useful for an early “I finished a book” experience.

Resource: <https://www.manna-publications.org.uk/>

Beginning Readers

- Ruth & Hannah — Manna Publications Easy English Bible teaching booklet.
- Mark, Part 1: Chapters 1–8 — Manna Publications Easy English Bible teaching booklet.
- Mark, Part 2: Chapters 9–16 — Manna Publications Easy English Bible teaching booklet.
- John, Part 1: Chapters 1–11 — Manna Publications Easy English Bible teaching booklet.

These Manna titles are written in easy English for Bible teaching and are available for online reading or free download. They can be used for independent reading, paired reading, or tutor-supported reading according to the learner’s skill level.

Resource: <https://www.manna-publications.org.uk/english-downloads.php>

Developing Readers

- John, Part 2: Chapters 12–21 — Manna Publications.
- Acts, Part 1: Chapters 1–12 — Manna Publications.
- Acts, Part 2: Chapters 13–28 — Manna Publications.
- James: Chapters 1–5 — Manna Publications.
- Philippians & Colossians — Manna Publications.
- Genesis, Part 1: Chapters 1–11 — Manna Publications.
- Romans, Part 1: Chapters 1–8 — Manna Publications.

A Longer Christian Reading Choice

You Are My Friends — Frank C. Laubach. New Readers Press currently offers this classic Christian book in which Laubach writes about living a spiritual life guided by the friendship and teachings of Jesus. It is better suited to a learner who has progressed beyond the earliest controlled-reading stage or to shared reading with an instructor.

Resource: <https://www.newreaderspress.com/You-are-My-Friends>

Tutor-Supported Bible Reading

Do not wait until a learner can read every word independently before opening the Bible together. Use short passages from the ministry's approved Bible translation and provide support as needed. For many Christian Adult Education settings, selected NIV passages can become meaningful reading practice while keeping the focus on understanding rather than performance.

- Ruth — a short, understandable story of loyalty, provision, and faithfulness.
- Mark — direct narrative sections about the life and ministry of Jesus.
- Luke 15 — stories of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son.
- John 3 — Jesus and Nicodemus; use short sections rather than the entire chapter at once.
- Psalm 23 — short, familiar, and useful for repeated reading and fluency.
- James 1 — practical teaching; use a few verses at a time.

How to Use the Reading List

- Choose success before length. A short book the learner finishes is more valuable than a longer book the learner abandons.
- Preview difficult words before reading, but do not pre-teach every word.
- Let the learner use the When Reading Clicks strategies while reading: cover and reveal, break big words into parts, reread for meaning, and read the question first when questions are included.
- Ask one or two meaning questions after a short section. Do not turn pleasure reading into a long test.
- Keep a simple record of completed books or booklets so the learner can see growth over time.

THE READING-LIBRARY AHA

A learner does not need a large library to begin becoming a reader. A small shelf of carefully chosen, adult-respectful, Christian-safe material—matched to the learner's actual reading level—can create something far more important: repeated experiences of understanding, finishing, and wanting to read again.

Resource availability and descriptions reviewed August 2026. Ministries should preview exact editions and downloads before classroom use.