

Hot Dogs & Hamburgers

LITERACY TUTORING MANUAL

{ A How-To Guide for
Helping Adult Learners
Become Readers

ROB SHINDLER & ISABELLA SHINDLER

Introduction



**I only have an hour,
Only sixty minutes in it.
Forced upon me, can't refuse it.
Didn't seek it, didn't choose it.
But it's up to me to use it,
Give account if I abuse it.
Just a tiny little hour,
But eternity is in it.**

—Author Unknown

10-minute abs. 3-minute eggs. 8-minute speed dating.

It's amazing! We can sculpt our bodies, feed our faces and find our soul mates almost instantly these days. All we need to do is make the time. We squeeze in a workout. Watch our favorite drama every Thursday night. Get a haircut at the corner salon. Do our crossword puzzles. Surf the net. Check our inboxes. Stare into space...

The \$99,000 question: Can we also make the time to change someone else's life? Donate to someone else's cause—even if they're a perfect stranger?

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Imagine being unable to help your own second grader with his homework. Incapable of understanding your own prescription bottle. Powerless to read your own daughter's wedding invitation. Those scenarios are realities for too many adults. One hour a week. 60 minutes. 3,600 seconds. That's all it takes to make a difference in someone else's future.

The fact that you have opened this book speaks volumes. It means you've already taken the crucial first step of showing an interest in helping an adult learn to become a better reader. To help someone discover the dignity and the second chance he or she deserves.

The truth is, the rest is easy. By following the basic suggestions laid out in these chapters, along with having a little patience, humor and love in your heart, YOU will empower an adult to learn how to read. Considering that at this very second there are approximately 32 million adults in the United States impacted by illiteracy, you need to be congratulated. Very soon there will only be 31,999,999 adults who can't read...and counting downward!

Regardless of what religion we may or may not follow, I, you—we—must believe that serving others is part of our life's plan. Otherwise, why do we really exist? It's got to be about more than just ourselves.

My personal calling landed close to home. In fact, in the bedroom just down the hall...

Our oldest son, Oliver, was drowning—and I had no choice but to dive in and help save him. As a father, it was a duty I could not and would not refuse. But in the end, I was the one who was saved because it changed the course of my entire life. It transformed me into a man. A man I am now proud to have my children call their father.

Learning to teach others how to read gave that to me. And without the slightest bit of hesitation, I promise that is exactly what it will do for you.

But like any good journey, mine had to start from the beginning. One foot in front of the other, so to speak. I now take you by the hand and humbly hope that I can show you how to change another adult's life by teaching them to read.

For more on my literacy journey with Oliver, check out my book, *Hot Dogs & Hamburgers*.



My wonderful family dressed up in honor of *Hot Dogs & Hamburgers* for Halloween 2013. From left to right: Oliver, Isabella, Sage, me (Rob) and Andi.

CHAPTER ONE

Getting Started

As I've mentioned, by picking up this e-book you've already taken the most important step by joining the fight against adult illiteracy. Now let's move on to steps two, three and four...

Finding the “where,” the “who” and the “how”

Fortunately, you won't have to look too far for those first two. More than likely, there's a facility in your area that offers tutoring or educational programs for adults looking to learn how to read. Check out America's Literacy Directory (www.nationalliteracydirectory.org), where you can enter any zip code in the United States and immediately be directed toward a location near your home or office to volunteer. Alternatively, contact a church or YMCA in your area—these organizations can often direct you to a site grateful to have your help. Better yet, email me at rshindler@sbcglobal.net and we can find a “where” together. And since the number of adults out there who can't read is greater than the population of Texas, you won't have any difficulty finding the “who.”

The “where” and the “who” will never be the problem. The “how” is a different story. People often shy away from taking action when it comes to volunteering because frankly speaking, we're all really busy dealing with our own lives. Who has three consecutive Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to learn how to teach someone how to read? Unlike an amusement park ride where folks will

literally stand in line for hours, if the literacy learning line is too long, they won't even get in it. And that's a shame because the ride they will miss is life changing.

**If you can't fly then run,
If you can't run then walk,
If you can't walk then crawl,
But whatever you do,
you have to keep moving forward.**

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Get ready for the ride of your life

When an adult decides that they are finally ready to learn to read, it's like getting onto a terrifying roller coaster. The task ahead of them is daunting, and they need your support and encouragement. They also need to know that they can trust you. To know that if they fall, you will be there to catch them. If for one second an adult learner senses that you are judging them or aren't helping them for the right reasons, you've lost before the game even begins—and I say “game” because just like any sporting event, there are rules, roles and responsibilities for each participant.

Let your students know that it's OK to be nervous. In fact, let them know that you are probably even a little more nervous than they are because you don't want to let them down. But if they are committed to realizing their goals, assure them that you will never quit. That's the key to a successful beginning in these relationships. And make no mistake about it—this is a relationship.

Just like any relationship, there are expectations on both sides. Adults learning to read later in life have been chronically let down by others: teachers, family

members, friends...you name it. Initially, they'll expect the same from you. But if they can see that you, their tutor, are in this for the long haul, they'll be on board. Most of the time, this realization will occur rather quickly, maybe after the third or fourth session together.

So in a simple and easily understood way, make the following statement:

“If you want to learn to read, I will help you reach your goals. But in order to do that, you need to be as committed and respectful of this process as I am.”

Yes, things happen. Emergencies, family obligations, illnesses, job responsibilities. But unless it is something Serious with a capital “S,” both parties have to sign on the proverbial dotted line.

BE PRESENT IN MIND AND BODY FROM DAY ONE

The look on a student's face when their tutor doesn't show up is indescribable. Don't join the club with all the others who have previously let them down. They are counting on you to be the exception to the rule. Then again, I've also seen the same look of disappointment on a tutor's face when their student is absent without an explanation. Respectful behavior applies on both sides. Make this point absolutely clear during your first meeting together.

Although we should never create false expectations, it's a great idea to create reasonable ones. Your students must know there's a finish line out there. Which is why during my first meetings, I look my students in the eye and tell them the following:

“I can help make you a better reader in less than two and a half days.”

Let those words linger in the air for a few seconds. After awhile, students will either laugh at you or pretend they are Olympic sprinters and head for the hills. Reel them back in by asking:

“How many weeks are in a year?” Fifty-two.

“How many hours are in a day?” Twenty-four.

“How many hours in two days?” Forty-eight.

“So 48 hours equals two days. Now add four more hours and voila, we’re at 52 hours. If we meet for one hour every week for the next 52 weeks, that’s also 52 hours – less than two and a half days. If we both give it our best in those 52 hours I guarantee you will become a better reader and I will become a better tutor.”

By creating a “*you and I*” theme there is now a team with a common goal, which gives students a sense of responsibility and something tangible to work toward.

It’s no longer “them versus me.” It’s “us versus them.” And we’re in it to win it!

Having a roaring good time with my students at the Literacy Olympics



CHAPTER TWO

Teaching Phonics

Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines. We’re ready to put this tutoring guide into first gear!

As you can see in the video above (click on the image or this link to view), I love having a whiteboard and colored markers in my classroom. For me, it’s how I tutor best. Most people, especially those with learning issues, tend to comprehend and focus better with visuals, rather than simply being talked at for an hour. For example, I draw the shape of a stop sign in red and write the word “stop” inside of it when trying to teach someone the sound that “ST” makes.

But you may not have access to a whiteboard or chalkboard, and it may be quite difficult to drag one down the street on your way to meet your students. Therefore, I suggest utilizing the KISS principle: **Keep It Simple, Silly**. Invest in a notebook or a poster board with some markers or colored pencils—and get ready to step on the accelerator.

WHAT IS PHONICS?

Simply put, phonics is a decoder between speech sounds and the letters that represent them. It helps teach students the sounds that go with the letters of the alphabet, which the student can then use to read words.