

# Small Group Instruction

For grades 3-5, small group lessons should be strategy lesson tailored to the expressed strategy need of the students in the group. Students in the group may be reading at different reading levels, but share a need to develop the same reading strategy.

## Why Strategy Lessons?

Strategy lessons are times for students to practice new strategies or review strategies they've learned before, or you can pre-teach strategies to students who need a jumpstart before the strategy is introduced to the class. The goal is to bring the students step-by step to independence.

## What can be Taught in a Strategy Lesson?

Strategy lessons are versatile-you can use them to teach comprehension, fluency, word work, or any other skill or strategy.

## How Much Time Should I Plan for a Strategy Lesson?

10-12 Minutes.

Number of Students: I prefer four students in a group. If teaching online, have students work in a chat room and follow the same procedures.

## Strategy Lessons at a Glance

Have student bring their self-select text. Alternatively, the teacher can provide a text for each reader. I prefer that students bring their own self-selected text. I learn a great deal about the student's reading preferences, if they are able to read the text fluently, and other useful information.

- **Connect and Compliment:** Begin the lesson by establishing a clear purpose and a connection to the ongoing work of the goal established for the student. If a goal has not been established do so now. Tell the children why they've been pulled together, reinforce strength, and state a strategy for today's lesson. It is helpful to provide an orientation to the students to let them know what they have been doing well and why they've been gathered. Whenever possible, try to offer a compliment to reinforce a strength that the student has shown you. It's important that the compliment is not general, like, "Great job reading!" but instead gives a specific insight into what they've been doing well.

- **Teach:** State the teaching point. Depending on how new the strategy is, decide on the level of up-front support. For example, if this is the first time the learners have heard the strategy you can provide a brief demonstration where you model your thinking and demonstrate the process you use to apply the strategy to text. If students have worked with the strategy previously use a shared practice, or provide concrete example, or explanation. The strategy should match both the student and the book. If the student's self-selected book does not provide sufficient opportunities to teach and practice the strategy provide a text for the students. The teacher determines how the teach will go depending on how much support students need. If, for example, the mini-lesson addressed the strategy, perhaps all that will be needed is a brief example or explanation. If using a demonstration keep it focused and short.
- **Actively Engage:** This is the part of the strategy lesson where the teacher coaches each students in their own self-selected independent reading books, or, when you're not sure their book will provide an opportunity to practice the strategy, prepare a text for them. The teacher moves from student to student providing differentiated support scaffolded to meet the needs of each student. Spend 1-2 minutes with each student. The time can be split into two or more brief sections with each students depending on the student needs. Sometimes it is best to offer a coaching tip and move on to another student returning again to the previous student to offer additional support. Move around coaching as the group practices and offer feedback.
- **Link:** Before students return to work independently to apply the strategy, deliver the message that you expect them to continue working to apply the strategy without your support until you meet again as they work independently. This can be done individually or by calling the group together. Tell the students what you expect them to do and provide a tangible reminder such as the target strategy written on a sticky note.  
The key is to invite students to continue working independently, applying and re-applying the strategy practiced in new contexts.

**Record Keeping:** Keeping records for each session is important. I encourage teachers to think of the small group lesson as a conference with students.

### How much Support is Given Prior to the Practice and Coaching?

- **Lean** when the strategy has been practiced before or following a mini-lesson. State the strategy only.
- **Medium** when students need a quick reminder, or you want to allow more time for practice and coaching. If you know those students only require a reminder.
- **Heavy** when teaching a new strategy, or when the application of the strategy in a new text looks different from the ones the students are reading. If you decide that students need and could benefit from seeing another think-aloud.

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