

## Sight Words (Tips for Tutors)

Sight Words are those small words that appear in almost everything you read. A beginning reader needs to memorize words like: a, all, are, as, come, have, his, is, said, some, the, there, they, etc. The struggling reader needs to have a core of known words that they can recognize in an instant on any page. Sight words free the reader up to attend to new things and to feel confident in what they know. I think of them as channel markers. If you drift into unfamiliar waters (new places) then the channel markers give you familiar (known objects) that help you find your way back home.

Take notes while your student reads aloud. Keep track of the little words he/she knows or almost knows. Write each word on a three by five file card. I use different color markers as well as different size letters. You might write a word like **is** twice (once starting with a lowercase i and once with an uppercase letter). You can play *Your pile/My pile* with the cards. Place the cards face down, flip a card over, if the student reads it quickly it goes in his/her pile, if not it goes in your pile. Remember to concentrate on known and almost known words first, so that your student becomes confident and sure of what he/she knows then introduce words the student struggles with one or two at a time.

The best way that I have found to teach new Sight Words is through matching. For example, if you want to introduce **said**, first write **said** on three or four file cards in different sizes and colors. Then pick three or four of the known words and face the cards up in front of your student. Show them the new word **said**, have them slide a finger under the word and read **said**. Then ask him/her to read all the words that say **said** then read the rest of the words. The next time, place the same words down (again facing up) and have your student point to and read the words. If he/she reads **said** easily then it is time to introduce a new word.

In the book Tutor published by the Literacy Volunteers of America the authors write, "Sight Words are learned as complete units, as whole words. It is important for a reader to develop a large and growing command of such words in order to reach the major goal of reading – to understand the meaning of what is being read. Learning to recognize and identify words by sight is an essential part of any reading program." I believe learning sight words is an important part of a reading program. If you see your student stumbling over Sight Words, help make reading a bit easier for him/her, toss them some channel markers, some things they can count on.

Glenn G. Coats, April 2007