

Mentoring Manual

**The Braille Connection:
A Braille Reading and Writing Program
for Former Print Users**

by

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This manual is meant to be used by adult braille users who may have no special training to teach but who have agreed to serve as mentors. You will be mentoring new braille users who have learned to read and write braille and are now on their own away from their braille teachers. It is the goal of this program to see that these new braille users achieve accuracy and proficiency in using braille in the activities of their daily lives.

What Is A Mentor?

You have been chosen as a mentor for this program because you are a proficient and enthusiastic braille user. You agreed to be a mentor, but now you are wondering just what is a mentor?

First, a mentor is a **role model**—a blind person the new braille user can see using braille in real life situations at home, on the job, in professional and community activities, and in gaining greater education. As you get to know each other, the many ways the mentor uses braille will become obvious to the new braille user who may not be in contact with any other blind people at this time. Together you can work to educate his or her family and friends to accept the new braille user's ability to once again read and write independently. Your enthusiasm and example will be invaluable confidence builders.

Next, a mentor is a **cheerleader**—someone who can encourage and support the new braille user as he or she begins applying newly acquired braille skills to activities of daily living. Your most important tasks may be getting your mentee to start using braille and to keep

him or her motivated to continue. Always praise the new braille user's sincere efforts to use and practice braille.

Then, a mentor is a **teacher**—someone who the new braille user can turn to for advice and ongoing support. You will want to foster a relationship in which the beginner feels comfortable asking for your help or posing a question. Or, you may identify a problem the new braille user is having and provide additional instruction, practice, or suggestions for remedying it.

Finally, a mentor may become a **friend**. Although the relationship starts out to be a working one between individuals with differing amounts of experience working with braille, the two of you may eventually discover that you have some other things in common, you like being together, and you are now really friends. If this is the case, long after the original need for the working relationship has ended, you may find yourselves keeping in touch. But, even if you do not become friends, you can have, for the time being, a successful and satisfying relationship centered around your mutual use of braille.

What A Mentor Is Not!

The relationship between a mentor and a new braille user is unique and may easily be misunderstood. Therefore it is important to talk about what a mentor is not.

First of all a mentor is not a **slave**. It is not the mentor's job to read or braille things for the new braille user. In most cases, new braille users will get more out

of doing tasks themselves with your support and encouragement. The exceptions to this might be

1. if the new braille user is becoming discouraged because a task is taking too long, you might do part of it to demonstrate how braille can be read or written with additional, regular practice, or
2. if you identify a particular need the new braille reader has for braille practice, you may devise some exercises and braille them for the novice to do.

Otherwise, it is best to remember what the educational philosopher John Dewey advocated: "People learn to do by doing."

Next, a mentor is not a **therapist** or **social worker**. It is not your job to solve all of the new braille user's personal problems. Such problems may require special qualifications and be very time consuming. You are there to work on braille with this person and to point out ways that braille can make life better. For example, you can help the individual get and read a braille bus schedule, put the phone number of a taxi in braille and read it back, or make a shopping list, but it is not your job to get the individual out of the house and shopping, to baby-sit, or furnish money for the groceries. Keep your focus on braille.

Then a mentor is not a **parent**. You are not responsible for the other person's actions. You are both adults and responsible for your own actions. If the other person doesn't do what you wish, try to be creative to produce the desired

result. To get the individual to try new things, do assigned tasks, work independently, or even keep appointments, study the person's interests and behavior carefully, try a variety of approaches, and keep a positive attitude. Always try to treat the new braille user as you would like people to treat you. The real trick is to get the person to do what you want, but to think it is his or her idea.

Finally, a mentor is not an **entertainer** or a **guest**. It is not your job to visit with the new braille user, enjoyable as that may be for both of you. Likewise, when you get together, it is not the new braille user's task to show you a good time. Both the mentor and the mentee need to stay focused on the task of further developing the new braille user's braille skills. You should both understand that this cannot be all fun and games, but will require hard work. Try to avoid getting sidetracked.

Objectives of the Mentoring Program

During mentoring sessions, mentors will strive to achieve the following objectives:

1. to build the new braille user's confidence in his or her braille skills
2. to improve the mentee's speed and accuracy in reading and writing braille
3. to make braille an important part of the person's daily life and activities

These objectives can be achieved by encouraging the individual to use braille daily, working together on a regular basis, and demonstrating that you use braille in much the same way that sighted people use print.

How To Get Started

Somehow, perhaps through a center for the blind or a mutual friend or acquaintance, you have been given the name, address, and telephone number of a new braille user and determined that this individual needs a mentor. It will be your job to contact the person as soon as possible, introduce yourself briefly, and set up an initial face-to-face meeting. Try to find a convenient time for both of you to get together and a public place where you can talk for awhile, perhaps over a cup of coffee or a simple lunch in a restaurant.

Your First Meeting

The purpose of this meeting is simply to get acquainted. Try to keep the meeting rather informal. To get things started, you might begin by sharing some general information about yourself. Not only will this help the two of you get acquainted, but it will also help you feel more comfortable talking to each other. It is important to learn as much as you can about the new braille user's life, needs, and interests since this information will help you plan meaningful and motivational braille activities as you work together. Try to be a good listener. Here are some things you will want to talk about:

1. the new braille user's general interests—family, job (or former jobs), hobbies, etc.
2. kinds of reading the new braille user did in print
3. braille instruction the new braille user has had
4. reading material the new user is receiving
5. ways the new braille user is using braille
6. any problems the new braille user has encountered in using braille
7. additional ways the new braille user would like to be using braille or could be using braille
8. future goals the new braille user may have
9. ways braille might help the new braille user achieve these goals
10. how the new braille user feels about using braille

As the conversation continues, talk about some of the ways you use braille in your daily life. It is not necessary to give a lecture on this topic or to feel that you must mention every time you use braille, but you want the new braille user to know that braille is an important tool in your life. You might want to use some braille notes to guide the discussion or maybe to write some of the activities which the person's answers bring to mind with a slate and stylus so that you can

discuss them later. Perhaps during your time together in this first meeting, you will be using a braille menu, a braille appointment calendar, a braille bus schedule, a braille street address to locate the restaurant, or a braille phone number to call for a ride, whatever seems natural. Mention ways you use braille as a means of introducing additional ways the new braille user can use it.

If the new reader does not yet have anything at home in braille to read, the mentor should provide something and plan to work with the individual on ordering some braille reading materials. The *Reader's Digest* is a good periodical to use for this purpose. Since it has short articles on a wide variety of current topics, everyone should be able to find something of interest. The *Reader's Digest* is available in braille from the American Printing House for the Blind, free to U. S. citizens and residents of the U. S.

Finally, discuss some things you would like the new braille user to bring to your next meeting. The list should include

1. something the new braille user is reading in braille
2. a slate and stylus (or a braillewriter if this is more appropriate) and some braille paper
3. any braille projects the new braille user is working on

As you can probably tell from this list, the next meeting will begin with a kind of "show-and-tell" session centered on the uses the new user is finding for braille.

Scheduling Future Sessions

Before you conclude your first meeting, you will want to make plans to get together again soon. Ideally, you should try to get together once every week or two from now on. It is important to meet on a regular basis and as often as possible. Obviously distances and other scheduled activities may make weekly meetings impossible, but do the best you can. Be sure that you agree on a definite time and place to meet.

Because future sessions will be working meetings, you will want to get together somewhere where it will be relatively quiet and you can be free from interruptions while you are working. If you do not feel that either of your homes is conducive to work, you may want to go to a public library or some other convenient public building.

Length of Sessions

Each session should be approximately one hour long. This seems to be an appropriate length of time for adults to concentrate on a topic as evidenced by the length of most college classes. This one hour guideline should be flexible and can vary depending on the participants themselves, their circumstances, and their desires. For example, the bus schedule might suggest making the sessions a little longer or shorter than an hour. Or, you may find that the two of you like to spend time visiting so you need to allow enough time so that you can still spend an hour or so working on braille in addition to the time you spend visiting. Or, after you have had a couple of sessions, you may find that you need a

little longer than an hour to get everything done that you need to do during a session. Whatever the length of the sessions, they should be agreed upon in advance by both participants. Both participants need to know what to expect so that they can plan their transportation and schedules accordingly.

Planning for the Sessions

Truly successful mentoring sessions require some planning. Use the information you have learned about the new braille user's interests, current use of braille, and the three primary objectives to help plan the sessions. Each session should include

1. oral and/or silent reading activities
2. accuracy and speed writing activities
3. applications of braille skills to activities of daily living

It is important to vary the activities between reading and writing often during a session, since the fingers of many new braille readers tire after reading for a relatively short period of time and they will be unable to distinguish the dots. Using a slate and stylus can also be rather tiring. Regular reading and writing practice will build stamina for both kinds of activities.

In addition to actually doing reading and writing during each session, it will be equally important to spend some time planning together for work the new braille user will do at home between sessions. Try to work with the new braille

user in setting goals and determining assignments. Plan braille activities which are interesting and challenging without being overwhelming.

Sources for Braille Materials

The sooner the new braille reader acquires the reading habit the better. With periodicals and books readily available in braille, it will be easier to get the new reader to begin making reading a regular part of the daily schedule.

Periodicals provide a constant supply of new braille reading material coming into the home. Articles are relatively short and so the reader receives the satisfaction of completing a task often. Periodicals are available on a variety of subjects and so it should not be difficult to find something of special interest to the reader. Encourage the new reader to subscribe to and read additional periodicals as time goes on. In addition to *The Reader's Digest* mentioned earlier, a number of other periodicals are available through the National Library Service of the braille reader's regional library. The *Catalog of Magazines in Alternative Formats* lists these periodicals.

The beginning reader also needs to begin using braille books. Short selections—jokes, anecdotes, poems, children's books, speeches, recipes, and so on—are best to start with. Later, as reading speed increases, the new braille user can graduate to longer selections. If the beginner has not already done so, help him or her apply for braille books from the National Library Service through the regional library. When the new braille reader begins receiving the

Braille Book Review, encourage the selection of books to send for and read.

Braille books and materials are also available from a number of other sources. For more information on braille materials, contact the following:

American Printing House for the Blind
P. O. Box 6085
Louisville, KY 40206-0085

National Federation of the Blind
1800 Johnson Street
Baltimore, MD 21230

Practicing Reading

To be a really good braille reader requires accuracy, speed, and, above all, work. Whittle (1993) suggests that a new braille reader who is reading sixty words a minute or more can increase reading speed by reading a minimum of

1. ten thousand braille pages a year,
2. two hundred fifty pages a week,
3. thirty-five pages a day—give or take a few pages.

Experience also shows that faster braille readers usually use both hands, with the left hand finding the next line while the right hand is finishing the current line (Lappin & Foulke, 1973). Urge the individual you are working with to use both hands to read and to read something every day. Read, read, read!

Here are some activities to use for increasing accuracy and speed in braille reading. It is not necessary or even

desirable to try to do every activity. Try to choose the activities which you feel best suit the individual's needs and interests. Feel free to add activities of your own which promote accuracy and speed in reading braille.

- Read children's books, perhaps out loud to a child.
- Read jokes, anecdotes, poems, short stories, and speeches for early reading practice.
- Read passages aloud on tape and play them back to hear fluency improve as you progress.
- Work to increase reading speed. Duffy (1989) suggests keeping track of how long it takes to read a page so that progress can be noted.
- Follow along, reading silently, as the mentor or another reader reads aloud from another copy of the same material. The oral reader should read just a little faster than the new braille reader is accustomed to reading so that it is necessary for the individual to work to keep up.
- Get two copies of a play in braille and take turns reading aloud and following along as the mentor reads the other parts.
- Get a tape and a braille copy of the same book and read along with the tape.
- Practice identifying individual braille units. Braille units are any

braille shapes taken together with their value (meaning or function). Letters, numbers, letter words, short-form words, dot 5 words, punctuation marks, and all other literary braille contractions are braille units. Nolan and Kederis (1969) reported dramatic increases in both accuracy and speed after readers practiced identifying individual braille units.

- Use Grade 2 Braille Cards, available for a nominal fee from the American Printing House for the Blind, or help the new braille user make cards with braille units on them to use for practice. See how accurately and quickly a group of braille units can be identified and then use the cards to practice between sessions. At the next session, the mentor can check for improvement and new cards can be assigned. Cards provide for easy randomization of the presentation of the braille units and can be used in a variety of ways to make practice more interesting.
- Read random lists of braille units or do exercises designed by the mentor to provide practice with particular braille units.
- Engage in braille/print word games and puzzles of all kinds. Such games and puzzles provide a fun way to focus on letters and words.

Practicing Braillewriting

To be really literate, it is necessary to be able to write as well as read and to be able to read back what you have written yourself. Encourage the new braille user to keep a slate and stylus handy at all times and to write something in braille daily. Urge the individual to strive to improve the accuracy, speed, and stamina required for braillewriting. Stress the importance of always proofreading what has been written and correcting errors. Just one misplaced dot can make a big difference in braille.

Here are some activities to use to improve the individual's braillewriting skills. It is not necessary or even desirable to try to do every activity. Try to choose the activities which you feel best suit the individual's needs and interests. Feel free to add activities of your own which promote braillewriting.

- Take notes on news broadcasts, speeches, sermons, and so on.
- Write down homework assignments, meeting times, and the like for the mentoring sessions.
- Write out the lyrics to a favorite song or hymn or a new song or hymn heard on the radio.
- Correspond with other braille users.
- Write reports on what you are reading.

- Start a joke file.
- Keep a daily journal. Record such things as the best thing that happened that day, how you used braille, or whatever you wish to write for each day.
- Practice writing any braille units you are having difficulty reading.
- See how quickly you can write a whole line of a single letter or a combination of letters. This will help develop spatial muscle memory.
- For 5 minutes, braille a passage from a book read on a cassette. Then check for accuracy, count the words brailled correctly, and divide by 5 to determine the number of words brailled correctly in a minute. Repeat this exercise periodically using a variety of passages.
- Try to get in the habit of proof-reading your writing and correcting any errors you discover.

Applying Braille Skills to Daily Living

One of the major goals of this program is to get individuals to apply their newly acquired braille skills to their everyday activities. As new braille users begin to use braille more and more, they will discover that braille can be an indispensable tool which can make their daily lives easier.

Here are some suggestions for everyday activities in which the new

braille reader or writer will begin to discover that braille can be used "the same way sighted individuals use print" (Huebner, 1989). No one is expected to do all of these activities. It is very important to choose the activities best suited to each individual's needs and interests. Some individuals will do activities in several different areas; others will concentrate on doing one activity in depth. Feel free to add activities of your own that you feel better meet the individual's needs or interests. These activities are only meant to be a starting point to get you both thinking about ways to use braille. Notice that some of the activities will require reading; some, writing; and some, both.

Clothing Related Activities

- Attach color labels to clothes and accessories. Some labels can be attached to plastic bags the items are stored in instead of to the item itself.
- Keep information about which clothes and accessories go together in a file or notebook or in some other easily accessible place.
- Make notes on cleaning instructions and file or keep in a notebook for easy reference.
- Keep a list of current sizes and color preferences for yourself and other members of your family to aid in shopping.

Financial Activities

- Keep a record of all withdrawals and deposits made to your account

and check your balance with the bank regularly.

- Identify all checks issued with a braille identification number so that you can tell which canceled checks are returned to you. Be sure this will not interfere with your bank's processing procedures.
- Keep information about any check you write the date it was issued, to whom, and the amount with the identification number of the check in a file or notebook for handy reference.
- Keep a copy of your credit card numbers and their expiration dates in braille at home and make another copy to carry with you for easy reference.
- Write the identification number for your money card in braille and keep a copy with you and another one at home.
- Identify bills and receipts with braille.
- Make notes about any maintenance agreements purchased.
- Identify anything which will be needed when filing income taxes and keep these things together.

Food Related Activities

- Label all foods, spices, and containers. Magnetic labels can be used on cans or rubber bands can be used.

- Make and use a grocery list. As items are used, the labels can be filed to reuse. If labels are magnetic, they can be put on the refrigerator until the list is made or just taken to the store instead of a list.
- Copy and use recipes.
- Braille recipes for old family favorites and/or for cooking convenience foods which are normally included in print on the package. Collect these recipes in a notebook for future use. You may want to braille them on Brailion Sheets to make them washable.
- Make a phone file of places that deliver groceries and meals in your area.
- Use braille menus at fast food places and restaurants.
- Put brief braille or other tactile markings on the microwave, stove, etc. and identify what these markings mean in a little more detail on a separate paper which can be filed nearby.

Home Activities

- Always keep a slate and stylus and paper near the phone for writing down messages.
- Make your own directories of phone numbers and postal and E-mail addresses. Index cards, either in the 4" x 6" or 3" x 5" size, are

handy to use for this. Be sure to include the following:

emergency numbers
family and friends
co-workers
school acquaintances
business and repair people
doctor, dentist, pharmacy
legal and other professional
services
any others you think you would
find useful

- Write all information about appointments on separate cards and file in order of occurrence. Discard cards or refile under next appointment date as appointments are completed.
- Write out your daily schedule.
- Write out lists of things to do. It will really make you feel good when you can mark off things you have completed.
- Make a card for each special occasion you wish to remember and file the cards in order of occurrence. You might also want to file another card for an earlier date to remind you to mail a greeting card or even to shop for this occasion.
- Identify print letters you receive and envelopes you are sending with braille.
- Identify all recordings, CD's, cassettes, VCR tapes, and computer disks with braille labels.

- Identify owner's manuals and warranties with braille.
- For easier reference, take notes on owner's manuals which are recorded. Be sure to include detailed instructions for use and warranty and repair information.
- If you enjoy reading to children, have some books available in braille and print which you can share. Such books can be borrowed or purchased from several different sources, such as *Seedlings* and the *National Braille Press*. (See Sources for Braille Materials.) You might want to add braille to some of the children's favorite books or make them some new ones by putting braille on plastic or paper inserts for print books.

Job Related Activities

- Keep a braille copy of your resume including your social security number and employment history to review before job interviews.
- Label files and contents.
- Take notes during meetings and conferences.
- Develop reports from outlines and notes.
- Make and use notes for speeches and presentations.
- Use appropriate braille manuals and reference books whenever they are available.

- Use braille formulas and tables rather than recordings for better understanding.
- Record measurements or other important personal information.

Leisure Activities

- Make a list of the television stations in your area including the cable stations if you have cable. This will make it easier to find the stations you want.
- Make your own television schedule with either a general listing or programs you want to try to catch during the week.
- Read books and magazines.
- Play card games, board games such as *Monopoly* and *Scrabble*, and other table games such as *Bingo*. Some games are available in braille, but sometimes you may prefer to braille your own card games and add your own braille labels to board games. You will find that this is not difficult to do, and it will increase your selection of games.
- Use patterns for crocheting, knitting, or making macrame.
- Get do-it-yourself books and learn to do new things.
- Become a ham radio operator. Keep your logs and study to get your license.

- Become active in local organizations. Take notes, write reports, keep books. Consider chairing a committee or holding an office.
- Make a membership directory for any groups of which you are a member. You may want to contact absentees or follow up on something that went on at a meeting, and you will be ready. You will also be able to match names with voices and be ready to identify and welcome visitors.

Medical Activities

- Keep medical records for yourself and your family.
- Braille brief descriptions of insurance and hospitalization policy requirements and information.
- Braille insurance identification numbers to carry along with your insurance cards.
- Request information about taking all prescription and non-prescription drugs in braille. If such information is not readily available in braille, ask the pharmacist or another print reader to dictate the information for you to braille. Keep this information with the drugs for easy reference. Also include expiration dates.
- Always take a volume of a book or magazine with you to read while you wait for your doctor or dentist.

Religious Activities

- Get and use a braille copy of the Scripture or other written material used during the services.
- Find out what hymns and other things will be used for the next service and go prepared with any braille materials you will need. You may need to have someone read the materials to you and then braille them yourself if they are not available in braille. Keep the copies you make in a notebook, and the next time you will not need to braille them.

School Activities

- Use braille textbooks whenever possible.
- Do assignments in braille.
- Write drafts of papers in braille.
- Use a braille dictionary and other braille reference materials.
- Take notes in class.
- Braille your class schedule, teachers' names, and the names and phone numbers of some of your classmates for easy reference.
- Keep a list of assignments and their due dates.

Travel Activities

- Use braille bus and/or train schedules.

- Keep a list of phone numbers for cabs and/or other drivers/rides with you.
- When traveling by plane, make a copy of your itinerary to take with you.
- Braille directions to use to help the driver when you are traveling on a long trip or in unfamiliar territory. For example, find out information that the driver may need, such as the name of the street or exit before the one where the driver is to turn left or to exit on the right.
- Make a checklist of things to pack for a trip and check to see that you have everything on it when you pack and again before you return.
- Use elevator tags and floor markers to help with indoor travel.
- Read magazines or books to while away the time spent traveling alone.

Sources for Braillewriting Materials

Up until now it has been assumed that the new braille user has been using a pocket slate and a stylus. As the individual begins to write more and more braille, you might want to discuss some of the other braillewriting materials which are made to serve special needs. Here are some examples of slates which are available:

- Brown Slate for reading the paper without removing it from the slate

- Playing Card Slate for brailleing standard playing cards
- Single Line Slate for making labels with Dymo tape
- Jiffy Slate with no pins or hinges for brailleing 3" x 5" cards and for controlled data sheets
- Cassette Labeling Slate

Braillewriting materials are available from a limited number of sources. For information on these and other braille-writing materials contact :

- American Printing House for the Blind
P. O. Box 6085
Louisville, KY 40206-0085
- The Howe Press of Perkins School for the Blind
175 North Beacon Street
Watertown, MA 02172
- National Federation of the Blind
1800 Johnson Street
Baltimore, MD 21230

Handling Possible Problems, or Dear Dotty, Help!

Problems are not an inevitable part of a mentoring relationship, but just as in other relationships, occasionally there may be problems. When such problems arise, mentors often turn to Dotty, the wise guru of braille, for advice. Here are a few sample letters she has received which contain the most common mentoring problems. Her advice may help you with problems you encounter.

Dear Dotty,

What have I gotten myself into? I have been using braille for years so I signed up to be a mentor so I could help somebody. Do you know I was assigned to work with a teacher and I've never even been to college? I just don't know what I'm going to do.

**Nervous in
Newport**

Dear Nervous,

Buck up! You can do it. Remember you know braille better than this teacher does, and she needs your help. She is just learning. Review the manual and encourage her to ask you questions. Then tell yourself this is not a test but rather an opportunity to help.

Dotty

Dear Dotty,

What if the person I am assigned to mentor is interested in something like crocheting or ham radio or something else I know nothing about. I won't be able to help.

**Useless in
Utica**

Dear Use(ful),

Since you can read, you should be able to help. Order a book on the special area of interest in question. Read some of it yourself. Then give it to the person with whom you are working and work on it together. It is entirely possible that your mentee may not need any special help with the material and may even be able to explain it to you. If possible, find another braille reader who shares your

mentee's special interest. Even if they do not live near each other, they might enjoy corresponding. Not only will you be useful, you might even develop a new interest.

Dotty

Dear Dotty,

The new braille user I am mentoring is giving me fits. Although we have met together several times now, I cannot get her to use braille for anything. She will not read, write, or use braille to organize her personal business. I don't know what else to try.

**Tearing-My-Hair-Out
in Terra Haute**

Dear Tearing,

Have you tried contacting her former braille teacher for suggestions? Perhaps this will give you a clue. If this doesn't work, make it clear to her that if she is not using braille, there is no reason to get together like this. Tell her when she is ready to work on braille to give you a call. Otherwise, forget it!

Dotty

Dear Dotty,

The NBU (new braille user) I have been assigned continues to make unwanted sexual advances toward me. I have tried to keep our relationship very businesslike and his mind on braille, but lately I have even had to keep something—you know, a book or a chair or table—between us. What should I do?

**Chased in
Chattanooga**

Dear Chased,

You have had enough. Contact the person who asked you to be a mentor, explain your situation, and ask for a new assignment.

Dotty

P.S. Now you know why it's wise to have your get-togethers in public places.

Dear Dotty,

My NBU and I have been unable to get together. With my job and my family, it is difficult to find the time and public transportation is impossible. Help!

**Good Intentions
in Galesburg**

Dear Good,

You know what they say about good intentions. But seriously, if you just can't make connections and find phone calls unsatisfactory, contact the person who asked you to be a mentor, ask for your mentee to be reassigned, and quit mentoring until your situation changes. Don't bite off more than you can chew.

Dotty

Dear Dotty,

I just completed another meeting with my mentee, and no matter what I suggest she disagrees with me. It seems like we have fights (or should I call them discussions?) about everything. Do you know that she has even gone so far as to get her own copy of English Braille American Edition so that she can check on the things I tell her about braille?

**At-Whit's-End
in Wichita**

Dear At,

Keep up the good work!

Dotty

Dear Dotty,

Help! The new braille user I am working with has learning disabilities and I don't know what to do.

**Frustrated
in Fresno**

Dear Frustrated,

Working with people who have additional disabilities which affect their ability to learn is a challenge. Why don't you talk to a teacher who specializes in working with the particular disabilities of your new braille user and find out how individuals with this disability are usually taught. The teacher may be able to give you some suggestions and recommend a book for you to read. You will have to adapt the ideas for working with your new braille user, but this should not be a problem since you have had lots of practice adapting things for yourself.

Dotty

Dear Dotty,

My new braille user asked me a question about braille that I could not answer. Now I know that it has been a while since I learned braille and that there have been some new codes developed and even some changes to the literary code since I learned it. Do you think I should quit?

**Dubious in
Dubuque**

Dear Dube,

Don't be a doubting Thomas. It is okay not to know everything. After all, no one likes a know-it-all. Don't let lack of knowledge stop you. Having up-to-date code books from the Braille Authority of North America which are available from the American Printing House for the Blind will make you feel like an expert. If a question still has you stumped, play your ace in the hole and take the question to a large braille producer or a local transcribing group. Just give them a call and ask for help. This will be a good lesson for your mentee on where to turn for help.

Dotty

Concluding Mentoring

As the new braille user shows improvement in reading and writing braille and uses braille for an increasing number of activities, there will be less need for regular meetings and a formal mentoring relationship. You will have fewer reasons to meet and will get together less often to work on braille. Without even realizing it, you may find that you have concluded the mentoring relationship.

During a trial test of this program, efforts were made to continue mentoring for approximately 6 months. You may want to use this as a rough guideline for continuing mentoring, but you will probably find that for some new braille users this will be too long and for others it will not be long enough. The mentoring relationship may be concluded or continued as long as the two of you feel it is beneficial.

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