

Goal-Setting Best Practices

Understanding ZPD and Goals

The software uses a student's first STAR Reading™ score of the year to estimate a zone of proximal development (ZPD) and to recommend appropriate reading practice goals. These are based on research data and are individualized for each student. *If you do not have STAR Reading, use one of the Goal-Setting Charts in Resources.*

ZPD

The ZPD is the optimal level of difficulty for reading practice. The software estimates a ZPD based on a student's STAR score. Allow students to read throughout the entire zone. "Stair-stepping" students through their ZPD (three books at 2.0, three books at 2.1, and so on) is not supported by research and can turn students off to reading.

Average-Percent-Correct Goal

The most important goal for all students is to average at least 85 percent on quizzes. This indicates a student is reading with a high level of comprehension, which accelerates reading growth. Averages of 90 percent are associated with even greater gains.

Point Goal

Point goals indicate how much reading students are expected to do. The software provides point goals that are appropriate for each student's reading ability, the amount of time that you schedule for daily reading practice, and the length of the marking period. In this way, point goals are individualized, fair, and realistic. We do not recommend giving all students the same point goal. If a student is frequently absent or if you are not able to schedule reading practice for part of the marking period, lower your students' point goals.

Book-Level Goal

The book-level goal helps ensure students read at a level appropriate for them as individuals. It represents a minimum level of difficulty. Goals are set at the low end of students' ZPDs to encourage them to read freely throughout an appropriate range.

The Goal-Setting Process

Follow these steps to set and adjust goals:

1. *Review the ZPD and goals provided by the software.*

Do they seem realistic for each student—ambitious, yet attainable?

2. *Set initial book-level goals at the low end of each student's ZPD.*

3. *Meet briefly with students one-on-one.*

Your objective is for students to take ownership of their goals. Have a conversation in which you and the student talk about how their reading is going and what they would like to accomplish. Make sure students record their goals on their Student Reading Log or a Student Reading Plan. (Click Resources under the Accelerated Reader™ tab on the Home page for reproducible forms.) Show students how to keep track of their progress by viewing the TOPS Report that appears after every quiz.

4. *Each marking period, check the data, adjust goals if needed, and confer.*

Goals automatically carry over from one marking period to the next. However, as the year goes on, your students will change and you will learn more about their capabilities. Reflect that information in their reading practice goals. Before adjusting goals, review any new STAR Reading scores. Have students' scores gone up significantly? Use the AR™ Diagnostic Report to review Accelerated Reader data. Compare what students have achieved against their goals. Best practices for adjusting goals are described on the next page.

5. *Recognize students who meet their goals.*

Offering recognition based on meeting individualized goals means all students have an equal chance at success. Simple acknowledgments, like posting the names of students who meet their goals on a class bulletin board, are highly motivating.

Best Practices for Adjusting Reading Practice Goals

Common Situations	Best Practices
Student is averaging 85 percent on Reading Practice Quizzes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise the average-percent-correct goal incrementally to 90 percent.
Student is averaging close to 100% on Reading Practice Quizzes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise the top end of the ZPD and increase the book-level goal. • Avoid raising the point goal at the same time. If you keep point expectations the same, the student will feel more comfortable taking on a challenging book.
Student is unable to maintain an average of 85% on quizzes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First have the student try shorter books within the ZPD. • If the student still struggles, lower the low end of the ZPD, the book-level goal, and the point goal. • Evaluate the student’s reading skills and strategies, and provide support as needed.
Student is unable to meet a point goal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the student is staying on task. • Provide easy access to the library so the student doesn’t have to wait to find a new book. • If the student is an English language learner, you may need to lower the point goal. ELLs often read more slowly than native speakers.
Student is a high-ability reader.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t prohibit the student from reading relatively easy books that are appropriate for his or her grade in school but encourage the student to read harder books as well. For example, a 4th-grader who is reading at a 7th-grade level will likely want to read the same books her friends are reading. Allow her to do so while encouraging her to also tackle books that will help her reading skills develop. • Use the Goal-Setting Chart to identify a point goal that is more in line with the student’s grade in school rather than the GE score. • Emphasize wide reading in a variety of genres.
Student’s STAR score has gone up.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the student has been consistently scoring 90 or 100 percent on AR quizzes, raise the top end of the student’s ZPD and boost the book-level goal while keeping the point goal stable. • If the student is averaging below 85 percent on AR quizzes despite showing gains on STAR Reading, find out why. Has the student been reading books above his ZPD? After finishing a book, has the student waited more than 24 hours before taking a quiz? Does the student lack the comprehension strategies needed for longer texts?
Student’s STAR score has gone down.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the student has been doing well on quizzes and meeting goals, maintain the goals for the next marking period. STAR scores sometimes fluctuate due to differences in testing conditions.