

# Literacy Toolbox – Instructions

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## General Overview

Literacy Toolbox is an online literacy development program - focusing on fluency - which implements the principles of perceptual learning for students between the ages of 4 and 14. Perceptual learning is a particularly powerful method of developing fluency in readers (and writers) at all levels.

The program has 21 components consisting of thousands of passages on hundreds of non fiction topics written specifically for pre teens and early teens plus a few stories for the very young. In almost all modules, students themselves choose the subject of the passage around which the exercises are built. In this way the students are interested in what they are doing and become a willing, active participant rather than an unwilling subject.

The student is always given sufficient support to succeed in their reading. For instance whenever a student is required to read a passage as part of an exercise they can call on auditory support with unfamiliar words. A fundamental principle of the literacy toolbox is that it is easier for students to do things unaided than to call on help but the help is always available from the program. Our experience has shown that students will call on as little help as they can get away with.

## The Golden Rules

There are two critically important rules which teachers should follow when using the Literacy Toolbox to assist with literacy education.

## Rule 1. Give instructions away from the computer.

After they are familiar with the interface you should tell students what to do then let them go to the computer and carry out your instructions independently.

Stress plays a large role in keeping poor readers back and the presence of a human observer is one of the largest factors contributing to that stress. Everything about the Literacy toolbox is designed to reduce the stress of reading and make it enjoyable.

The program interface is designed so that students can exercise the maximum independence possible. The more independent the student feels the more they will engage with the exercise.

## Rule 2. Keep performance data secret.

The main recordable performance data such as words per minute (WPM) and amount of help sought can easily be faked by the student and this is exactly what the student will do if you encourage them to aim for 'better' measurements. Unfortunately if students 'tap through' the text faster than they can read it, and don't seek help with words they can't read, they will not improve.

## The Program Structure

The program consists of 21 modules and submodules. Different modules target different age groups, reading abilities and literacy goals - see details below.

After signing in, the student first selects a module from a list and then in most cases a topic within that module. When a student completes an exercise their performance is recorded and can be reviewed through the teacher admin panel.

All but one of the exercises have an auditory component and students should wear headphones whilst using the program.

Some exercises require the student to write in their exercise book and some exercises produce a printout from which the student can read to the teacher.

# Program Modules

## Library 300

The Library consists of 300 titles graded in six levels of intellectual challenge. Most children should start with a Level 3 title and then move up or down as appropriate.

*It is very important that the children should carry out the computer preparation on their own without adult intervention no matter how severe the child's reading deficit.*

The child simply...

- taps the spacebar to advance word focus; or
- taps any letter key to make the computer vocalise unfamiliar words.

When the session is complete, the child places the printout in his/her reading folder and at some convenient time, reads the prepared text to a teacher or T.A. We recommend that two chapters are completed at each daily session. Using headphones is highly recommended.

The child never reads to an adult from the computer screen.

## Comprehension (Years 6 - 9 : vulnerable readers)

Reading Comprehension Course is tackled in the same way as the library.

*It is very important that the children should carry out the computer preparation on their own without adult intervention no matter how severe the child's reading deficit.*

The child simply...

- taps the spacebar to advance word focus; or
- taps any letter key to make the computer vocalise unfamiliar words.

The comprehension exercises can be completed in any order and are suitable for vulnerable readers in Years 6, 7, 8 and 9. This course presents a more challenging quality of reading than the library stories. These exercises report on both literal and inferential comprehension. Inferential comprehension is a higher level reading skill which only accrues as reading skills become completely fluent.

## First Dictation (Years 3 - 4 : vulnerable readers)

There are four levels of dictation and this is the easiest. First Dictation is a simplified dictation course for vulnerable readers in Years 3 and 4. We recommend that this course is offered to vulnerable readers in the target age range who have completed a term of work on the Jumpstart course. Children should be given a dedicated dictation exercise book for this course which incorporates a Spelling Helper which means that the exercises can be completed without spelling errors.

It is very important that all spelling errors are rigorously marked so that children acquire experience of only spelling words correctly. This is the main point of all the dictation courses.

## Dictation ( Vulnerable readers)

Dictation is the middle range dictation course suitable for vulnerable readers. These dictation courses automatically accommodate the pace and short term memory span of each individual user and also provide a 'Spelling Helper.' Punctuation is given in this course. These exercises may be completed in any order.

*It is very important that all spelling errors are rigorously marked so that children acquire experience of only spelling words correctly. This is the main point of all the dictation courses.*

## Higher Dictation

Higher Dictation is similar to the course above except that appropriate grammar is implied by the voicing and not stated.

*It is very important that all spelling errors are rigorously marked so that children acquire experience of only spelling words correctly. This is the main point of all the dictation courses.*

## Science Dictation

This is the highest level of dictation. Phrases are longer and the vocabulary is as difficult as any the program offers.

It is very important that all spelling errors are rigorously marked so that children acquire experience of only spelling words correctly. This is the main point of all the dictation courses.

## Jumpstart (Years 3 - 4 : vulnerable readers)

Jumpstart is a course of individual reading exercises designed for vulnerable readers in Years 3 or 4.

It is very important that the children should carry out the computer preparation on their own without adult intervention no matter how severe the child's reading deficit.

The child simply...

- taps the spacebar to advance word focus; or
- taps any letter key to make the computer vocalise unfamiliar words.

We recommend that one exercise is completed each day over the course of one term.

## Sentence Builder

Sentence Builder is a spelling and language development course which requires users to spell words within the context of an engaging sentence. It uses the highly effective 'whisper-spell-twice' technique which is proving to be increasingly effective. This suite can be used on an *ad hoc* basis with targeted children with specific spelling issues. Sentences are presented with one word missing and pupils have to select what they think is the missing word from a given group. Any word on the screen, including the words in the sentence can be vocalised by clicking the mouse on them.

## Reading Starter (Year 2 : non reader)

This is a one term Perceptual Learning course which is designed for non or near-readers in Year 2. Completing the course boosts these children's confidence in their own ability to learn to read and kick-starts their reading skills generally. Used over the first term of the academic year, this course will ensure that these children catch up with their peers in reading.

Pupils should be taught to use the program independently without adult supervision or intervention. This usually takes no more than a few sessions.

1. The program instructs the child to “*Watch every word - and listen!*” and then serially highlights each word before voicing it. The delay between the visual emphasis of each word and its enunciation is variable and carefully calculated to allow the child’s brain time to make a judgement which the voicing subsequently either confirms, corrects or instructs.
2. The program then instructs the child “*Now read it yourself!*” highlighting only the first word. The child is able to advance the word focus by tapping the spacebar and to ‘voice’ any unfamiliar words by touching any letter key. This is the reinforcing experience.
3. When the passage has been read through, pupils are offered the option to either (1) Read it again him/herself or (2) to Exit the programme or (3) to print out the exercise.

In the interests of economy, teachers may feel it appropriate to print off a copy of each exercise and staple them in groups of ten exercises. After the child has prepared the text at the computer, he or she should read it to an adult from the printed exercise. After the first five exercises have been completed, the children should have reached a point at which they are able to read the text from the printout with reasonable accuracy.

*As soon as a child has reached this stage, s/he should be asked also to read the previous day’s text but this should not be attempted until the child is reading the current day’s work fluently.*

## Spelling ( Years 5+ )

This course is for children aged 9 or older who have spelling difficulties. The course is intended to be offered weekly over a full school year and is based, not only on words with exotic spellings but on those words which research has shown to be commonly misspelled by children. Each session offers ten words randomly drawn from an extensive database of such and uses a multi-sensory form of the well established Look/Cover/Spell/Write strategy.

We have included an algorithm which detects which words are causing a child difficulty and repeats these in subsequent sessions.

## Grammar ( years 6 + )

This consists of 9 sub modules dealing with sentence parts (nouns, adjectives, verbs etc..) a grammar testing module and a module on punctuation.

This is a series of courses for children aged 10 or over designed to introduce them to the role of individual words in sentences. They are intended to be offered on a once weekly basis over a school year.

## General Grammar Test ( years 6 + )

This test is designed to be offered at the end of the Grammar Courses and provides teachers with a means of assessing the extent of children's appreciation of grammatical concepts. The questions in the test are randomly derived from an extensive database and can be used to provide both 'before' and 'after' scores.

## Punctuation Course ( years 6 + )

This is a ten session course designed to be offered weekly to children aged 11 or over which provides examples and routine practice in punctuation focusing particularly on the use of direct speech. The course is designed to be offered once weekly over a single school term.

## Progress Monitor

Monitoring exercises are completed by each child without adult intervention and take precisely 2.5 minutes to deliver a 'score' derived from elements of reading accuracy, reading comprehension and reading fluency. After the second session, the program presents the scores as a graph showing the rate of each student's progress in reading over time. We recommend that all children using the literacy toolbox should routinely complete a Progress Monitor exercise on the same day each week.

## Literacy Toolbox Strategies

As the name suggests the Literacy Toolbox is a set of teaching tools rather than a single regime.

It is more important that the general guidelines (above) are followed than that any particular schedule is adhered to. Having said that it is valuable to always be aware what strategy you are following for each student even if you vary it from time to time.

I present here some specific examples of strategy which have worked well in the past.

For use in primary/junior schools.

General Instructions for target groups to restore literacy skills deficits.

### **Year 2 target group.**

Read the instructions for the **Reading Starter** programme and follow these for one term. This will restore the child's reading skills and make it possible for them to engage more productively with their phonics exercises with the rest of their peers.

### **Year 3 target group.**

Read the instructions for the **Jumpstart** programme. The child completes one exercise per day from the Jumpstart Course over a full term. This will bring their reading and chronological ages into line.

### **Year 4 target group.**

The target children complete one exercise per day from the **Jumpstart** course AND on three days each week (Mon, Wed & Fri) also complete one exercise from the **Dictation One** course. The children read their prepared work to an adult.

### **Year 5 target group.**

Each child completes two chapters from any title in the **library** every day and reads these to an adult from the printouts – never from the computer screen. Additionally, on three days each week (Mon, Wed & Fri) they complete an exercise from the **Dictation** course. The children read their prepared work to an adult.

### **Year 6 target group.**

**Term one:** Each child completes two chapters from any **library** title every day and reads these to an adult. They also complete an exercise from the **Dictation** course three times each week also reading these to an adult.

**Term two:** They complete an exercise from the **Reading Comprehension Course** every day and three exercises weekly from the **Dictation Upper course**. Completing further titles from the library becomes a purely voluntary activity.

**Term three:** Continue with the daily **Reading Comprehension Course**. When all dictation exercises have been completed, this work could be replaced by the completion



of an exercise from the **Sentence Building** course which extends vocabulary.

### **High intensity course for a small Y6 target group to achieve Level 4 English at KS2 English in one term.**

Each child in the small target group

1. completes any Reading Comprehension exercise every day.
2. completes any exercise from Dictation course every day.
3. reads both completed exercises to a TA daily.

On completion of the Dictation course, the children start the Dictation Upper course. Every child who completes this high intensity regime as recommended will achieve Level 4 English at KS 2.

### **For use in secondary schools (Grade/Year 7 or over.)**

The optimum strategy is a daily forty minute regime for all children entering Year 7 with a significant deficit in literacy skills so that they can tackle the secondary school curriculum with confidence.

#### **Children with a reading deficit of less than two years**

should complete an exercise from the Reading Comprehension course plus one from the Dictation Course. These children's literacy skills should be in line with the expected standard for their age after one term.

#### **Children with a literacy skills deficit of greater than two years**

should complete two chapters from an title in the Library 300 and an exercise from the Dictation One course in the first term.

In the second term, the library element should be replaced by an exercise from the Reading Comprehension course and where time permits, an exercise from the Sentence Builder course.

In the third term, such pupils should progress the Dictation component through to the completion of the Science Dictation course as well as alternating between an exercise from the Spelling and the Grammar courses.

