

## INDEPENDENT READING:

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The following suggestions are intended to support discussion about issues that are sometimes raised about Independent Reading.

### Definition and clarification

Note: Some teachers/schools have times set aside for practices referred to as *Drop Everything and Read*, *Silent Sustained Reading (SSR)*, *Uninterrupted Silent*

*Sustained Reading (USSR)* or other such names. The purpose of these is for students have time to read which is important. Sometimes with these practices the students just browse or pretend to be reading if the material is too difficult for them. However, the term *Independent Reading* implies that the students are actually choosing something to read that is at a level of difficulty so they can read fluently and understand what they are reading and it is something that students can do at any time of the day or night in any discipline, rather than just occurring once a day.

Independent Reading is taking place when students are able to read the text with 95%+ accuracy and can understand what they are reading. Students should also have opportunities to read some 'easy' reading materials and read/browse through some 'challenging' reading materials, but they should know that's what it is and why they wish to read it, or attempt to read it. All people read such a range of materials and it's good for students to enjoy reading material that's easy. In fact for those who have struggled with a text it's important to reread it, especially to develop fluency. The comprehension is also likely to be better in the second or third reading. Also in *Independent Reading* the teacher monitors what the students are reading and confers with students, such as described below, so that time becomes an extremely important part of the work of both teachers and students while also being pleasurable for both groups.

### More about Independent Reading

- This is more likely to improve students' reading if it occurs regularly for sustained periods of time, preferably a half hour session, although beginning readers may commence doing this for a shorter period.
- It's natural for readers to have multiple 'texts' that they are interested in reading at any one period of time (a novel, short stories, poetry, newspapers, magazines, an article, a letter, factual resources of some kind, emails, digital texts of interest, etc.). So students should have multiple resources in their book bag or box (or easily accessible) so that when Independent Reading time begins they can just get on with it. The intention isn't to necessarily read multiple items in one session, unless the students are beginning or developing readers and all of their material is read relatively quickly. However, people interested in reading usually have more than one item lined up to read so it's better for students to have such a range rather than to spend time looking for something to read during reading time. At different times of the day or according to varying moods, readers choose to read different kinds of materials and students need this opportunity too. Novels or lengthy factual texts are more satisfying to read when there are large chunks of time to do this.
- It is beneficial for most Independent Reading to be silent but this does not mean students may not read aloud. Readers often think aloud too and research shows that thinking aloud can assist comprehension.
- It is more natural for students to be able to comment about what they are reading, rather than for teachers to expect complete silence. 'Quiet Independent Reading Time' would be a suitable name.
- It's important for students of all ages to learn how to self-select what they will read, but teachers should monitor and guide this. Students may need mini-lessons about how to choose 'just-right' materials to read and discussions should occur about what makes a text 'just right'. This will be affected by prior knowledge of a topic, the contents or genre; by the amount of interest in the topic or genre; by the complexity of the sentences and the vocabulary; by the amount of pictorial support; by the length of text and the layout.
- Students need to learn how to choose 'just right' material for Independent Reading at all ages.
- It's helpful for beginning readers and ESL students to reread the same text many times. Others may also do this for pleasure too.

### Independent Reading time – the role of the teacher

During this time teachers should:

- select particular students to confer with to find out about the students' reading interests, range of reading, competence in reading (comprehension, vocabulary, decoding, fluency, ability to read for a variety of purposes), ability to choose appropriate texts and to sustain their reading. This may be a general 'finding out'

conference about the student's reading or it may focus on a particular aspect of reading that the class or a group has been learning about, or it may be to focus on a previous goal set for that student.

- to guide and teach 'on the spot', to help the students know about their reading strengths and what they should work on next to improve
- to record information about the student's reading (which may include a Running Record and the quick analysis of that reading) and the strengths and goals in some way that is useful for the student to keep, such as in a notebook kept with each student, plus a record for the teacher to keep – information that will quickly give a picture of class, group and individual needs. Whatever is recorded should be shared with the student and students may also record their own thoughts about strengths and goals.
- because of the discussion with the teacher during the conference, the student should be able to articulate what they are good at in their reading and what they are working at; together with the teacher the students can decide on a goal for their reading and know how to achieve this goal. This assessment and evaluation is used to inform future teaching and to guide the monthly planning about who to meet with and how often to meet with each student.

### **Independent Reading – link with Read Aloud, Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Writing**

- It is usual for Independent Reading to take place after some sort of demonstration or explicit teaching in Read Aloud or Shared Reading so that students may 'practise' what they have been learning about. It should be part of the reading block time in a primary school. This is in line with the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model of learning.
- It's difficult to plan for Guided Reading (which should be with flexible groups) or other teaching and learning sessions without conferring with students in Independent Reading time.
- It's helpful to meet with the students for writing conferences on the same day as for reading conferences, to learn more about the students' literacy. Of course this would depend on the purpose of the conferences.
- What is learned about students in Independent Reading informs what is taught in Read Aloud, Shared Reading, Guided Reading and any other group work. This includes in **all** curriculum areas where students are expected to read.
- Any paired or group work in other times in the reading block of time should be planned to help students' Independent Reading. It is therefore not necessary, and probably not very helpful to rotate students around various activities in some sort of group time. Not all students will benefit from the same activity and in many cases it would be more beneficial to allow the students to work at a worthwhile activity for a longer period of time and to just spend more time reading.

Depending on the students' reading experience, some worthwhile types of reading that support improvement in independent reading include:

- reading-along with a fluent expressive reader (at an appropriate pace), following a copy of the text, perhaps using a tape-recorder, a
- CD or DVD player or an ipod; listening to a fluent expressive reader, following a copy of the text;
- rereading class or group shared reading material, including class made books;
- reading to a buddy;
- being involved in reading for an audience, such as reading aloud to a group and performing a readers' theatre script;
- being involved with a reciprocal teaching group, which involves silent reading with a routine of predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising;
- being involved with a book club group, where all students will usually be reading the same book and meet to discuss their reading;
- reading instructions to make something or do something;
- researching information as part of a topic inquiry.

For beginning readers or English Language Learners students the following activities will help them develop concepts about the English language and knowledge about words. They will also support their independent reading:

- reading sentence strips to match them with the full text or sequencing sentence strips and reading them;
- matching words with a sentence strip and reading the sentence;

- reading and rereading class and/or collections of poems and rhymes;
- reading or rereading print displayed in the classroom;
- rereading enlarged texts that have been introduced in Shared Reading.

Sharing at the end of a reading block or time is most helpful when students share what they have learned as readers and writers or share recommendations to others about what they have been reading. The more that students know about each other's interests in authors, genres, hobbies and things they like to learn about, the more they are able to make recommendations to particular individuals or groups. This will also lead to the formation of book clubs around authors, genres and interests. There is a strong correlation between students' reading and writing development so students could continue with writing projects as a follow-up to reading.