

USING A DAILY MESSAGE TO BUILD LITERACY SKILLS

In this month's Introduction, we defined fluency as a student's ability to read text quickly and accurately. The activities from last week's Teacher's Corner support fluency by building students' sight word vocabulary so that they can read more quickly and efficiently. This week's Teacher's Corner presents an activity that can help students apply phonics skills and develop sight word vocabulary. Development in both of these skills can help improve students' reading fluency.

THE DAILY MESSAGE

Time: 5-10 minutes daily/each class meeting

Goals:

- To help build students' knowledge of sight words.
- To help students segment words into sounds and blend sounds into words while reading a meaningful message.

Materials: a place to write a short note that will be visible to all students in the class, whether on the board, on chart paper, or in an electronic document

Preparation:

1. Consider sounds and letters that your students already know or have been studying recently. It would be helpful to include words in the daily message that contain letters and sounds they have studied most recently. Doing so provides additional reinforcement.
2. Plan and write the message before your students arrive. If you have multiple classes, you may need to write a specific message to each group. This activity can be used with students of any age.
3. Begin your message with a greeting. This can be formal, such as "Dear Class," or more casual, like "Hi, Kids!" Varying the way you greet students is another opportunity to teach different types of vocabulary and expressions.
4. Include a few sentences that will be interesting to the class. Tell about something you did that morning or what you are excited about for today. If you have students who are very new to English, you may choose to write only a few sentences to begin with. Messages can grow longer

as students gain more English. The message is an opportunity to include words with specific sounds or letters (see the examples for ideas).

5. It is fun and engaging to end your letter with a question that can prompt discussion. To respond to your questions, students will practice reading the message and then practice using vocabulary and forming sentences in their answers.
6. End the message with a closing. As noted with the greeting in Step 3, the closing can vary and provides another opportunity to include different vocabulary and ways of saying goodbye.

Example Messages:

1	2	3
<p>Hi Class!</p> <p>This morning I rode in a car to school. I saw many things that begin with the letter c. I saw a cat, a cab, a cap, and a cow. What else do you know that begins with c?</p> <p>From, Ms. Wells</p>	<p>Good afternoon, students!</p> <p>I am very excited because after school today I will take a taxi to the airport. I am going to pick up my friend Rania who is coming to visit from her country! Have you ever been on an airplane before? When?</p> <p>From, Mr. Sharif</p>	<p>Dear Students,</p> <p>Yesterday, I scraped my knee and scratched my elbow. I was jogging and a person driving a car didn't see me. Their tires screeched and they stopped just in time! I screamed and fell down. Have you ever fallen and had a scratch like this?</p> <p>Sadly, Mr. Thomas</p>

Procedure:

1. You can choose to have the message on display as students enter the classroom, or wait until they are settled and then share it with them.
2. Read the message aloud to students once or twice. Then, using your hand or a pointer, track the text as the class reads it out loud together. For additional practice, you can have students read it again in pairs and then have each partner take a turn reading it to the other.
3. If you included a question at the end of the message, allow students a chance to share their answers. Again, this can be done with a partner or small group, or you can call on individual students to share ideas.
4. You can even create a list or chart of student responses to your question and read them together if time permits. This will give students even more exposure to written language.
5. Provide opportunities for students to interact with the message by finding targeted letters or words. You can have students come up to the board to find things by pointing, circling, or highlighting. Students can also make notations in an electronic document by changing colors or

underlining. For instance, in Example 1 from the table above, students could come up and circle a letter *c* in the text until all of them are located. In Example 2, students could locate sight words such as *before*, *been*, *from*, etc. In Example 3, students could look for words with the *scr*- spelling pattern.

6. Repeat this activity each day or class meeting with a new message to provide students with more practice.

Variations/Extensions:

1. The daily message can also be used to start a dialogue journal with students. Dialogue journals are ongoing written messages back and forth between two people, in this case between a student and a teacher. For this extension, each student would need a notebook. Once you have displayed your message and followed the steps outlined in the procedure above, you can have students write you a response. They can respond to the question from your message or even write you a whole message. Students can use your message as a model for their own. After they write their messages, you would write a quick reply to each student in his or her notebook. This journal extension can be repeated daily or done only a few times per week, depending on what is best for your students. For more information about using dialogue journals, take a look at the *English Teaching Forum* article called [The Dialogue Journal: A Tool for Building Better Writers](#).
2. When students feel more confident and have more English skills, you can involve them in reading and writing the daily message. A student helper can be in charge of reading the message and leading the discussion to answer the question. Eventually, you can assign each student a date to write and share his or her own message to the class.

Students of all ages and levels really enjoy this daily message activity. It is a great warm-up at the beginning of class and helps build relationships, especially if students are given a chance to write their own messages. The message provides an opportunity to reinforce beginner students' phonics knowledge, sight word vocabulary, reading fluency, and basic literacy skills while being fun and engaging. Next week's Teacher's Corner will focus on helping students develop literacy skills through activities that support comprehension in beginning readers.