

**Facilitating library
activity sessions
for children**

General Guidelines for Facilitating a Library Activity **Session/Programme**

"Before anything else, preparation is the key to success."

~ Alexander Graham Bell

Preparation

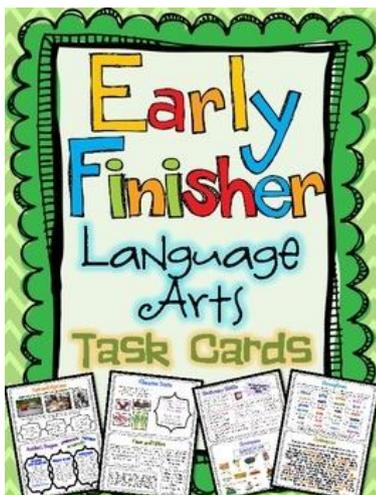


Preparation before an activity session with children is essential for the smooth running of the session and to ensure that the children attending have a positive, safe and rewarding experience. Consider the children who will be attending. If there are children with special needs - make yourself aware of these needs. Perhaps something simple like a different type of seat/cushion would benefit this child. Ask the parents if they have anything they could send in with the child to make the session a more pleasant experience for their child. Often children with special needs will need plenty of breaks. Ensure there will be a staff member free to facilitate this.

Plan an agenda and set out a routine for the children to follow. Even if this varies depending on the day, spend a few moments at the beginning of each session speaking to the children about what will be happening during it. Children enjoy structure. Share with them your objectives and know exactly what you want the children to learn. Ask yourself if the activity is constructive? What will it teach the children? Also consider how you will observe the children and find out what they have learned and if they have enjoyed the activity.

Think also about the space in the library that the children will need when participating in the activity. Will the children be sitting at desks? On the floor? Moving freely around the area? Is the area safe, comfortable and interesting? How could you make the area more appealing to children? Is the area print rich and engaging? Is it possible to set up different workstations to facilitate group work? For example an open plan area for chat, discussion and movement? Designated areas/desks for group work, resources stations, creative stations, writing stations, quiet areas.

Be sure you understand how to do each activity before attempting to facilitate it with a group. Be aware of the content and the steps involved in completing it. If the children will be working in groups, create the groups beforehand or think of a simple way to quickly organise them on the spot. Make sure that the resources are collected and in order for each activity before the beginning of each session. Never plan activities where you cannot source all of the necessary resources.



As well as preparing the resources for the planned activities, perhaps consider having some additional activities for early finishers. Quick and simple activities such as a maths quiz, crossword or interesting books/pictures might come in handy for early finishers or children who choose not to participate in a particular activity. Rewards such as small stickers might prove worthwhile to motivate children and keep them on task.

Facilitating a Library Session to Support Literacy and Numeracy Skills

Health and Safety

The activity space should be a safe, fun and interesting place for those in attendance. When the children arrive at the library, welcome them with enthusiasm.

Before getting started make sure that all those who should be in attendance have arrived and check them off on a list. Always make sure you know how many children are in your care at all times. Next, clear up some housekeeping such as a general plan for the day. Tell the children when they will have their breaks and where the toilets are.

Chat to the children about the library and your expectations of them during session. Explain to them that although the library is normally a very quiet place, the library activity session will be a little different. There will be times when they will be working alone, in groups, listening, chatting, interacting, playing and investigating. Talk about respecting each other and most importantly having great fun learning through numeracy and literacy activities. Later you can read about creating a Library Session Contract with the children.

Building Rapport

Soon into the session the children should have an opportunity to get to know each other. Ice breakers such as fruit-bowl or the 'What am I?' game work well to get children chatting and interacting with one another. Having broken the ice you will want to establish what the children already know and begin to understand their different levels of literacy and numeracy. Short activities such as group discussions with feedback or a fun quiz should give you an idea of this information and help when you are considering groups for cooperative learning activities.



The activities you have planned and prepared should engage the children and use multisensory presentation methods. For example it is not enough to always read to the children and then ask them questions about the text. Multisensory presentation methods are hands on. Perhaps you could have the children do freeze frames, or you as the facilitator could take on the role of one of the characters. The “Hot Seat” is a great way to become one of the characters and really engage the children in a more interactive or fun way. Perhaps you could use music in your presentation of a topic or explanation of a scene from a story. Is the music calm? Frantic? Fast? Slow? Does it suit the scene?

Try to incorporate children’s different learning styles (see Learning styles below). Have high expectations but do not overload children with a huge task. Start with something simple that will boost the children’s confidence and allow them to get to know each other.

Whether the children are working independently, in pairs or in groups, the facilitator should always be close by monitoring and observing, ready to help any child or group who need assistance or have questions. Guide and encourage the children to help themselves by suggesting ideas that might trigger something for them.

Explanations

When providing instructions and explanations do not begin until you have the attention of all of the children. Ask the children to nod as you explain if they understand and to raise their hand if they are unsure of anything or if they have a problem or question. Speak clearly and project your voice, ensuring that all children can hear you. Give clear concise instructions so the children do not get flustered. Having explained something check that the children have heard and understand by asking one or two children to repeat what you have said or have asked them to do. Another idea might be to ask for a volunteer to demonstrate what you have asked them to do. Children often like to see an example of what is expected.

Time Management

It is important that the children know how much time they have to complete a certain task. Make sure you as the facilitator know exactly how much time you wish to allocate to each activity and have a suggested timeframe for each section, which you can share with the children. A digital alarm or stopwatch might be useful in letting the children know how much time they have left, or when they should move on to the next part of the activity. A simple bell may suffice in giving children a 5 minute warning.

Smooth transition between activities is important in maintaining a calm atmosphere. If the children are left with nothing to do they may become disruptive. Make sure that the children know exactly what to do or where to go between activities. For example there may be learning/activity stations set up in the library to keep the children engaged during this downtime. At these stations the children should find short and simple activities to keep them occupied while

the facilitator sets up for the next part of the day. Having the children lie down and listen to quiet soothing music for a two minute meditation might also work. Perhaps the children could sit in the reading corner and choose a book. Be prepared - do not expect the children to behave during these transitions if you have nothing to entertain them. Remind the children if necessary about the rules agreed at the start of the day and be consistent in ensuring they are followed. Praise and affirm children who abide by the rules.

Hopefully there will be more than one staff member to facilitate the activities. If so, make sure that you have met, discussed and planned which parts of the activity each of you will be taking charge of. Consider your roles and share the responsibility. The children should equally respect each staff member. Do not allow disrespectful behaviour or language.

Working with larger groups and a broad range of ages and abilities

An effective way to work with larger groups with a broad range of ages and abilities would be to have the children working in cooperative learning groups.

This approach would allow for children to work together towards a learning goal with each child and the group as a whole being responsible for the outcome. Each child must play a part or have a role in the group.

Perhaps you could consider initially splitting the whole group of children in attendance into two groups (junior and senior) for example, 4-8 year olds and 9-12 year olds. This will limit the broad range of ages and abilities and will make working together in cooperative groupings easier.

From here, divide the children into groups of about four children – each group with varying ages and abilities. Explain that each child should have a part to play in the group and each child will be responsible for coming up with the finished product or achieving the learning goal. This style of learning fosters positive interdependence and provides unique learning experiences. You will find this approach will aid your management of the activities and how you deliver instructions to the children.



Awareness of Different Learning Styles

It is important to understand different learning styles when dealing with groups of children, particularly when there are varying ages and abilities. A multi-style approach to presenting the material can be a helpful way to cater to each child's best way of learning. It's not possible to accommodate



all learning style preferences all the time so try to use a combination of all to improve learning.

Children have different ways of learning, which educational experts have grouped into three basic styles; auditory, visual and kinaesthetic.



Auditory Learners

benefit from:

- The spoken word
- Audio clips
- Oral work, discussions
- Music, poetry, stories
- Presentations



Visual Learners

benefit from:

- Pictures – Posters, charts, diagrams
- Mindmapping, maps
- Demonstrations
- Videos
- Displays
- Use of colour
- Word activities



Kinaesthetic

Learners benefit from:

- Physical activities
- Hands on experiences
- Practical work
- Making things (displays)
- Writing

General Reading Strategies

Children will use a variety of reading strategies to read efficiently. Some children are not familiar with the strategies that work best for them. These five strategies can be incorporated by both library staff and parents.



Reading Strategies

Monitor & Clarify-
Monitor your reading so you know if things are making sense.



Make Connections-
Make connections to what you already know to better understand an article.



Visualize-
You visualize when you make pictures in your mind of what you are reading.



Ask Questions-
Ask questions to help you think about what you're reading or to clarify what you don't understand.

Infer & Predict-
Use clues to figure out something that the author doesn't directly tell you. Make "best guesses" about what will happen next based on what you read in the text.



Summarize-
You summarize an article so that you can better understand and remember the most important information.



Visualise: Children enjoy coming up with their own image or descriptions of characters and settings. Ask the children what they think a particular character looks like. Perhaps they could draw the character or map a map of the setting/location. They could also verbally explain what they are visualising.

Summarise: Have the children retell in their own words sections of the story. This will check that the children have read and understood/retained the information. As they summarise they can distinguish between the main thoughts and the minor details. They can verbally recap or write down a summary.

Predict: Predicting what might happen next in a story will allow the children to fully engage with the story. Ask the children what they think will happen? Why? Where will the story be set? Asking these kinds of questions will allow you to check that the children have understood the story so far.

Ask Questions: Encourage the children to ask questions about the text. Perhaps you could steer them towards questions about the meaning or morals. The children should be as clear as possible on all parts of the story.

Find Connections: Perhaps parts of the text/story remind the children of something or a time in their own lives. Can they relate to a character? Or does a character remind them of somebody else in their own lives? This will encourage deeper thought.

Overview of Reading Strategies for Children with Lower Reading Levels

- Children need material that will motivate them. Children have different interests which need to be accommodated for. If the children are reading about topics they have an interest in, they will be more likely to engage with the text and stick with it. For example a football magazine or comic book may be a lot more beneficial for some children than a mystery story. The children should be given an element of choice and should be able to pick the books they read.
- Children should look at reading as a positive activity. Help them to read difficult words and make it easy for them to find the meaning or understand the text. The children should look at reading as a hobby – a way to entertain ourselves and find out the information we need to know. Let them succeed and get absorbed in the book.
- When you read with them, make it your goal to enjoy the book together. You don't have to make them read perfectly! Avoid too much correction. Use the 5 Second Rule: if children are stuck on a word, wait 5 seconds to give them a chance to figure it out and then supply the word if they don't manage to decode it.
- Younger children like to pretend to read. Allow them to follow your voice. Also allow them to use the pictures in the story to tell the story in their own words. Often having a heard a book numerous times, the children become familiar with the text and become more confident in attempting to read it aloud. If a child says the wrong word, point to the word, say the word correctly in a cheerful voice and let them continue.



- If you get a sense that a child would like to read aloud to you, let them. Listen to the Mem Fox (Famous Australian Author) website. She models how to do effective read alouds.
- If a child with lower reading levels has to read aloud in public, have them practice reading their passage with fluency ahead of

time. In a group setting ask for volunteer to read aloud, rather than passing the book from child to child.

- Consider using technology in the library as part of the session. Also consider using recorded books or audio books.

Interacting with Children and Maintaining Their Engagement



The quality of interactions between the library staff and the children is crucial in maintaining their engagement and leading to constructive and successful literacy and numeracy activities. Each child needs to be absorbed by what's going on, or they may get bored, zone out of tasks and activities and find something else to do. It is important to create a collection of strategies and routines to re-engage the children and keep them interested and on task.

The following are some tips on interacting with children and maintaining their engagement:



Be Enthusiastic! Don't be afraid to make a fool of yourself. Have the children copy your funny actions. Let them see that you are really excited about spending time with them. Use expression in your voice and positive body language. Often this can be done with something as simple as pulling a silly face, saying each child's name with a funny tone of voice and having the children copy you!

Make a game Children love to engage with games and most activities can be turned into games. Challenge the children to reach goals and to show off what they already know/can do and then encourage them to do something harder. A

simple phrase like “the first group to tidy up and sit with their legs crossed and their hands on their heads wins!” can often quickly engage the children and give you their full attention.

Give them an active role Children respond really well to trying things out for themselves, rather than listening to a lecture. Children could act out parts in a story or predict repeating lines e.g. *“I want my Mummy” said Bill.*

Provide real experiences Children love what they can touch taste and smell. Bring the story to life. Whenever possible, use crafts, the outdoors, hands on experiments and dramatic role-plays. Use story sacks for younger children such as the Owl Babies story sack pictured here. Don’t forget to pass the baby owls around for cuddles at the end of the story!



Use Colour Colourful visuals are essential for engaging children, especially young children. Children will become bored and lose interest if they are not engaging with colourful materials and resources. So use colourful posters, storybooks or flashcards to engage young children and keep their attention.

Be clear and consistent Regardless of what you might think, children actually respond very well to rules. They like to know what to expect from you. If you reprimand or reward one child for a certain kind of behaviour be sure to be consistent with all children and their actions..



Dos and Don'ts for Keeping Children's Attention



- **Do** project your voice. Speak loud and clear but don't ever shout. Children will disengage from you if you shout and this may be damaging to your relationship.
- **Do** have fun together – give the children the opportunity to really enjoy the activities, but don't forget that you are in charge – maintain boundaries and stick to the rules
- **Do** make things interesting using games/activities, don't do all the talking!
- **Do** use expression in your voice. Alter the tones you use. Whether that be while reading a story to the children or giving instructions. Try not to speak in a monotone!
- **Do** challenge children appropriately but don't set them up for failure by asking them to complete a task or activity that is way beyond their ability.

Some Quick Activities to Re-engage Children

1. Mind warm up. Teamwork – Give the children a short paragraph (or write a phrase on a chart) Ask the children in groups to find the mistakes. The first team to find all of the mistakes wins.



2. Movement – imitate marching, clapping patterns, clicking, stomping

3. Quick writes – quiet time and reflection. After an activity ask the children to write or draw something that recaps or explains what they have just done/learned.

4. Refocus the children for listening with 'Give me 5' – legs are crossed, hands are still, ears are listening, eyes are watching, lips are zipped.

5. Use a fairness cup – put all of the children's names on lollipop sticks - pull one out to see who answers the question.

Keep On Track With Your Chat!



Quiet

We are working independently without noise.



Small Voices

We are working in a small group or with a partner.



Talking Voices

We are working as a class (or in a small group with our teacher.)

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6. Remind children of the 'Camp Contract'.
7. Encourage the children to follow the traffic light system. (explained below) Practise voice levels. What should we hear when the arrow is at red? Orange? Green?

Encouraging Positive Behaviour & Managing Disruptive Behaviour

At the beginning of library activity session, spend some time talking to the children about your expectations of them at camp regarding behaviour and participation. In groups have the children discuss what they think would be acceptable rules while at camp. Create a "Library Session Contract" using the children's ideas and suggestions – and perhaps some of your own if they haven't already been mentioned. When the children have created their contract as a group they will be more motivated to stick to the rules when reminded.



Talk about the difference between our indoor and our outdoor voice. Often a traffic light system (made simply from green, red and yellow card and an arrow) can remind children of what's expected of them regarding the level of their voices during an activity. Point an arrow to green if the children are allowed to talk loudly and freely (break times etc), indicate orange for quiet group chat/discussion and have the arrow pointing to red when the children are expected to be silent (during instruction, listening to peers etc).

Perhaps the children could earn tickets to go into a raffle to win a book at the end of the day.

Good practitioners use positive reinforcement. This is easy to do! Catch the children 'being good'. Use praise, give a thumbs-up or a high-five or reward good behaviour with a sticker/treat. If you notice somebody being disruptive, try to praise a child close to them who is being well-behaved. "Wow! Look at Mary and John sitting still and listening so well! You have done exactly what I have asked and that makes me REALLY happy!" This is often enough to manage minor disruptions.

Behaviour Management at a Library Activity Session:



Start as you mean to go on!

From the get go, make sure that the children are aware of what is and is not allowed. Start as you mean to go on – be firm, but nice. If the children think they can push the boundaries and get away with it, they will.

Be consistent and fair Ensure that you treat all children equally. If you do not do so the children will lose respect for you and your role of authority. Do not allow one child to do something that you have already said is not okay for another child to do.

Deal with disruptions without fuss Try to deal with disruptions immediately and with little interruption. If children begin to chat during instruction, make direct eye contact with them and speak directly to them. Often asking a question or acknowledging that another child is doing great listening is enough to get them back on track. You do not want the other children to get distracted and lose momentum.

Use humour Sometimes finding a way to laugh with your children will help to diffuse a situation. However, don't confuse humour with sarcasm. Sarcasm may upset or offend a child. Use your best judgement and only use humour when it is appropriate.

Stay positive and have high expectations

Don't automatically presume that the children will misbehave. Most children will want to get on well with the activities you have planned, so stay calm and stay positive. Ensure the children know what your expectations of them are. For example in cooperative groupings tell the children that each person is responsible to contributing to the activity.



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Over Plan Avoid free time. Create additional activities in case your main activities run shorter than expected. Some groups may finish an activity early and allowing them to just talk may cause a lack of focus among the whole group- be prepared.



Book Clubs for children and Parents

Book clubs are a perfect way to foster connectivity around books and reading. Having seen how a book club works, children can learn how to host their own book clubs among friends at home.

Author Visits

Children need to learn about how writers get their ideas and turn those ideas into books. Author visits help make those connections visible for children.

Young Authors

A “young author” exhibition allows children to show off their own writing. This will foster self confidence in the children as young writers.

Create an ‘Encouraging Reading’ Notice Board

A new display can do wonders to highlight favourite books, new releases, and best-loved authors. Display some of the most popular books and ask children to leave a comment or review having read a book.

Host a Mystery Check-Out Day

Create a little mystery around books. Wrap up a variety of books and encourage children to check out a mystery book. They will only find out which book they have checked out when they leave the library. This will encourage them to challenge themselves and read a wider variety of genres.

