



# Weave Routines into Your Instruction While Building Stamina

The first weeks of class are distinct from the rest of the school year. First, you need to teach many routines. Secondly, an enormous part of building *Reading Without Limits* readers is building extended time reading. However, during the first week of school, you haven't launched the library and your readers haven't yet built up their reading stamina.

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

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

## Short Chunks

Cognitive psychology reveals that our attention span is limited to our age plus two minutes. So, if you are thirty-two, like me, you can pay attention without your mind wandering for thirty-four 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. It will also increase as you get better at the task. Therefore, build stamina, as explained in Chapter 2. As you build your students' stamina, you will also have time to introduce other aims dedicated to classroom routines. For instance, below are common aims I use on the first day of school.

### *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 Reading 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 Melbournian, 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 as I explain in Chapter Two of *Reading Without Limits*. 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**. 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 by myself.

Follow the gradual release of responsibility as you teach each short chunk during the first week of school. Avoid telling your students what to do. That's like Brendan telling me to meet him in the CBD without a map. How does it look over the course of class?

	Entering and Exiting a Classroom (10 minutes)	Tracking During a Read-Aloud (20 minutes)	Write a Letter to Yourself (20 minutes)
I Do	Show the criteria for entering and leaving which include 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 whole class a question like, "What are your hopes ten years from now?" As individuals share to the whole group, make sure that 100% of your students are tracking the speaker. Remind or redirect when necessary as part of guided practice.	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.
You Do	Students return to their seats, line up silently alphabetically by their last names and practice exiting	Read-aloud "Oh The Places You'll Go" by Dr. Seuss. During the read-aloud, pause and correct any	Students write a quick note to themselves mirroring the ideas from your note and the ideas



the room. They re-enter the room and sit down for the next part of the lesson.

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!

### **Kid-Friendly:**

With a dismal 70% of students graduating high school in the United States nationally, it's necessary that we make literacy richly engaging for adolescents. 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 the first week of school kid-friendly as you plan and deliver. It's essential that we make our content kid-friendly otherwise we run the risk that students won't find the content meaningful.

It's always a good idea to leave 10 minutes fluff time in your planning during the first weeks just in case something comes up.

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. 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). Emotions can range from excitement, happiness, confusion, anger and sadness. Identify one way to make each chunk kid-friendly by encoding it into their memory using emotionally arousing events. 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 leaving the room cleaner than you found it**
  - 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 over lining up (note: not frustration)
- ❖ **To track the speaker during a read-aloud**
  - Kid-Friendly → "On Beyond Zebra" by Dr. Seuss is such a good book. The read-aloud is super kid-friendly.
  - Emotion → "On Beyond Zebra" is inspiring and funny
- ❖ **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.

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- Emotion → Hope

When developing your first week of reading class, weave routines into your lesson plan. If you are building student stamina, it's easier because students won't yet be reading to your target time as described in Chapter Two. Be sure to divide your class period into small chunks (until you've reached your target stamina), teach the routines using the gradual release of responsibility, and keep it kid-friendly. For more ways on how to role out the *Reading Without Limits* program, see Chapter 15.

## Pitfalls

There are times when planning the first week of reading class doesn't work as planned. Here are some problems that do come up.

1. **Activity-Driven Lessons:** As Steven Farr says in *Teaching As Leadership*, avoid slipping “into planning that is not driven by student outcomes but is instead governed by what a teacher wants to do” (Farr, 132). 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, 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 15 different student ideas during “We Do” it can turn into 60 minutes. Be sure to include timing in your lesson plan to keep each chunk small, or you run the risk of losing your students' attention before you build their stamina.

## Sum Up

- During the first week of school, create several smaller mini lessons per class period in order to launch your reading class routines.
- Follow the gradual release of responsibility of I Do/We Do → We Do → You Do structure for teaching routines.
- Make sure each small element 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.

