
Why is my 10 Year Old Still Having Difficulty Reading?

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While there is no one description that fits every 'older' child who has difficulty reading, there are a number of general characteristics that most of these students share, whether they are in later elementary grades, middle school, or high school. The following list is not presented in order of importance, for all of the following characteristics are equally important and all of them interact, each affecting the others.

1. Most older students who have reading deficits **have poor recognition of sight words**. Since words in print must either be recognized immediately or figured out in some way, these students generally read slowly and without fluency. They have to stop frequently to figure out words that other students figure out automatically. Most of their effort is expended in trying to figure out what the words are, which drains their ability to understand what they are reading.
2. Although they rely heavily on word analysis to get through text, these students usually have **poorly developed decoding and word analysis skills**. Most often they rely entirely on decoding letter-sounds, yet they usually do this slowly and inaccurately. Their insufficient strategies persist in spite of, in some cases, years of drilling and practice in decoding.
3. Usually, junior and intermediate students with reading deficits also have **poor comprehension** of what they do read. Poor sight recognition of words and slow, inaccurate decoding causes the disabled reader to expend huge amounts of cognitive effort in word recognition, leaving little for comprehension, the real cognitive task of reading.
4. Older students with reading deficits have **huge deficits in the amount of reading they have done** in comparison to those of their more skilled peers. For example, a study of first graders revealed that the total number of words read in a week in school ranged from a low of sixteen for one poor reader to a high of 1,933 for a skilled reader. One can readily see that a poor reader who reads only sixteen words in a week is not going to advance as quickly as one who reads nearly two thousand words in a week.
5. Poorer readers have much **less information about text** and about the world in general than their skilled-reading peers. This is because much general information and knowledge about language structures and text are acquired through reading.
6. Older students with reading deficits display **attitudes and motivation** problems and often have low self-esteem. These problems become much more severe as the students get older.

Effective Remediation Strategies for "Older" Student who is Experiencing Difficulty Reading

To teach older students with reading deficits, we must first have our goals for these students firmly in mind. To remediate their reading difficulties, we must:

1. Help them **develop interest in and motivation for reading**. As it is often difficult to find "low vocabulary, high interest"
2. Help them develop automaticity in word recognition. Older readers acquire sight words the same way beginners do: by seeing the same whole words in meaningful contexts over and over. As it is often difficult to find "low vocabulary, high interest" books and stories that are appropriate for older readers, try writing out a story that the student dictates orally. Create a set of short stories in this manner. As you and the student reread these stories, he/she will be able to recognize these words more and more automatically.

3. Help them **develop rapid, accurate means of analyzing unrecognized words** on text. Depending on the needs of the specific student, you can use various means of instruction from an explicit and systematic phonic program to looking at spelling “rules” within the context of a reading passage.
4. Help them develop and apply **comprehension strategies** as they read. As with all readers, comprehension is the goal of all reading. To assist older students with this task, teacher modeling plays an important role. Teachers can model the mental processes that they go through to better comprehend a story. Read a short passage and then “think aloud” about connections that you are making to best assist you in understanding what you are reading. For instance, you might state that the title may give you insight, events in the story may mirror experiences from your past that might help you figure out the plot: you might not know the definition of words, so you might have to look them up in the dictionary, you have to keep track of the story sequence and cause and effect relationships, etc.
5. Show them how to **monitor their own** comprehension, so they know when they do not understand what they read.
6. Drastically **increase their time spent reading**. Of all the deficits disabled readers may have, perhaps the most crippling is that they have spent very little actual time reading. Even if all other things were equal, you cannot get to be a very good reader if you only read a few words a week. Good readers read a lot; they read whole books. So, although explicit instruction in literacy skills (through work sheets, drills and games) is an essential part of any remedial reading program, actual sustained reading, must also occur as part of the curriculum.
7. **Develop their general knowledge** by wide exposure to literature and non-fiction text (e.g., newspapers, magazines for children, etc.). As in all cases of learning, both teachers and parents are critical to the reading development of the older child with a reading deficit. Discuss remediation strategies and skill building with your child’s teacher and ask how you can assist at home. Also keep in mind that an increased diet of good literature will help any reader broaden their knowledge and come to better appreciate and comprehend the written word.

References:

1. Gillet, J. W. & Temple, c. Understanding Reading Problems. Glenview, 111: Scott Foresman and Company, 1990.
2. Ivey, G. A multicase Study in Middle School: Complexities among Young Adolescent Readers. Reading Research Quarterly (vol.34, No.2)