

## 8 Multisensory Techniques for Teaching Reading

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Multisensory instruction is a way of teaching that engages more than one sense at a time. For kids with reading issues like dyslexia, the use of sight, hearing, movement and touch can be helpful for learning. Here are a few of many possible examples of multisensory techniques teachers use to help struggling readers.



### Sand or Shaving Cream Writing

This activity allows students to use sight, touch and sound to connect letters and their sounds. Students start with a handful of sand on a cookie sheet or a dollop of shaving cream on a table.

Then they spread out the sand or shaving cream and use their finger to write a letter or word in it. As they write, students say the sound each letter makes. They then blend those sounds together and read the whole word aloud.



### Air Writing

Air writing (also called skywriting) reinforces the sound each letter makes through “muscle memory.” It can also help reinforce letter forms that are commonly confused, like b and d. Students use two fingers as a pointer (keeping elbows and wrists straight) to write letters in the air. They say the sound each letter makes as they write it.

They’re also encouraged to imagine the letter as they write it. Teachers may have students pretend they’re writing in a certain color, for instance.



## Sandpaper Letters

Using letters cut out of sandpaper helps students retain a tactile (touch) memory of letters and their sounds. Students trace each letter with their fingers while saying the sound of the letter out loud. Teachers may use sandpaper letters to help students feel the shape of the letters as they write.

Students can also arrange sandpaper letters on a table to spell out star or sight words. Then they lay a long piece of regular paper on top and color over the letters like a “gravestone rubbing.”



## Word Building

Word building can be done with tiles or magnetic letters. The Barton Reading Program uses color-coded tiles in various ways to help kids connect sounds with letters. Students can also use magnetic letters in which vowels are one color and consonants another.

Students say each letter's sound as they lay it down. When they've built the word, they read it out loud.



### **Read It, Build It, Write It**

This technique to teach sight words can be done with a group or one-on-one. Students have a piece of paper with three boxes on it, labeled “Read,” “Build,” and “Write.” They also have cards with sight words, magnetic letters (or tiles) and a marker.

Students and the teacher read the sight word that’s in the “Read” box. Then they build the word in the “Build” box, using their letters. Finally, they practice writing it in the “Write” box.



### **Tapping Out Sounds**

Tapping gives students a way to feel and hear how sounds are segmented and blended to make words. The Wilson Reading System pioneered this technique, in which students break down and blend word sounds by tapping out each sound with their fingers and thumb.

Take the word cat. Students tap an index finger to their thumb as they say the k sound. They tap their middle finger as they say the short a sound. And they tap their ring finger to their thumb as they say the t sound.



## Story Sticks

Story sticks can help students who struggle with reading comprehension to visualize the elements of a story. Teachers use a different color craft stick to represent each element. Red sticks might ask the question, "Who are the characters?" while blue sticks ask, "What is the setting?"

While reading together with a teacher, students may be handed a stick and asked to answer the question on it. Or they may be asked to highlight the elements of a printed story using the proper colors.

Print and create your own story sticks. ---

<https://www.understood.org/~media/95443502d2094a84910a0b26160fa63e.pdf>

## Shared Reading

In this activity, students join in or share the reading of a book with a teacher. They may follow along as the teacher reads aloud or while they listen to an audio version of the book. They can interact with the text by underlining sight words or circling short or long vowels.

During shared reading, students may use printable books. Printable books leave a space for students to write in sight words or draw pictures to match sentences.