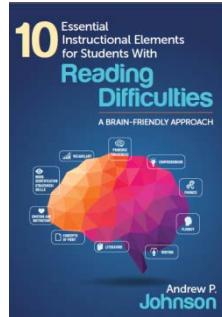


# 10 Essential Instructional Elements for Students with Reading Difficulties: A Brain-Friendly Approach

by

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Directions for discussion groups or book clubs:** There are a variety of ways to run discussion groups, professional development groups, or book clubs. I recommend that you read one chapter each week. Then choose one or two questions from the lists below of which to respond. Participants in your discussion group do not have to respond to the same questions. If you have a discussion leader, that leader might select mandatory and optional questions each week.

For in-person discussion groups, keep a notebook to use as a learning log. The notebook should be used just for this project. Write down your ideas in the learning log before the session. If you are doing online discussions, share your ideas then respond to the ideas of at least one other person in the group. Figure 1 can be used to guide your responses.

**Figure 1. Ideas for responding to questions in discussion groups.**

1. **Question.** I want to know more about ...
2. **Associate.** This reminds me of ...
3. **Apply.** I can see this idea being used ...
4. **Evaluate.** I agree with this because ... I disagree because ... (You must tell why you agree or disagree here.)
5. **Identify.** I like this idea.
6. **Compare.** This is very much like ... It is different from ...
7. **Analyze.** This important, interesting, part is \_\_\_\_\_ because ....

Chapters 7 through 15 are the strategy chapters. For these chapters I recommend that you select one strategy to try in your class during the next week. In your group describe your ideas for implementing it and get ideas from others. During the week, try it out. Next week, report back.

## INTRODUCTION

1. Rate yourself from 1 to 10. 10 means that you identify extremely strongly with a code-first perspective and 1 means that you identify extremely strongly with a meaning-first perspective.
2. Share your perspectives on the “whole language vs. phonics” conversation.
3. What are three important things you know about reading instruction for students with reading difficulties?
4. What are two things you’d like to know about reading instruction for students with reading difficulties?
5. What are your goals for reading the book?

## CHAPTER 1: CREATING MEANING WITH PRINT: THE NEUROCOGNITIVE MODEL

1. What areas of reading instruction would you like to improve?
2. When you think back to the reading instruction you received in grades 1 and 2, what stands out?
3. Reading is creating meaning with print. What does this mean to you?
4. We use what is in our head to help us understand what is on the page. Describe a time when you had to read something about which you knew little. What did you do to help you create meaning in this situation?
5. There is some Latin print on the bottom of page 9. Read it to yourself. Describe the path your eyeballs took as you read this material.
6. What does it mean to read with your brain?
7. How much time do you spend working on vowels and vowel sounds in your reading instruction?
8. What's something you would do differently as a result of the information in this chapter?
9. What type of activities do you think can be used to develop the syntactic cueing system?
10. The two-way flow of information during the process of reading is important in understanding reading as a neurocognitive process. Explain this in a way that would make sense to a parent.
11. What is reading? How do human beings best learn to read?
12. Approximately how much time do you spend reading each week? What kinds of things do you like to read?

## CHAPTER 2: EYE MOVEMENT AND NEURAL PATHWAYS

1. Read page 18. Describe the path your eyeballs traveled as you read.
2. What's the difference between a function word and a content word? How do our eyeballs respond to each differently?
3. Describe each of the following in a way that a parent might understand: saccade, fixation, regression, foveal.
4. How do your eyeballs know which words to skip, fixate, or review?
5. Try the experiment on page 20. Describe your findings.
6. What are two interesting or important ideas related to the brain or learning that you will take from this chapter?
7. Describe learning from a neurological perspective.
8. As you read this chapter, your brain made associations with other things. Describe the associations (no matter how peripheral).
9. We create our own reality. What does this mean to do? How might this affect the way you teach reading? How might this affect the way you teach other subject matter?
10. Struggling readers just need more phonics instruction. Why might this be an inaccurate statement?
11. Compare and contrast learning to reading and learning a sport or musical instruction.
12. Have you read any good books lately? What are they? Why do you enjoy them?

## CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING READING FROM A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

1. Identify three interesting or important ideas from this chapter.
2. Describe learning from a cognitive perspective.
3. Describe a time when your working memory became overloaded.
4. Do the experiment on page 30. Describe your findings.
5. Describe a time or example when you used chunking.
6. Pat is in third grade student who is a struggling reader. Pat over-uses phonics during the process of trying to create meaning with print. As Pat reads, each letter is sounded out in each word. What affects might this have on Pat's short term memory? What about Pat's ability to comprehend?
7. Describe a skill that you are able to do automatically. How did you develop automaticity? What are the implications for reading instruction?
8. We don't teach students how to read. We create the conditions that enable students to develop their ability to create meaning with print. What does that mean in reality? How might this apply to reading instruction in your classroom?
9. Describe the two-way flow of information that occurs during the reading process. What implications might this have for your classroom?
10. Try the experiment on page 34. Describe the results.
11. How are you using your schemata to enable you to create meaning with this chapter?
12. If you could read about or learn about anything, what would it be?
13. Describe how something in this chapter related to something else.

## CHAPTER 4: DIAGNOSIS AND DOCUMENTATION

1. Identify three interesting or important ideas from this chapter.
2. Identify one idea that was completely new to you.
3. What do you see to be limitations of standardized tests in general?
4. What do you see to be the limitations of using standardized tests for diagnosing reading difficulties?
5. Describe your experience using some form of a Diagnostic Reading Inventory?
6. What do you see to be the strengths and weaknesses of a DRI?
7. Describe a student who is a struggling reader. Identify strengths and weaknesses in terms of word identification, fluency, and comprehension.
8. Analyze the IEP of a student who struggles with reading. Based on the IEP, what do you see the strengths and deficits? Is the IEP clear and easy to understand? Does it include the reading grade level? Does it identify the specific deficit area/s? Does it give you a sense of the type of instruction that student needs?
9. Which of the following have you used? Miscue analysis, running record, story retelling chart, maze, cloze. What do you see as the strengths or possible uses of those you have used?
10. Try a miscue analysis with a struggling reader. Use the DRI analysis sheet. Describe your results.
11. What did Dr. Johnson forget to include in this chapter? What might have made it more interesting or useful?
12. What do you see as being the most effective ways to assess and document fluency, comprehension, and/or word identification in large group and individually?
13. What brings you joy?

## CHAPTER 5: READING LESSONS

1. Which of the nine pre-reading activities have you used? Which of these might you try in the coming week?
2. Why do you think round-robin reading or popcorn reading should be avoided at all costs? What do you see as practical alternatives?
3. Describe your experience using advanced organizers. Share a new idea for using advanced organizers that you'd like to try in the coming week.
4. What's the difference between shared reading and guided reading?
5. Describe your experiences using share and/or guided reading?
6. Describe how and where you might use shared reading in the upcoming week?
7. Describe how and where you might use guided reading in the upcoming week?
8. Dr. Johnson does not like using behavioral objectives, especially for SRE lessons. Describe two ideas in support or opposition of this.
9. Page 69 contains a variety of questions for Shared Reading: Narrative Text. Select three that you might use during the upcoming week.
10. Page 70 contains a variety of questions for Share Reading: Expository Text. Ask yourself three of these as applied to this chapter. Respond to your questions.
11. Using the Bloom's action words on pages 70 and 71, design two questions for this chapter. In your group, ask these questions and get responses.
12. Using Bloom's action words, design an activity for use as a post-reading activity.
13. In terms of your own professional growth as a teacher, what is an area you'd like to develop your knowledge or expertise?

## CHAPTER 6: TEN ELEMENTS OF READING INSTRUCTION

1. What's the best method for teaching reading? What's the best method for teaching reading to students who are struggling readers?
2. Identify a program or specific instructional method that claims to be research-based but may not be.
3. Identify an instructional program or product (in any area) in which teachers need to be "trained" before using it. Why do you really think the company makes this requirement?
4. Academic rigor is different from complexity. What does this mean to you?
5. With which of the 10 essential elements were you familiar before reading this chapter? Which were new?
6. Compare and contrast Dr. Johnson's 10 essential elements with the recommendations from the National Reading Panel. What might you conclude?
7. When you look at Erick Jensen's seven critical factors on pages 79-85, what stands out? What will you do differently as a result? What ideas would you like to try?
8. What ideas do you have for keeping students engaged during instruction of any kind?
9. What suggestions do you have for improving input quality during instruction of any kind?
10. Describe your suggestions for providing pause and process time during instruction of any kind.
11. Describe your ideas using error correction during instruction of any kind.
12. Describe your teaching philosophy in terms of the following: (a) what you believe to be the purpose of education, (b) your goals for teaching, and (c) action statements

## CHAPTER 7: EMERGENT LITERACY: CONCEPTS OF PRINT AND PHONEMIC AWARENESS

1. Identify a strategy you would like to try in your class. Describe your plans for implementation.
2. Explain, so that a parent could understand, the difference between code first and meaning first instruction.
3. It's not the 'what' of phonics instruction; it's the 'how' and the 'how much' of phonics instruction. Describe what this means to you.
4. Describe an example of what you believe would NOT be developmentally appropriate literacy instruction at the Pre/K level.
5. Describe an example of what you believe would NOT be developmentally appropriate literacy instruction at the grade 1-3 level.
6. Describe an example of what you believe would NOT be developmentally appropriate literacy instruction at the grade 4-6 level.
7. Identify two or three associations or ideas that popped into your head as you were reading this chapter. These ideas can be closely related or very peripheral to the content.
8. Describe an example of whole-to-part-to-whole instruction that you've experienced outside a reading context.
9. Two common misperceptions of whole language or neurocognitive reading teachers are (a) they do not believe in explicit instruction and (b) they do not believe in phonics instruction. What would you say to correct these?
10. Describe your mission statement and goals for yourself as a teacher.

## CHAPTER 8: EMOTIONS AND MOTIVATION

1. What strategy did you try from Chapter 7? Describe how it worked. Describe how you might adapt, change it, or use it differently.
2. Identify a strategy you would like to try in your class during the next week. Describe your plans for implementation.
3. Describe a time when you were motivated to learn something. Describe a time when you were not motivated to learn something. What can be applied to reading instruction for struggling readers?
4. When have your emotions gotten in the way?
5. Behavior problems are often emotion problems. Explain.
6. Teaching starts with a relationship. Explain.
7. Pages 102 and 103 identify four tips for establishing trusting relationships with struggling readers. Which do you see as the most important? Describe tips that Dr. Johnson should have included.
8. This chapter describes nine strategies to use with struggling readers to enhance their motivation to read. What are three strategies that you currently use or will use? Describe a strategy the Dr. Johnson should have included.
9. Identify two or three associations or ideas that popped into your head as you were reading this chapter. These ideas can be closely related or very peripheral to the content.
10. Describe something specific in your own experience as a student that you associated with this chapter.
11. When you are teaching from your highest place, the teacher and student are one. What does this mean to you?

## CHAPTER 9: LITERATURE AND INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES

1. What strategy did you try from Chapter 8? Describe how it worked. Describe how you might adapt, change it, or use it differently.
2. Identify a strategy you would like to try in your class during the next week. Describe your plans for implementation.
3. What's the best book you have ever read or a very good book? What elements did it contain?
4. This chapter describes 15 strategies for promoting voluntary reading. What do you think are the three most effective? Are there any strategies that Dr. Johnson should have included?
5. Why is voluntary reading so important?
6. A teacher's number one job is to help children fall in love with reading. Support and explain. What is one idea you can use toward this end?
7. LEA is a very effective strategy to use with emergent level and severely struggling readers. Describe your experiences using this technique.
8. Scaffolded Oral Reading (ScORe) will take some practice before you feel totally comfortable using it. Try it with a student this week. What are the benefits do you see to using this technique?
9. What do you know about reading workshop? What have been your experiences? What do you see as the benefits to using this approach?
10. What do you know about Four Blocks? What have been your experiences? What do you see as the benefits to using this approach?
11. Identify two or three associations or ideas that popped into your head as you were reading this chapter. These ideas can be closely related or very peripheral to the content.
12. Describe something specific in your own experience as a student that you associated with this chapter.
13. What do you value in a teaching and learning experience?

## CHAPTER 10: PHONICS

1. What strategy did you try from Chapter 9? Describe how it worked. Describe how you might adapt, change it, or use it differently.
2. Identify a strategy you would like to try in your class during the next week. Describe your plans for implementation.
3. It's not the 'what' of phonics instruction; it's the 'how' and the 'how much' of phonics instruction. Describe what this means to you.
4. Page 123 describes three tips for helping to develop students' phonetic cueing system. Which of these do you think is the most important? What is one tip that Dr. Johnson forgot to include?
5. Reading is sounding out words. Why is this an inaccurate statement?
6. Struggling readers simply need more phonics. What is wrong with this statement?
7. Phonics is necessary but not sufficient. Explain.
8. Systematic phonics instruction does not mean that a scope and sequence should be followed in lock step. Explain.
9. Describe a reading sub-skill that you've seen in a basal or scope and sequence chart that you believe to be totally irrelevant or unnecessary.
10. Why do teachers of reading need to be empowered to make the choices necessary for their students? In what ways are they not able to do this?
11. What is the difference between synthetic and analytic phonics? What approach is best?
12. Of the 14 strategies for developing students' phonetic cueing system, which three do you believe are the best? Are there any that Dr. Johnson forgot to include?
13. Describe your experience using the elements of effective skills instruction as both a teacher and a learner.
14. How do you best learn a complex skill?
15. Where do you see yourself in five years?

## CHAPTER 11: STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING WORD IDENTIFICATION SKILLS

1. What strategy did you try from Chapter 10? Describe how it worked. Described how you might adapt, change it, or use it differently.
2. Identify a strategy you would like to try in your class during the next week. Describe your plans for implementation.
3. What is the difference between phonics and word identification skills? What are the instructional implications?
4. What is the difference between word recognition and word identification? What are the instructional implications?
5. When does a strategy become a skill? What are the instructional implications?
6. Describe three creative or interesting ways you might include cloze or maze in your classes (reading and other).
7. This chapter described five strategies for developing students' synaptic cuing system. Which one might you be most likely to use in the coming week? How will you use it? How could you use it outside of a reading class?
8. What are two interesting or important ideas that you took from this chapter?
9. What strategies from this chapter are you already using? What is one strategy you might like to try someday?
10. Describe two strategies from this chapter that you might like to try outside a reading context.
11. What idea or ideas from this chapter do you wish you would have known about when you first started teaching?
12. After reading this chapter, how will you change your approach to prefixes and suffixes instruction?
13. Finish the sentence: Education would be better if ...

## CHAPTER 12: FLUENCY

1. What strategy did you try from Chapter 11? Describe how it worked. Describe how you might adapt, change it, or use it differently.
2. Identify a strategy you would like to try in your class during the next week. Describe your plans for implementation.
3. How does fluency relate to neural pathways and neural networks?
4. Describe a skill (other than reading) in which you have achieved fluency. How did you become fluent?
5. Wide reading is one of the best cures for most reading problems. Explain and support.
6. What new, interesting, or creative idea did you think of while reading this chapter?
7. Which repeated reading idea seemed most effective and practical? How would you implement this?
8. Why are round-robin reading and popcorn reading such bad strategies?
9. Describe ideas for fluency that Dr. Johnson could have or should have included in this chapter.
10. What idea or ideas from this chapter do you wish you would have known about when you first started teaching?
11. Why is fluency important? How do you think it is best assessed? What is a practical way to document fluency growth?
12. Finish the sentence: In my first year of teaching I wish that ...

## CHAPTER 13: COMPREHENSION OF NARRATIVE TEXT

1. What strategy did you try from Chapter 12? Describe how it worked. Describe how you might adapt, change it, or use it differently.
2. Identify a strategy you would like to try in your class during the next week. Describe your plans for implementation.
3. What is the difference between reading narrative and expository text?
4. The amount of time students spend reading narrative text declines as they enter the middle school grades. Why is this a bad thing? What can schools or teachers do to reverse this?
5. Comprehension involves thinking. Explain. How can you (should you) promote or develop this student's thinking?
6. As you read this chapter, which of the cognitive operations did you use?
7. Identify three important ideas from this chapter. Put them in order from most important to least.
8. Describe one question you have after reading this chapter.
9. Describe the types of conversations you like to have with friends after you have seen a great movie. What are the implications for reading instruction?
9. Describe the types of conversations you like to have with friends after you have read a great book. What are the implications for reading instruction?
10. Describe a book that you remember reading in elementary or middle school. Did you read this as part of class?
11. Which of the strategies described in this chapter have you used in your class? Which strategies might you like to try?
12. Something in this chapter reminded you of something else. Describe both things.
13. Identify 5 things that have happened to you this week. Rate each from happy to sad using a plot profile.
14. Identify 5 things that have happened in your life. Rate each from happy to sad using a plot profile.

## CHAPTER 14: COMPREHENSION OF EXPOSITORY TEXT

1. What strategy did you try from Chapter 13? Describe how it worked. Describe how you might adapt, change it, or use it differently.
2. Identify a strategy you would like to try in your class during the next week. Describe your plans for implementation.
3. In terms of reading instruction, what are two ideas that are clear? What are two ideas that seem very fuzzy right now?
4. What strategies did you use to help you comprehend a textbook? What strategies did you use when reading this book?
5. Which of the strategies described in this chapter have you used in your class? Which strategies might you like to try?
6. There are seven teacher pre-reading strategies for reading a textbook or other forms of expository text. Which ones have you used effectively? Which might you like to try?
7. How does the SRE apply to reading textbooks in your class?
8. What is a study-skill strategy? Which ones do you currently teach? Which ones might you teach?
9. What are two interesting or important ideas you will take from this chapter?
10. Describe an idea that Dr. Johnson should have included.
11. All teachers should be teachers of reading. What does this mean in reality? What specific behaviors should we see in all classrooms?
12. This chapter describes nine pedagogical strategies that can be used to develop cognitive processes related to comprehension. Which ones have you used? Which ones would you like to try?
13. Finish the sentence: Before I retire I hope to ...

## CHAPTER 15: VOCABULARY

1. What strategy did you try from Chapter 14? Describe how it worked. Describe how you might adapt, change it, or use it differently.
2. Identify a strategy you would like to try in your class during the next week. Describe your plans for implementation.
3. Why might direct instruction be an ineffective method to use to develop or enhance students' word knowledge?
4. Concept learning and word knowledge are related. Explain.
5. Identify at least five new or interesting words you have encountered in this book.
6. What are two important ideas you will take from this chapter?
7. Describe an idea from this chapter that you wish you would have known when you started teaching.
8. Describe two strategies you might use to promote active, in-depth processing of words.
9. Identify the three most useful strategies from this chapter.
10. What is a parallel personal writing prompt? How might you use this?
11. Describe associations you made as you were reading this chapter. Did you think of things from your own experiences as a student? As a teacher? Other? How is something here related to something else?
12. Describe something new or interesting that you encountered here?
13. Describe a creative application of an idea from this chapter that you might use?
14. What is one special skill, trait, or talent that you bring to your classroom?

## CHAPTER 16: WRITING

1. What strategy did you try from Chapter 15? Describe how it worked. Described how you might adapt, change it, or use it differently.
2. Identify a strategy you would like to try in your class during the next week. Describe your plans for implementation.
3. Why do you think weekly spelling tests are ineffective? What could be done instead?
4. In your real life outside of a school environment, how do you use writing? When do you write? What kinds of writing do you use? What does this tell us about writing instruction?
5. You should rarely ask students for more. Explain. Do you agree?
6. How have you used writing in your classroom? What interesting tips do you have for making writing come alive?
7. Complete the following sentence: In my class I teaching writing by ...
8. What do you wish you would have known about using writing for reading instruction when you started teaching?
9. What have you learned about using writing in your reading class?
10. What tips would you give another teacher for using writing across the curriculum?
11. What are your thoughts about grammar instruction and learning to write?
12. Finish the following: Ten years from now I hope my students remember ...

## EPILOGUE

1. What strategy did you try from Chapter 16? Describe how it worked. Described how you might adapt, change it, or use it differently.
2. Rate yourself from 1 to 10. 10 means that you identify extremely strongly with a code-first perspective and 1 means that you identify extremely strongly with a meaning-first perspective.
3. What are three important things you know about reading instruction for students with reading difficulties?
4. What are two things learned about reading instruction for students with reading difficulties?
5. Did you meet your goals for reading this book? What are future goals? What are some topics about which you would like to learn?
6. What is a master teacher? What traits do master teachers have?