



First Week of Class

The first week of reading class is distinct from the rest of the school year for a couple reasons. Firstly, there are many routines that you have to teach. Since there are small routines that don't take a lot of time to teach, your typical lesson plan structure looks different. Secondly, an enormous part of building Reading Without Limits readers is extended, independent reading. However, during the first week of school, you haven't launched the library. Also, your readers haven't built the reading stamina yet for extended independent reading.

When planning the first week, make sure that the lessons are

- ❖ Divided into short chunks
- ❖ Taught using the gradual release of responsibilities
- ❖ Kid-Friendly

Short Chunks

There is cognitive psychology research that reveals that our attention span is limited to our age plus two minutes. So, if you are thirty-three, like me, you can pay attention without your mind wandering for thirty-five minutes. Other research says that it sparks out at about twenty minutes. Regardless, the younger you are, the less you are able to focus for a long period of time.

It's important to note that your attention will increase if you like the task and as you get better at the task. Therefore, it's so important to build the soft skill of student stamina, as explained in Chapter Three. However, during the first weeks of school, let's assume your students' attention is somewhere between the 'two minute plus' age rule



and twenty minutes. Divide your first weeks of class into short chunks. Each chunk represents a different strategy that your students will learn. In an hour class, you can divide it up into three chunks. Below are the three aims that I want my students to be able to master by the time they leave the room on the first day of school. After the first couple weeks of school, I only teach one aim per class period. But, can you imagine spending 60 minutes on entering and exiting the room? Boring!

Day One Aims:

- ❖ To enter and exit the room quietly
- ❖ To track the speaker during a read-aloud
- ❖ To write yourself a note describing what Without Limits means to you

Gradual Release of Responsibility

A year ago I moved to Melbourne, Australia from New York City. With cars on the opposite side of the road, streets ending in 'Parade' rather than 'Avenue', and legions of folks streaming to the next footie match, I was a fish out of water. Yet, this was my new home and I needed to master the city as soon as possible. For our first day in the city, we followed my friend Brendan, a native of Melbourne, into town. He showed us a few sights. The following day we wanted to buy a package of miniature kangaroos for our students back home. Using a map that Brendan drew, my friends and I went into town. We got lost along the way, but we had the map to guide us. A couple days later, I had a conference at the Malt House, which is also located downtown. While I was nervous to go alone, I had the map and my previous experience. I hopped a couple of trams and got to the Malt House in no time. This is called the Gradual Release of Responsibility. It follows I Do/We Do → We Do → You Do. The gradual release of responsibility starts with the **I Do/We Do** where the teacher shows the students what she wants them to do.

In this case, Brendan walked me downtown. Then, students are given time to practice with the teacher and each other for the **We Do** with less support. Brendan drew me a map and with my friends we searched out kangaroo souvenirs. Then, in the **You Do** stage I attempted to show that I could do it on my own by taking the trams out a few days later.

Follow the gradual release of responsibility as you teach each short chunk during the first weeks of school. Avoid telling or explaining the aims. That's like Brendan telling me to meet him in the CBD without a map. How does it look over the course of an hour period?

	Entering and Exiting a Classroom (15 minutes)	Tracking During a Read-Aloud (20 minutes)	Write a Letter to Yourself (20 minutes)
I Do/We Do	Show the criteria for entering and leaving which includes silently lining up in line order.	Look at examples and non-examples of tracking.	Share a model note that you wrote to yourself about what 'without limits' means to you, including social and academic dreams. Also, try to make the note fun by adding pictures and funny lines.
We Do	Play a game where students as a group must silently line up alphabetically by their first name. Teacher guides them in strategies for how they can do it silently before they try. Students exit the room in this fake line order and then enter, returning to their seats, according to how you want them to enter.	Ask the class, what will you be doing in the year 2019? Call on students one at a time. Make sure that 100% of your students are tracking the speaker as they share their ideas.	Have students think for a couple minutes about their social and academic dreams. Call on several kids to share out their brainstorm. Make sure that 100% of your students are tracking the speaker as they share to reinforce tracking.
You Do	Students return to their seats, line up silently alphabetically by their last names (or however you want	Read-aloud "Oh The Places You'll Go" by Dr. Seuss. During the read-aloud, pause and redirect	Students write a quick note to themselves mirroring the ideas from your note and the ideas



them to do it) and practice exiting the room. They re-enter the room and sit down for the next part of the lesson.

any students who are not tracking.

shared by their peers. They seal them in an envelope. Return the letters at the end of the year, end of middle school or when they go to college!

Encode With Emotional Experiences

With a dismal 70% of students graduating high school nationally in the United States, it's necessary that we make literacy richly engaging for adolescents.

It's always a good idea to leave fluff time in your planning during the first week just in case something comes up.

I know that in our first week of school we don't want to be too fun. There's the old teacher adage that we shouldn't smile until January otherwise the kids will think that we are too soft. I get it. I don't want my classroom to be chaos either. So, let's compromise. If you are a Don't Smile Until January Teacher, at least consider ways to make each chunk kid-friendly as you plan and then deliver the material to your students frowning. Seriously, it's essential that we make our content kid-friendly otherwise our students won't find the content meaningful.

What I define as kid-friendly does not mean dance party fun. However, you want students to find each chunk of your lesson meaningful so that they will remember it. You are prioritizing important routines right from the offset because you need these routines to be ingrained in their muscle memory. According to John Medina in Brain Rules, "Emotionally arousing events tend to be better remembered than neutral events." (Medina, p. 62). Any emotion works. Identify one way to encode each aim into your students' memories by designing emotionally arousing activities. Let's return to Day



One. I tried to make each lesson kid-friendly and considered triggering emotions as I planned out each chunk:

To enter and exit the room quietly

- Kid-Friendly → Students played a line-up game that required them to figure out how to communicate to each other using non-verbal cues.
- Emotion → Confusion

To track the speaker during a read-aloud

- Kid-Friendly → Have you read “On Beyond Zebra?”? It’s awesome!
- Emotion → Humor

To write yourself a letter listing out the places that you will go by 2019

- Kid-Friendly → The model is written like a note that a teacher would confiscate in class. It includes doodles and funny one-liners.
- Emotion → Hope

When developing your first weeks of reading class, you need to also teach routines.

Therefore, your lesson planning will be a little different. Be sure to divide your class period into smaller chunks (for the first week or two only), teach the routines using the gradual release of responsibility, and encode it into your student’s memories.

Mild, Medium, Spicy Next Step Suggestions

	Mild	Medium	Spicy
Small Chunks	On the daily agenda, include how long each chunk will take. Include what the times will be like 9:05-9:20 a.m.	If you are concerned about pacing, determine daily which chunk you feel is the least important so if you need to modify your lesson as you go, you know what to cut out.	Practice teaching the lesson the night before if you feel like it might take too long! Consider scripting out the lesson so you can apply economy of language.

Pitfalls

There are times when planning the first week of reading class didn’t work as planned.

Here are some problems that do come up; I hope they don’t happen to you!

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- 1. Activity-Driven Lessons:** Avoid slipping “into planning that is not driven by student outcomes but is instead governed by what a teacher wants to do”(Farr, p. 132) as Steven Farr observes in *Teaching As Leadership*. What does this mean for planning the first week of school? Determine what you want the students to be able to do first before considering the fun activity. While making it kid-friendly is important, what’s more important is that your students enter and exit your room correctly. Farr later writes, “What you think students would find enjoyable may or not lead to actual learning – and students may not enjoy it as much as you think if they aren’t sure there’s a purpose behind it” (Farr, p. 134).
 - 2. Small Chunks:** Are you sure that your chunk is only going to take twenty minutes? What if it takes 60? Showing the students a sample note that you wrote as I suggest doing during day one can be fast. Or, if you elicit fifteen different student ideas during We Do it can drag along. Be sure to include timing in your lesson plan.

Sum Up

During the first week of school, create smaller mini lessons per class period in order to launch your reading class routines.

Follow the generic I Do/We Do → We Do → You Do structure for teaching reading routines.

Make sure each small chunk is kid-friendly by appealing to an emotion.

Ensure that you are spiraling each routine by sprinkling practice into each subsequent lesson. Save time in your planning for this practice.