



Reading Aloud in Community Learning Programs

Introduction

Adult participants in community programs may have difficulties with some of the literacy requirements of their programs. Reading aloud in a group can support comprehension and learning of program materials. It is also a way for all participants to develop and practice reading skills, including able readers who are not confident about reading aloud.

This handout includes suggestions for facilitating reading aloud in a book club or reading circle. You could adapt the ideas to reading materials for your program. You could also consider offering a book club or reading circle for participants who want to work on their oral reading skills.

Getting ready for reading aloud

Be sensitive to learners' feelings

Reading aloud can be a big deal for many learners with literacy difficulties. They may experience fear and anxiety at the thought of reading aloud. It may trigger memories of school days when they anxiously waited their turn to perform, and dreaded getting it wrong. They may have been laughed at or mocked in class for their lack of reading ability. Reading aloud may bring up feelings of shame at making mistakes in public.

Encourage learners to talk about their thoughts and feelings

Provide opportunities for learners to talk about personal memories, experiences, and feelings related to reading aloud. Let them know they are not alone and that their feelings are normal. Reading aloud is a form of public speaking, and public speaking is a number one stressor for many people!

Let learners know they have a choice

Avoid putting learners on the spot. Let them choose whether to read aloud or not. Let them know that they don't have to read aloud to be accepted in the group.

Developed by Michael Wallace, 2008.

Widening Access for
Adult Literacies
Project.
[www.widening
accessforliteracies.ca](http://www.wideningaccessforliteracies.ca)



Help learners set their own guidelines about reading aloud

Encourage participants to set guidelines about reading aloud. For example, some learners may want to say, "I don't want anyone to correct me while I'm reading." Or "I only want the teacher to point out any mistakes I make." Establishing guidelines can help learners increase confidence to read aloud.

Create an atmosphere of enjoyment

Reading aloud together can be enjoyable for learners. Keep the focus on enjoying the story rather than on mechanics of reading. When we help people see that learning is enjoyable, they may start to see that making mistakes is just another part of the learning process.

Model reading aloud

You might start by reading to the group. Some learners may then offer to read. You can also ask, "Would anyone else like to read aloud?"

Read aloud while learners follow the text. Change your voice as you read. Your voice is a powerful way to hold interest and attention and to bring a book alive for learners. Use eye contact and facial expressions where they can emphasize dramatic parts of a story. Remember that it's not just about the pages and words you are reading; it's about having fun and bringing reading alive. Your enthusiasm will be contagious, and the learners will get the message that reading can be fun without you having to tell them.

Offer positive feedback

Find ways to compliment learners who brave the threshold of reading aloud, especially if it is their first time. Use comments such as: "That was great, you read clearly and expressively" or "You paced it really well."

Check in with first time readers: "How was that?"

Review previous reading sessions

At the beginning of a session, ask learners what happened in the story in the previous session. Ask them what they think might happen next. This will remind learners about the story, and catch up anyone who missed the last session.

Discuss key issues raised in a book

Talking about the reading gives learners a chance to make connections between the story and their own lives. For instance, a story may prompt learners' childhood experiences. You could then invite them to reflect on what effect these have had on them as adults. You can prompt discussion with questions such as: "What do you think the hero might be feeling now? How would you deal with this situation?"

Encourage research about the text

Encourage learners to do research about the book on the internet or at the local library. For instance, they might find out about the country or period in which the story is set or discover other books by the same author.

If there are words in the text that learners do not know, encourage them to use dictionaries and internet searches to find definitions.

Finding reading materials

Your public library may have a collection of easy to read materials for adults. You could also check with your local literacy program.

The National Adult Literacy Database library includes stories that you can download. Go to <http://www.nald.ca>. Click on *Use the library*. Click on *Advanced Search* and scroll down to *short stories*.

You can also order easy to read books from the following Canadian sources:

- Grassroots Press. <http://grassrootsbooks.net/ca/>
- Frontier College New Readers Press Bookstore. <http://www.frontiercollegebooks.ca/home.aspx>

Also see the Links page on the Widening Access for Adult Literacies website.

Creating reading materials: the Language Experience Approach

The *Language Experience Approach* (LEA) is a simple but powerful technique to create reading materials and to help learners practice reading. When you use LEA, a learner tells a story and you write it down.

Some advantages of using LEA include:

- It builds on learners' life experiences and affirms that their ideas, feelings and stories are worth communicating.
- It gives learners an opportunity to share what they know and to read something that they have created themselves.
- Learners are likely to be interested in learning to read if they can read their own words on topics of they choose.
- Writing learners' stories for them shows respect for them and their stories. This can be empowering.
- It uses the learner's own language, not someone else's. This supports their reading.
- It shows a powerful connection between spoken and written words.

How to use the LEA

You can use this approach with one learner or with a group.

- Ask the learner(s) to tell you a brief story or share an experience. Base the topic or focus upon the learner's own experiences and interests.
- Write down exactly what the learner(s) say on a whiteboard or flipchart. Use correct spelling and punctuation but do not make grammatical or stylistic changes. Stop to ask for clarification if necessary.
- Read the story aloud and ask if the learner(s) would like to make any changes. Make the changes they want.
- Type the story up and make photocopies, one for each learner. Use LEA stories as the basis for group reading.

With a group of learners, each student can contribute a sentence or two to the story. This works well if they have had a common experience such as going on a field trip or watching a movie together.

With a group story encourage learners to use a "Yes...and" approach. In this way, they each build upon the last contribution in a positive and constructive way. For example, "We caught a bus to the Royal Alberta Museum." "Yes... and I went straight to look at the wild animal gallery."

Reading their own stories aloud can be a celebration of authorship for learners.