Guide To Using DSF Sight Word Readers
Introduction

Researchers now recognize the benefits of involving children with Down syndrome in reading and literacy activities at an early age. Early reading skills can improve a child's ability to participate in formal education and learning, increase employment opportunities and provide access to books and newspapers.[1]

Reading instruction from an early age serves other purposes, too. Research suggests that exposure to literacy activities can improve spoken language and memory skills, even without independent reading. Interestingly, studies show that reading ability is often a strength for children with Down syndrome and that children do better at reading than might be predicted on the basis of their language skills or general "mental age" measures. Other by-products of an early literacy program include improved speech, articulation, and grammar.[2]

Method Of Instruction - Whole Word Approach - "Match, Select, Name"

In The Learning Program™, students increase their vocabulary and learn to read using a whole word approach. As researchers at Down Syndrome Education International have said:

> *Children with Down syndrome can learn words by sight before they are able to recognize, learn or apply the rules of letter sounds, phonemes and graphemes. For them, and for many other children, whole word learning is a strength and will give them early reading success.[3]*

More information about research and reading instruction is available from Down Syndrome Education International (http://www.down-syndrome.org/information/reading/childhood/). At the DSF Learning Center, students read books and use matching, selecting and naming activities to learn vocabulary and sight words. In addition, parents and teachers are encouraged to make personalized learning materials and to practice sentence building activities from an early age.

Step 1: Choose And Read A Book

Before engaging in specific match, select and name activities, choose which book set you will use. The book sets are available in a variety of topics and at two levels (single word or sentences). Choose a topic of interest at an appropriate level for your student.

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[1] Buckley, S. (2001). Reading and Writing for Children with Down Syndrome. *Down Syndrome Issues and Information.* DSEI.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*

Depending on your student's age, you can read the book while sitting on the floor or at a desk or table. Allow your student to follow along with their finger or a pointer (unsharpened pencil). The reading activity should be enjoyable.

Step 2: Do Matching Activity (Easiest)

Purpose: This stage helps you teach your student new vocabulary (using pictures) or new sight words (using written words).

What: In this stage you provide your student with all the information necessary for success. You will first need to decide which materials you will use with your student – the **picture** board with **picture** flash cards **or** the **written word** board with **written word** flash cards. Choose materials based on student age and experience.

For younger students or those who might not be familiar with the vocabulary you are teaching, start with picture to picture matching. For older students or those who already know the vocabulary, start with word to word matching. As your student learns the sight words, make sure to have them match the **written word** flash cards to the **picture** board to ensure comprehension.

> **For vocabulary development** - Use picture board with picture flash cards
>
> **For sight word recognition** - Use written word board with written word flash cards
>
> **To check comprehension** - Use picture board with written word flash cards

How - Overview:
1. Choose and identify a flash card for your student (e.g., "This is a cat.").
2. Point to the matching picture or word on the board.
3. Show your student how to match the picture or word flash card to the target picture or word on the board (*i.e.,* how to put them together physically).
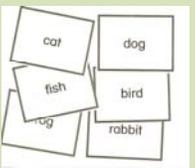
How - Details:
⇒ Place the board in front of your student.
⇒ Select one flash card (the "target" card).
⇒ Read the target flash card to your student. For example, if you are using the *Pets* book to increase vocabulary, and you choose the flash card with a picture of a dog, say "This is a dog." If you are teaching the written word "dog" say, "This says 'dog'."

⇒ Point to the target word on the board. Say, "This is also a 'dog,' let's put 'dog' on 'dog' *or* This also says 'dog,' let's put 'dog' on 'dog.'"

⇒ Place the target flash card on top of the matching picture or written word on the board (you can add Velcro to the flash cards and board to make it more game-like).

⇒ Continue method with all words.

Matching Activities

Picture Board	Picture Flash Cards	Completed Activity	

Written Word Board	Written Word Flash Cards	Completed Activity	

Variations:

⇒ Once your student can easily match **picture** to **picture** or **word** to **word** one-by-one with your assistance, you can reduce support. When you do, make sure to use your judgment to ensure your student feels successful in the task.

- Try using less language (e.g., when pointing to the flash card, say "this is a dog, let's find dog" or "let's match dog to dog.").
- Identify the target picture or written word flash card ("dog") and let your student find the picture or written word "dog" independently on the board.
- Place two or more flash cards next to the board and let your student choose the order in which to match each flash card to the board.

⇒ As an alternative, you can have your student match the flash cards directly into the book or create your own board and flash cards using handwritten or typed high-interest words.

⇒ Keep the matching interesting by using the *Draw-a-line* worksheets to reinforce sight words. Start with easier draw-a-line (straight word to word) and move to more difficult (diagonal word to word and word to picture).

Modifications:
⇒ If your student signs, say and sign each picture or word when you say it.
⇒ If you want to make it easier, work first with two **pictures** or **written words**, then progress to six.

Cover all but two words

Cut and Match: Pets

| dog | cat |
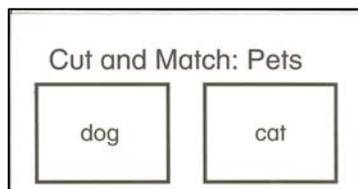
Use two flash cards

| cat | dog |

Additional Information:
❖ Do not be concerned if your student does nothing or looks confused by your instructions. If this happens, guide his hand to complete the matching task successfully (*i.e.*, physically guide his hand to match the flash card to the target spot). If you receive resistance, you may have to demonstrate the matching process by doing it yourself until your student shows more interest. Even if your student does not handle the flash cards, if he is looking at them and at the board, he will still learn from exposure to the pictures or written words.

❖ Matching encourages your student to look carefully at pictures or words and to notice that certain ones look the same as or different from others. Students learn to discriminate through this matching process and, in later stages of reading, may need to go back to matching to emphasize and learn differences between words with similar looks or meanings (such as "is" "in" or "it" **or** "no" and "on" **or** "to" "too" and "two").

❖ Sometimes when your student tries to say a word, it may not be clear. Praise and encourage word approximations. Repeat words after your student has signed or said them to help with pronunciation.

❖ Once your student starts accumulating a sight word vocabulary, she may be able to learn new words without the need to match words in the structured way described above.

Moving On:
How do you know when your student is ready for the next stage? Let your student be your guide. Some students enjoy the activities and will eagerly work through all of the steps (match, select and name) during each learning session. For these learners, you will want to provide sufficient support for selecting and naming activities with new pictures or written words (*e.g.,* she may need help with each activity). Other students will prefer to complete only matching activities until they feel confident. As long as your student is paying attention to the pictures or written words, you are making progress. In many cases, your student will communicate her preference through words or body language, letting you know it is time to move on.

Step 3: Do Selecting Activity (More difficult)

Purpose: This stage helps refine your student's ability to recognize pictures or sight words by requiring him to choose a requested flash card from a group of flash cards at your prompt.

What: In this stage your student participates at a higher level, because he must select the prompted **picture** or **written word** from two or more flash cards.

How - Overview:
1. Place two or three picture or written word flash cards in front of your student.
2. Ask your student to give you a requested flash card.
3. Show your student how to make the correct selection.
4. Respond to incorrect selections by modeling correct answers using a positive approach.

How - Details:
⇒ Put the matching board away or out of sight. You do not use it for this activity.
⇒ Choose two or three picture or written word flash cards to place in front of your student.
⇒ Ask your student to give or show you the requested flash card (*e.g.,* "Can you give me the 'cat' (or the word 'cat')?"
⇒ If your student does not know what you expect of her, demonstrate by performing the task yourself (*e.g., "Say 'm*y turn' and select a flash card").
⇒ Continue adding cards to the set of flash cards in front of your student and asking your student to "select one" until all flash cards have been selected.

cat	dog

Can you show me 'dog'?"

Selecting Activities

Additional Information:

❖ Do not become discouraged if your student struggles with the selecting activity. Your student will progress with time and patience. If learning doesn't come quickly, it may mean that you have to model the correct responses for a longer period of time. To ensure a beneficial learning experience, make sure the person working with your student understands and applies the Guiding Principles (set forth at the end of this document or downloadable at www.dsfoc.org).

Moving On: As with the matching stage, let your student guide progress. At this level, some students may be able to identify pictures or say/sign written words at your request. Other students will need guidance and support. Helping students to select a picture or written word is not cheating. We are teaching, not testing our students. Continue to provide support until your student is able to accomplish the selecting activity independently.

<u>Step 4: Do Naming Activity</u> (Most difficult)

Purpose: This stage helps reinforce your student's vocabulary and sight word skills by requiring your student to name (say or sign) the picture or written word on the flash cards. Once at this stage, you can play different games with the pictures or words, such as Bingo, Silly Sentences or I Spy.

What: In this stage (also called "the reading stage"), your student shows you what he has learned as he "names" or reads (says or signs) the **picture** or **written word** flash cards you choose.

NOTE: Some educators start at this stage. For students already interested in words, flashing pictures or words can be an effective technique. For younger students or those without as much exposure to, or interest in, written words, it is sometimes uninteresting or ineffective. Use your judgment. If you have a new student and want to try this method, combine it with personalized books and high-interest words.

How - **Overview**:
1. Choose the picture or written word you wish to have named.
2. Show a flash card to your student and ask them to name (say or sign) it.
3. Respond to incorrect answers by modeling correct answers using a positive approach.

How - **Details**:
⇒ Have your flash cards ready and in your hand.
⇒ Demonstrate the activity by flashing and naming each flash card.
⇒ Ask your student to identify each picture or written word as you flash through your cards. (Your student may know the pictures or words at this stage. If not, you can provide the answer. Continue with the matching and selecting activities to help your student learn the necessary vocabulary or sight words).

Naming Activities
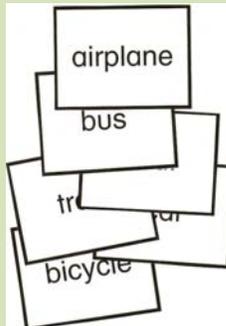
Additional Information:

❖ You might point to the **picture** or **written word** flash card or hold it up and say, "This card says [pause]" (giving your student time to say or sign the picture or written word). You also can ask, "Do you know what this is?" or "Do you know this word?" If she answers correctly say, "You are right; it says 'mom'! You read it!" The same applies if your student needs to sign the word. Model the sign or correct word where necessary.

❖ Instead of testing your student, you can conveniently forget the name of a **picture** or **written word** that your student knows; pausing and looking intently at it (as if you are thinking) to give your student the chance to fill in the gap and "help" you. Feel comfortable improvising during this stage to make it fun.

❖ Note, you can also use the naming activity with commercially available, handwritten or typed high-interest words. If you also want to complete matching and selecting activities, purchase two sets of cards and make your own boards.

Guiding Principles

While there are as many different methods and styles of teaching as there are types of learners, there are some basic principles we follow in The Learning Program™ which we believe will help you maximize instruction time with your student.

1. Assume Your Student Is Able

We have no way of predicting how each individual child will respond to this or any instructional program. Each student has different strengths and passions. However, research shows that one of the most important factors for learning success is a parent or teacher who believes the student is capable of learning. It sounds so simple. Unfortunately, as students progress in education, there will be some educators who will focus only on presumed defects and limitations. Don't let this be you. ***Your student can learn. Your student will learn.*** Your job as a parent or teacher is to remember this and to keep your focus on your student's abilities.

2. Make Learning Fun

Learning should and can be fun. Because children with Down syndrome experience developmental delays, learning takes longer. Unless we can make learning an enjoyable experience, we are likely to meet with resistance. If learning is fun, students will be engaged, enthusiastic and motivated to learn.

3. Success Is Key

"*Success is Key*" is another closely related principle.[1] In addition to having fun, students need to feel successful in their attempts to learn. If they feel successful, they will enjoy learning and be inspired to learn more. If they experience only failure, they will eventually become defeated and avoid learning. Students feel successful when we use best practices for instruction, choose materials that are appropriate, and account for individual learning strengths and challenges.

4. Teach . . . Don't Test

Another important program principle is that we need to teach, *not* test. When we teach, we give information (*e.g.,* "This word is 'run'; this is 'dog'"). When we test, we seek to elicit information (*e.g.,* "What is this word? What is this letter?"). To use this program effectively, you will have to *resist the urge to make teaching sessions into testing sessions*.

5. Model . . . Don't Correct

As your student learns, he will make mistakes. Remember to use a positive approach to teaching by modeling correct responses rather than correcting each mistake (avoid phrases like "no, that's wrong," "no, let me show you," or "that's not right").[1] Using a positive approach, you can provide feedback based on effort and not on whether the answer or response is "right" or "wrong." *Ongoing modeling and encouragement are strong motivators*.

6. Let Student Set Pace

We need to let our students set the pace of learning to implement this program effectively. At times (perhaps too many times) it may seem that progress is slow, and we as parents or teachers may become frustrated by the lack of perceived growth. This is our problem, not our student's. Our students rarely seem discouraged by the speed of their own progress – they are proud to complete each task. Let us ***embrace their energy, go at their pace*** and suspend our own preconceptions about how long it should take to master a specific task. With our students guiding us, we can sit back, have some fun and delight in their progress, regardless of the pace.

7. Balance Learning Time And Play Time [For Parents]
"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy"

This old proverb has particular importance to parents hoping to grow life-long learners. Balancing learning time and play time frees our children for "childish" fun: fun without the weight of educational goals. As parents, we are used to juggling crowded schedules and weaving learning tasks into our daily routines. Quiet times become opportunities to read or practice spelling words. Waiting in line becomes a chance to skip count or recite addition facts. We have high expectations for our children and find time to infuse our schedules with teachable moments. This skill is important for successful instruction.

Ample play time, however, is just as critical. Our children work hard in school, in therapy sessions and at home. They need time set aside to relax and be kids. ***Schedule agenda-free play time*** if you have to, but make sure it happens. Water fights, hide-and-go seek and trips to the ice cream store are a few of the pleasures that take the weight off the hours of work.

8. Don't Let Guilt Get In The Way [For Parents]

The introduction of a new program into our busy lives can be overwhelming and, consequently, guilt-producing (*e.g.,* "I missed another day of working with my child"). Once guilt sets in, parents often quit entirely. Don't fall into that trap. Set a reasonable goal (15 to 30 minutes three days a week) and add more time as you are able.

Don't worry about missing a day, week or month now and then. Pick up where you left off and continue working with your child. Have a good attitude, and try not to feel burdened by this opportunity. This program can be enjoyable for both you and your child if you set realistic goals and don't let guilt get in the way.

Implementation Tips

1. Determine Best Learning Environment [Parents]
When you begin this program, determine whether your child requires a structured learning area (*e.g.,* desk or kitchen table) or whether they need more flexibility (*e.g.,* a portable lap tray or TV table). Some children may need to work in one or two areas that they associate with learning, particularly in the beginning of the program. Others may have difficulty sitting still and may do better when you teach wherever they happen to be playing. Your ultimate goal is to have your child learn in a structured learning area, because that is what is expected in school (a table or desk is best). You might want to try using program materials after a meal or snack, while your child is still seated. Alternatively, you could offer a snack and then bring out the materials while your child is "held captive" by the snack. Your first priority, however, is to get your child working. So figure out your child's learning preferences, and take cues from the success of each session.

2. Be Flexible and Creative [Parents]
Whatever the setting for your learning session, be creative. Don't always bring out materials in the same order or do the same tasks. Some of the best learning occurs when children are unaware they are learning (spontaneous teachable moments). You might offer to play school with your child using program materials and let your child be the teacher. You can also involve some of your child's favorite stuffed animals or action figures in the session. Have your child read to a "friend" or have the "friend" read. Siblings also make for great props: some children love "showing off" for a sibling and siblings benefit from being involved in the learning process. Flexibility and creativity will enhance your child's learning time. So, use your imagination and have fun.

3. Know When to Stop [Parents]
There will be times when your child is not receptive to learning (i.e., tired, sick, hungry). If you meet real resistance before you start, skip that time and find time later in the day or the next day. Alternatively, there will be days when your child will work for a while and become disinterested. If this happens, remember to maintain the illusion of control. Try once or twice to engage him, saying "let's do one more page" or "we will be done after this one problem." But if your child won't engage, announce "okay, I'm done for the day. You may go play." Whatever your approach, use your child's behavior as a guide and remain in control of when the session ends. You don't want to become involved in a power struggle over working on program materials . . . because you will always lose!

4. It Works if You Work It [Parents]
This program is intended to supplement your child's formal education by providing you with direct instruction on use of program materials and by providing targeted materials designed to maximize your child's ability to learn. But this program will not work unless you work with your child. Whether you target twice a week or five times a week, you are a busy parent with responsibilities that will interfere with program time on occasion. But, materials put in the corner each month and brought out only on rare occasions will not have much impact on your child. So, without letting guilt get in the way, put materials where you will "trip" over them. Integrate program time into your lifestyle (calendar program time, parking lot time (while waiting for siblings) or do program while siblings do homework). Whatever your method, find a way to integrate program time into your day, make good use of the materials, and have some structured fun with your child. Work it . . . and it will work.

5. We Are Here to Help [Parents and Teachers]
Remember to contact us for assistance. We are here to support you in your teaching efforts.   We prefer that you direct questions through one of our email groups, which are monitored by our consultation team.

To join The Learning Program group (for anyone using Learning Program materials)
Visit: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/thelearningprogram/join   OR
Send an email to thelearningprogram-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

To join the Teacher to Teacher group (for educators only)
Visit: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TLP_teacher2teacher/
Send an email to TLP_teacher2teacher-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

You can also email us directly at info@dsfoc.org.

Important Recognition and Acknowledgment

The strategies provided in this guide are used in DSF's Learning Program and have been adapted from practice, these written works and feedback from our Advisory Board:

- Buckley, S. (2001). Development and Education for Children with Down Syndrome (0-5 and 5-11 years), Reading and Writing for Children with Down Syndrome. *Down Syndrome Issues and Information. DSEI. www.dsei.org*

- Oelwein, P. (1995). *Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome, A Guide for Parents and Teachers. Bethesda, MD.* Woodbine House.

- Peoples, S. (2003), *Understanding How Children with Down Syndrome Learn: Proven and Effective Techniques for Parents and Professionals.* State College, PA. Special Offspring Publishing.