

# TEACHING READING SKILLS

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## Introduction

Daily reading is a universal requirement. Everyone encounters daily situations that require reading ability, such as the reading of signs, safety notices, newspaper ads, recipes, street addresses, prescription information, menus, and correspondence. Likewise, the workplace of today also requires a high level of literacy. Workers must know how to read application forms, manuals, memos, evaluation forms, and technical pieces. They must recognize the organization of materials and analyze graphics and writing styles. The average adult is most likely skilled enough to handle the daily situations that require reading ability. However, there are some adults who, for a variety of reasons, have never mastered reading skills at even a literacy level. Many of these adults have traveled through the educational system hindered by reading disabilities. When these adults become motivated to improve their reading skills and enroll in an ABE class, the teacher should make every effort to help them succeed. This can be accomplished with a study plan that meets their specific needs.

How can an ABE teacher determine the reading skills that an individual student needs? Pre-testing with a standardized test is the tool most ABE teachers use to assess students' academic abilities and weaknesses. The most frequently used assessment instrument for adult students is the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), and it provides an individualized diagnostic profile for each student. This profile reveals mastery or non-mastery of specific skill areas, and this information can be used to prepare appropriate and meaningful study plans. In order to use this information wisely, the teacher should be familiar with the format of the TABE Reading Subtest.

## Understanding the TABE Reading Format

The TABE objectives contain content that is considered relevant for students' educational growth. In the **Reading Subtest**, the examinee is required to use vocabulary and comprehension skills to gain meaning from printed material and then to respond to questions pertaining to the material. The printed material -consisting of reading passages, forms, documents, and graphics - contains adult interests in daily living and workplace settings. The content in the **Reading Subtest** is divided into five parts: **interpret graphic information, words in context, recall information, construct meaning, and evaluate/extend meaning**. These skill areas can also be included in other standardized tests that measure ability in reading. However, since the TABE is used in most ABE classrooms, the teacher should be familiar with its particular reading format.

After a student completes the TABE, the teacher can use the individual diagnostic profile to determine the academic remediation needed. For the reading section, the profile might look like the following:

SUBTEST	LEVEL/FORM	NO/CORRECT	GRADE LEVEL
Reading	D7	31	6.6

OBJECTIVE	SCORE	MASTERY LEVEL	PERCENT
Interpret Graphic Information	9/11	+	80 %
Words in Context	3/5	P	60 %
Recall Information	6/8	+	85 %
Construct Meaning	10/17	P	58 %
Eval/Extend Meaning	3/9	—	33 %

## INTERPRETATION:

There were 50 items on the Reading Subtest.

- In Interpret Graphic Information, the student got 9 out of 11 correct, mastery level of 80 %. No remediation needed.
- In Words in Context, the student got 3 out of 5 correct, mastery level of 60 %. Partial mastery. Needs review.
- In Recall Information, the student got 6 out of 8 correct, mastery level of 85 %. No remediation needed.
- In Construct Meaning, the student got 10 out of 17 correct, mastery level of 58 %. Partial mastery. Needs review.
- In Evaluate/Extend Meaning, the student got 3 out of 9 correct, mastery level of 33 %. Skill not mastered. Needs extensive remediation.

**(NOTE:** The reading print material should be at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, especially for the Words in Context part. The graphics and comprehension materials can be at a lower level when participating in group instruction.)

The sample profile reveals the student's weak areas, but it does not provide enough information for the teacher to prepare a meaningful study plan. In order to select appropriate instructional materials for remediation, the teacher must be able to identify the "specific weak skills." This can be done with a "break down" of the five skill areas. The following is a listing of the specific skills, appropriate for ABE students, in the Reading Subtest.

CATEGORY	SKILL AREA
Interpret Graphic Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bar Graphs</li><li>• Maps</li><li>• Schedules</li><li>• Index Pages</li><li>• Table of Contents</li><li>• Forms/Documents</li><li>• Recipes</li><li>• Notices</li><li>• Newspaper Ads</li><li>• References</li></ul>
Words In Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Same Meaning</li><li>• Opposite Meaning</li></ul>
Recall Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Details</li><li>• Stated Concepts</li></ul>
Construct Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Character Aspects</li><li>• Main Idea</li><li>• Cause/Effect</li><li>• Compare/Contrast</li><li>• Conclusion</li></ul>
Evaluate / Extend Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fact/Opinion</li><li>• Predict Outcomes</li><li>• Apply Passage</li><li>• Generalizations</li><li>• Author's Purpose</li><li>• Style Techniques</li></ul>

In the case of the student whose individualized diagnostic profile was used as an example, the student needs a review in the specific skills listed in Words in Context and Construct Meaning. The student needs extensive remediation in the specific skills listed in Evaluate/Extend Meaning.

When using the TABE, it is important to correlate the remedial reading assignments with the skill content measured by the test. For example, every level of the TABE measures the students' ability to distinguish between fact or opinion. Therefore, lessons on fact or opinion will enable the students to respond correctly to those test items.

### Strategies for Teaching Reading Skills

Most ABE teachers use the TABE's pre- and post tests to earn literacy completion points. If this is the case, then it is necessary to document each student's mastery of the specific skills included in the Reading Subtest. This can be done by developing a form that lists the specific skills. The following is an example that can be used with group instruction to check those students who have covered the particular skills needed in the Interpret Graphic Information part.

GRAPHIC INFORMATION	Student # 1	Student # 2	Student # 3	Student # 4
Bar Graphs				
Maps				
Schedules				
Index Pages				
Table of Contents				
Forms & Documents				
Recipes				
Notices				
News Ads				
References				

Group instruction can also take the form of cooperative learning whereas students work together in groups. Each group is responsible for studying a particular topic or skill area and then sharing their findings with the entire class. The teacher acts as a facilitator, assigning topics and keeping order within the groups. Cooperative learning would be a good strategy to use with the Construct Meaning section of the Reading Subtest. Simple assignments could be made as follows:

### CONSTRUCT MEANING

GROUP NUMBER	ASSIGNMENT	PRESENTATION DATE
Group # 1	Character Aspects	June 7
Group # 2	Main Idea	June 8
Group # 3	Cause/Effect	June 9
Group # 4	Compare/Contrast	June 10
Group # 5	Conclusion	June 11

Each group presents its findings to the class and, thereby, assists in teaching the specific reading skills. The teacher can add remarks and further instruction as needed.

For individualized instruction, a study plan can be made for each student. Using the student’s individualized diagnostic profile, the weak skill areas can be listed along with the instructional materials that provide lessons and practice in those areas. A reading study plan (sometimes called a “prescription”) could be similar to the following one, showing Recall Information assignments.

RECALL INFO	ASSIGNMENT	DATE
Facts/Opinions	PACE Reading, Modules 260-1 & 260-2	
Recognizing Details	Reading Basics, Intermediate 1, pp 59-61	
Recalling Details	Reading Basics, Intermediate 1, pp 63-65	
Stated Concepts	Reading Basics, Intermediate 1, pp 75-77	
Check-Up	Reading Basics, Intermediate 1, pp 83-86	
Review	Building Skills/TABE, Reading D, pp 13-18	
Test	Skill Assess Module, Reading D/H pp15-22	

**(NOTE:** The steps in preparing a complete study plan, like the one just shown, can be found in the resource guide titled “Applying TABE Results in the ABE Classroom.”)

As stated, there are several strategies for teaching reading skills, and the teacher can use a variety of techniques for instructional purposes.

### Using Reading Assessment Tools in the Classroom

When teaching reading skills, an assessment tool should be used to determine whether or not the students have mastered the skills. This is usually accomplished with some sort of test. Whether using a teacher made test or a standardized test, the teacher should pay attention to the format that is being used. For example, when measuring vocabulary skills, a test might have test items like the following ones.

**DIRECTION:** Select a synonym for the word “huge.”

- a. Average
- b. Enormous
- c. Tiny
- d. Regular

**DIRECTION:** Select an antonym for the word “young.”

- a. Elderly
- b. Juvenile
- c. Youth
- d. Small

These directions are simply stated. The student will be looking for the word that is the same or opposite in meaning. The extent of the student’s vocabulary skills will determine the success of his or her responses.

Vocabulary skills form the foundation for understanding. While all readers have an inventory of words that they understand, they must also have skills for finding out the meaning of words that are not familiar to them. Word structure and the context provide clues to understanding an unknown word. **The**

**TABE emphasizes the use of context clues as an aid in measuring vocabulary.** This allows the student to use the words surrounding the unfamiliar word to determine its meaning. Therefore, ABE students should have practice using the context to develop vocabulary. The exercises should be in the same format as those used on the TABE. The following are some examples of reading test items that model the TABE.

1. The thief was **posing** as a janitor in the department store. What does the word “posing” mean in this sentence?
  - a. modeling
  - b. pretending
  - c. working
  - d. hired
  
2. The directions in the manual were **confusing**. What word means the opposite of “confusing” as it is used in this sentence?
  - a. clear
  - b. different
  - c. puzzling
  - d. difficult
  
3. The teenager was **eager** to drive his family’s new sports car. In this sentence, the word “eager” shows a strong feeling of
  - a. pleasure
  - b. concern
  - c. interest
  - d. ambition

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Another type of test item sometimes used on the TABE is one where the student must select the incorrect word in the list. The correct response is actually an “exception” to the statement, such as the following:

- The most popular colors are red, yellow, blue, and green. They are all primary colors except
- a. red
  - b. yellow
  - c. blue
  - d. green

There is a way to help students be successful with these types of test items and that is by providing practice with them. (Publishing companies have a great deal of instructional materials that contain test-taking practice with the TABE format. These will be listed later in the “Reading Resources” section.)

### Some Teacher Tips

By having some knowledge of the TABE’s content, the ABE teacher can more easily help the students prepare for post-testing. The following tips involve reading skills that can be found in the TABE subtests.

**The Printed Reading Material:** As stated previously, the printed material in the reading section consists of reading passages, forms, documents, and graphics. The ABE teacher should be aware of the performances required in these readings so the classroom lessons can be planned accordingly. In the Reading Subtest of the TABE the examinee is required to:

- Identify words and word meanings,
- Select synonyms and antonyms,
- Read stories and articles,
- Read signs, safety notices, letters, receipts, checklists, clothing tags, newspaper ads, recipes, and computer displays.
- Interpret graphics, budgets, and application forms,
- Understand literary styles, rental agreements, and evaluation forms,
- Identify main ideas and author’s purposes,
- Draw conclusions and predict outcomes, and
- Distinguish between fact or opinion.

Students who have lessons and practice with these specific reading skills will undoubtedly do better on a TABE posttest.

**Specific Graphics:** While the teacher should strive to enlighten the students with all types of graphics, it is important to know the specific graphics that are on each test form. The students should have lessons with the types of graphics they will encounter on the posttest. The following are the specific graphics found in the TABE Reading Subtest.

<b>Level E, Form 7</b>	Letter – Receipt with Abbreviations
<b>Level E, Form 8</b>	Directions
<b>Level M, Form 7</b>	Bar Graphs – Social Security Application Form
<b>Level M, Form 8</b>	Rental Agreement – Letter – Bus Schedule – Map
<b>Level D, Form 7</b>	Letter – Recipe – Index
<b>Level D, Form 8</b>	Highway Map

These graphics can be used in planning remediation. For example, if a student pre-tests with D7 and shows non-mastery in Interpret Graphic Information, the study plan should include lessons with a letter, recipe, and index (included on D7) **AND** lessons with a highway map (which will be encountered on D8).

**Beginning Readers:** The TABE has a Literacy (L) Level for use with beginning readers. ABE students at this level require a great deal of personal attention, and volunteers can be beneficial in assisting with these individuals. At this level, the instruction should be basic in the key phonetic principles and mechanics skills. There are instructional materials on the market that provide this basic instruction. Most noted among these materials is the Laubach Way to Reading which was developed especially for beginning readers.

At this low level, some students may be unable to read and understand the directions without assistance. Some practical strategies would be to have one-on-one instruction with them or to work with a group of low readers, reading the directions and helping them as they follow along with the lessons.

**Fact or Opinion:** Some ABE students have difficulty responding correctly to a fact or opinion question. They seem to think a statement is true if it makes sense and they agree with it. These students must be taught the strategy for determining fact or opinion. **A statement is a fact if it can be checked and proved. A statement is an opinion if it expresses someone's personal feelings or judgment.**

ABE students should have lessons and practice with fact or opinion questions. The following are examples of the types of these test items encountered on the TABE.

*My sister's six month old baby is adorable. He has blue eyes and brown hair. He is playful and can sit up by himself.*

Which of these statements contains an opinion about the baby?

- a. The baby is adorable.
- b. He is six months old.
- c. He has blue eyes.
- d. He can sit up by himself.

*The apple is the most popular of all fruits. Apples are delicious, and everyone likes them. The United States produces about 6 billion pounds of apples a year. There has been much improvement in the production of apples. For example, chemicals now play an important part in producing top quality apples. However, some people still prefer those that are naturally grown. Regardless, apples will always be at the top of the list of preferred fruits.*

Which of these is a fact about apples?

- a. The apple is the most popular of all fruits.
- b. Everyone thinks apples are delicious.
- c. The U.S. produces about 6 billion pounds of apples a year.
- d. Apples will always be at the top of the list of preferred fruits.

**Importance of Speed:** The TABE is a timed test. Some students acquire the skills to respond correctly to all of the test items in the Reading Subtest, but due to the time limit, they fail to complete the section. This is especially true of students who are limited in English proficiency. Besides trying to do their best with the English language, they are also required to read at a very fast pace. Likewise, it is not uncommon for ABE students to have difficulty with the time restraints of the test. So, some consideration should be given to prescribing timed readings to all students on a regular basis. Such daily practice will give the students the opportunity to increase their reading speed slowly as they also work on other reading skills

There are some instructional materials that focus on increasing reading speed – plus they include comprehension skills as well. An excellent resource for increasing speed is listed in the “Reading Resources” section of this writing.

(NOTE: This tip is not encouraging “Speed Reading” which teaches students to use skimming and scanning skills to read quickly at extremely high rates and to not be overly concerned with 100 % comprehension. Instead, the teacher is being encouraged to help students increase their reading rate so they can comfortably handle the speed required on the TABE and still maintain their ability to comprehend the information.)

**Author's Purpose:** The average reader does not think about the author's purpose as a passage is being read. However, the TABE measures students' ability to identify the author's purpose, so some lessons and practice should be directed to this skill. Students should be taught that authors do have a purpose in mind when they write, and they usually want to (1) provide information, (2) entertain the reader, or (3) convince the reader of a certain viewpoint. Completing practice exercises involving the

author's purpose will enable the students to perform better with this skill on the TABE. Many reading instructional materials contain lessons on identifying author's purpose.

## Reading Resources

There are a wide variety of instructional materials that provide lessons and practice with reading skills. The Florida Adult Basic Education Practitioners Committee has developed some "ready made resources" that are available for educators teaching adult education in Florida. Other resources include the many instructional materials developed by publishing companies. Some of the noted ones used by ABE teachers throughout the state include these materials:

- PACE's simple reading lessons in the form of modules,
- Steck-Vaughn's Pre-GED Reading workbooks,
- Contemporary's Pre-GED Reading workbooks,
- Educational Design's Critical Reading for Proficiency (Books 1, 2, 3),
- Educational Design's Raising Your Reading Test Scores (Books 1, 2),
- New Readers Press Laubach Way to Reading (Books 1, 2, 3, & 4) for beginning readers,
- Jamestown's Timed Readings and Timed Reading Plus, used to increase speed at several reading levels, and
- Steck-Vaughn's Vocabulary Connections to increase vocabulary at levels A, B, C, D, E, F, G, & H.
- Globe-Fearon Be a Good Reader

There are several publishing companies that have developed instructional reading materials that specifically correlate to the TABE. These are excellent resources because they include the same reading content as is found on the TABE, and they also provide test-taking practice in the same format. This is important for ABE teachers who use the TABE pre- and posttests to earn literacy completion points. These instructional materials include the following that are appropriate for ABE students:

- McGraw-Hill/Contemporary's Reading Basics - Introductory (E Level), Intermediate 1 (M Level), and Intermediate 2 (D Level).
- Contemporary's Word Power for vocabulary - Introductory (0-1.9), Intermediate 1 (1.6 - 3.9), Intermediate 2 (3.6 - 6.9), and Advanced 1 (6.6 - 8.9).
- Contemporary's Skill Assessment Modules in Reading - Levels E, M, and D, with two forms at each level.
- CTB/McGraw-Hill's Building Skills with TABE (Reading/Language /Spelling), Levels E, M, and D.
- Steck-Vaughn's TABE Fundamentals (Focus on Skills) in Reading, Language, and Spelling, Levels E, M, and D.

As the ABE teacher becomes familiar with the reading resources available, the selection should be based on the needs of the students. The teacher is also encouraged to utilize a variety of teaching strategies in order to accommodate the learning styles of all the students in the class.