

Handout: Goal Setting

Effective goal setting with students is the foundation of successful instruction. When students set their own reading goals, then can monitor and see progress toward those goals, they are more likely to persist in adult education programs. In addition, goal setting and monitoring provides valuable information to help tutors make instructional decisions about materials, methodology, and focus of instruction. Below are some tools and strategies you can use to help students set and monitor their goals.

Setting Long-Term Goals

Initially, an adult student may enter a program with very vague or general long-term goals; specific short-term reading goals and no long-term goals; or maybe without any goals at all – just the sense that he wants to read better. In long-term goal setting, the objective is to get students to think more about the “why” than the “what.” For example, a student may want to get his GED (the what). In setting the long-term reading goal, you want to help the student identify why he wants his GED: to move up in his job, to continue his education, to be a role model for his children. This discussion helps the student clearly define a big picture for what he wants to accomplish. Once the student can describe the big picture, begin to talk about how reading fits into this big picture. In the example above, you could begin by asking the student what kinds of things he reads at work now and what kinds of things he would need to read if he got a promotion. You can talk about what kinds of things he thinks he would need to be able to read to pass the GED and how those might be similar to or different from the things he would read at work. These then become the student’s long-term reading goals.

Setting Short-Term Goals

Once the student has established some long-term reading goals, it is important to break these down into short-term reading goals that can be clearly identified, articulated, accomplished in a short period, and measured. To do this:

- Ask the student to discuss the reading strengths and skills he already has and can build on to accomplish his goals.
- Discuss with the student what gives him trouble when he reads and help him identify the areas that he needs or wants to develop.
- Identify the skills, knowledge, and abilities the student needs to meet his long-term goal.
- Identify with the student the short-term reading goals that will be the focus of instruction.

Once you and the student have identified the short-term reading goals, be sure there is a clear link back to the long-term reading goals. In the example above, the student might identify the need to identify details in work documents, follow a sequence of steps, and skim for important information. These are also skills that the student will need to pass the GED. Discuss with the student what the two of you will do in and out of class to accomplish the goals, and how the student will know he has met the goal.

Monitoring Goals

Once you've worked with the student to set long-term and short-term reading goals, it is important to monitor the goals on a regular basis. Monitoring involves reviewing the long-term reading goal to see that it is still relevant to the student's life, and reviewing the short-term reading goals related to it. During this review, you and the student want to identify the goals he has met and what progress he has made on the other goals. If the student has not made progress on a goal, discuss the reasons why and adjust the strategies you both are using to achieve the goal. Setting and monitoring long-term and short-term reading goals helps the student see progress, avoid frustration, and remain motivated to continue his education.