



In-depth Interactive Learning Tools
— Because You Want Results

57 Surefire Ways for Special Education Teachers to Improve Student Skills with Merit Software

A Free Report for Teachers





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Special Education teachers often work with students from various backgrounds and ages who possess a range of abilities and skills. Teachers find themselves instructing mixed-level classes comprised of students with very different needs.

Some special education students hope to attain a high school equivalency diploma. Others want to enroll in classes leading to a GED, or to enter job training. Some require learning interventions, while others require individualized learning situations.

All special education students need to improve their skills in reading, writing, and math; state tests regularly measure their progress. Yet many students struggle with schoolwork. Some fail to improve their skills beyond a certain level. Some have trouble concentrating; they are impulsive or easily distracted. In either case, they end up stuck.

Reading, writing, and math should be taught in such a way that students understand why these subjects matter. They should be introduced to basic skills in an enjoyable way that not only holds their interest, but gives them instant feedback.

Software designed to help special education students is a great tool for accomplishing these goals. Good skill-building software offers clear visual cues, a step-by-step approach, content review, and context-sensitive feedback. Good skill-building software provides teachers with ways to monitor individual student work.

Merit Software's Special Education Bundle is designed with these features in mind. Hundreds of teachers have reported Merit's effectiveness in helping them teach basic skills in classroom and lab settings. They have used the Merit Software Special Education Bundle to fulfill curricular goals, build critical-thinking skills, boost test scores, and save time.

Based on feedback from educators, here are 57 surefire ways for teaching reading, writing, and math both effectively and efficiently with Merit Software.

Surefire Ways for Special Education Teachers to Improve Student Skills with Software—Getting Started

1. **Make Students Comfortable:** Check that students are sitting comfortably, and at the right height and distance before the computer. Check that they can see the screen, and that their eyes can focus comfortably on software text.
2. **Talk about Hardware:** Make sure students know the location of the Enter key. Check that they are familiar with mouse buttons, and can use the mouse to point to text on screen. If they are using sound as an accommodation, make sure that they can hear it, and then introduce them to the “Say text” feature.
3. **Review Reading Direction:** Make sure that students are reading software text from left to right, and from up to down.
4. **Talk about Time:** Make sure students understand that the computer doesn’t judge them. They should take all the time they need to read through a text or respond to a question.
5. **Keep up the Comfort:** From time to time, make sure that students still feel comfortable. Check that their eyes are not tired; that they are not getting headaches. Encourage them to stretch every 15 minutes, focusing their eyes on the furthest point across the room or out the window

Surefire Ways for Special Education Teachers to Improve Student Skills with Software—Reading/Vocabulary

- 6. Get to Know Student Readers:** Make personal connections with students. Ask what they read outside school. Do they like books or newspapers? Do they read online? Talk with students about their individual strengths, weaknesses, and difficulties as readers.
- 7. Tell the Truth about Reading:** Plan short-term reading objectives. Discuss how these objectives are part of realistic, long-range, reading goals for students. If reading goals are ambitious, let students know how much work is ahead of them.
- 8. Review Short-Term Reading Goals:** At the start of each reading/vocabulary software session, discuss what students are trying to achieve. How much time are they going to spend on software? Is there anything going on in their lives you should know about? What might impact their reading work during the session?
- 9. Organize Reading/Vocabulary Software Sessions:** Give students a session overview. List skills they will be learning and practicing. List in what part of a software unit they will be engaged, e.g., Tryout; Warm-up. List goals for the session. Make sure students understand and agree with the session organizer.
- 10. Review Reading/Vocabulary Software Feedback:** When doing a Merit Warm-up or Workout, discuss feedback with students. Most reading/vocabulary feedback goes beyond identifying a simple wrong or right answer; it gives students additional information they can use to correct a response. Make sure students can understand and paraphrase software feedback.
- 11. Finish Reading/Vocabulary Software Sessions with a Closing Organizer:** Discuss the reading/vocabulary software session and its results. Review the session organizer, discussing whether students met their goals. Discuss any concerns. Discuss the date and time for the next reading software session. Help students preview goals for the next session. Print results for the end of each reading software unit.
- 12. Follow-up Reading/Vocabulary Software Sessions (A):** Connect reading and vocabulary software sessions to other learning activities. Review what students learned during their session. Discuss ways in which they can remember what they learned. Offer or review a remembering device.
- 13. Follow-up Reading/Vocabulary Software Sessions (B):** Connect reading skills practiced during software sessions with other learning content. Using reading content from a class, model the same approach as a Merit software lesson. Ask students to co-model and practice these skills along with you.
- 14. Relate Reading/Vocabulary Skills to Test-Taking:** Have students return to their Merit reading/vocabulary program, going through the Finals section. Discuss how skills being practiced may apply to an upcoming test.
- 15. Examine Reading Progress with Software:** As students complete additional rounds of reading/vocabulary software, use the Teacher Program Manager (TPM) to see if individual students are completing rounds faster. Discuss reading progress with individual students. Praise students for gaining new knowledge.

Surefire Ways for Special Education Teachers to Improve Student Skills with Software—Process Writing

16. **Learn About Student Writers:** Make personal connections with students. Ask what kinds of writing they do for school. Do they like or dislike writing? Do they write outside school? Keep a journal? Write lists, poems, songs, letters, or email?
17. **Tell the Truth about Writing:** Plan short-term writing objectives. Discuss how these objectives are part of realistic, long-range writing goals for students. If goals are ambitious, let students know how much work is ahead.
18. **Review the Computer Keyboard:** Read through letters and symbols on the computer keyboard with students. You may need to remind students how to make capital letters; how to remove Caps Lock; how to insert a space between words; how to delete text; how to insert text. Point out keys for punctuation.
19. **Review Short-Term Writing Goals:** Discuss what students are trying to achieve at the start of each writing software session. How much time are they going to spend with software? Is there anything going on in their lives you should know about? What might impact their writing during the session?
20. **Organize Writing Software Sessions:** Give an overview of the writing software session. List skills that students will be learning and practicing. List in what part of a software unit they will be engaged, e.g., Pre-Writing; Warm-up. List goals for the software session. Make sure students understand and agree with the session organizer.
21. **Get to Know Writing Software:** Have students use a Merit process writing program. Going through Pre-Writing will help them to brainstorm. Next, ask students to input sentences for Writing-Body. Make sure they understand their sentences.
22. **Share Writing Ideas:** As students complete Writing-Body, ask them to talk about writing. What is their topic? What are they saying about their topic? Can they make a prediction about how they will conclude their writing?
23. **Add Editing Experience:** Continue with the Merit process-writing program until students reach Editing. Discuss Editing prompts with students. Most prompts offer additional information students can use to improve their work. Make sure they understand Editing prompts; ask them to paraphrase prompts before attempting them. Ask them to read work aloud to themselves, or use the “Say text” feature. Make sure students understand their own writing.
24. **Review Reversible Letters:** Before running Spellcheck, help students correct spelling with letters that are easily confused, e.g., b for d, m for w, p for q. Also, review easily confused symbols, such as o for 0.
25. **Don't Be Spellbound:** Save Spellcheck for last. Make sure students understand Spellcheck suggestions—special education students may replace whole words by clicking too quickly! If possible, use the “Say text” feature when proofreading.

26. **Help Students Publish:** Make sure students print and save finished work. Help them transfer writing onto a floppy disk or other storage device. Encourage students to ask for help, rather than exiting from the software impulsively.
27. **Finish Writing Sessions with a Closing Organizer:** Discuss results of the writing software session. Reviewing the session organizer, discussing whether students met their goals. Discuss any concerns. Mention the date and time for the next software session. Help students preview goals for the next writing session.
28. **Follow-up Writing Software Sessions (A):** Connect writing software sessions to other learning activities. Review what students learned during the session. Discuss ways in which they can remember what they learned. Offer a remembering device.
29. **Follow-up Writing Software Sessions (B):** Connect writing software sessions to other learning content. Using a writing activity from a class, model the same approach as a Merit software lesson. Ask students to co-model and practice skills along with you.
30. **Personalize Writing Prompts:** Give students time to practice writing. If possible, have them use a word-processing program. Offer a choice of topics relating to their own experiences, such as “the best day of my life,” “the worst day of my life,” “my dreams,” “someone I love,” “my family history.” Offer or review a remembering device to help students start.
31. **Relate Writing Skills to Test-Taking:** Give students a writing topic. Ask students to write a paragraph, using steps from their Merit process writing program—pre-writing; thinking of a main idea; building an outline; writing a paragraph body and conclusion; reviewing and revising. Offer or review a remembering device for working step by step.
32. **Relate Writing to Job Readiness:** Give students time to practice job-related writing. Do they need help creating a resume? Filling out an application? Discuss how writing skills may help them find or retain a job.
33. **Examine Writing Progress with Software:** As students complete additional rounds of reading software, use the Teacher Program Manager (TPM) to individual students are completing rounds faster. Re-read student writing, then discuss individual progress. Special education students usually produce more work using software than when writing by hand. Praise students for progressing as writers.

Surefire Ways for Special Education Teachers to Improve Student Skills with Software—Grammar

34. **Relate Grammar to Life:** Make personal connections with students. Discuss how using grammar might help someone in a real-life situation. Explain how grammar is a tool that helps readers to read and writers to write.
35. **Stick to the Point:** Discuss students' strengths and weaknesses as writers, how grammar helps or hinders them. Plan short-term, grammar-related objectives. Discuss how grammar objectives are part of realistic, long-range, writing goals. If goals are ambitious, let students know how much work is ahead.
36. **Review Short-Term Grammar Goals:** Discuss what students are trying to accomplish at the start of each grammar software session. How much time will they spend on software? Is there anything going on in their lives you should know about? What might impact their work during the grammar session?
37. **Organize Grammar Software Sessions:** Give students an overview of the session. List skills they will be learning and practicing. List in what part of a grammar software unit they will be engaged, e.g., Tryout; Warm-up. List goals for the session. Make sure students understand and agree with the session organizer.
38. **Reinforce Grammar Feedback:** When doing a Merit Warm-up or Workout, discuss grammar software feedback with students. Most feedback goes beyond identifying a simple wrong or right answer; it gives students additional information that they can use to correct a response. Make sure students understand and can paraphrase feedback.
39. **Finish Grammar Software Sessions with a Closing Organizer:** Discuss the grammar software session and its results. Review the session organizer, discussing whether students met their goals. Discuss any concerns students have. Mention the date and time for the next grammar software session. Help students preview goals for the next session. Print results for the end of each software unit.
40. **Follow-up Grammar Software Sessions (A):** Review skills from grammar software sessions. Review what students learned, and discuss ways in which they can remember what they learned. Offer a remembering device if necessary.
41. **Follow-up Grammar Software Sessions (B):** Model the same approach as a Merit software lesson, using content from a class grammar lesson. Ask students to co-model and practice these skills along with you.
42. **Relate Grammar Skills to Test-Taking:** Have students return to their Merit grammar program, going through the Finals section. Discuss how skills they are practicing may apply to an upcoming writing/ grammar test. Praise students for improving their grammar.

Surefire Ways for Special Education Teachers to Improve Student Skills with Software—Mathematics

43. **Learn How Students Use Math:** Make personal connections with students. Ask when students use math in real-life. Do they compare prices in a supermarket? Decide how much time a trip will take? Follow instructions about how often to take medication?
44. **Tell the Truth about Math:** Discuss students' individual strengths and difficulties in math. Agree on short-term math objectives. Discuss how these objectives are part of realistic, long-range goals involving math. If math goals are ambitious, let students know how much work is ahead.
45. **Review Short-Term Math Goals:** At the start of each math software session, discuss what students are trying to accomplish. How much time will be spent on software? Is there anything going on in their lives you should know about? What might impact their math work during the session?
46. **Organize Math Software Sessions:** Give students an overview of the session. List skills they will be learning and practicing. List in what part of a software unit they will be engaged, e.g., Tryout; Warm-up. List goals for the math software session. Make sure students understand and agree with the session organizer.
47. **Encourage Students:** When starting math sessions, students may forget what they recently learned. They may mix up math operations—subtraction and addition, division and multiplication. It may be hard for them to avoid reversing numbers—e.g., 41 for 14, or 6 for 9. A realistic, short-term goal might be to respond to basic math steps, using visual clues presented in the software lesson. If possible, encourage students to use the “Say text” feature.
48. **Review Computer Math Keys:** Remind students where number keys are located. If students will be using the keys in the keyboard center, remind them how to use the Shift key to make a + sign, and of the location for the = and – sign. Also remind them that * means multiply and / means divide.
49. **Review Math Direction:** Have students use a Merit math program, going through Tryouts. Make sure students are working in the correct direction as they do math steps. Knowing when to work from left to right or from up to down may be difficult. Offer or review a remembering device.
50. **Reinforce Math Software Feedback:** When doing a Merit Warm-up or Workout, discuss feedback with students. Most math software feedback goes beyond identifying a simple wrong or right answer. It gives students information that they can use to correct a response. Make sure students understand and can paraphrase feedback.
51. **Problem-Solve Right Away:** Ask students to talk about a math problem they were able to solve during the software session. Ask students to discuss a math problem they found difficult. Model a math problem mentioned by students.

52. **Finish Math Sessions with a Closing Organizer:** Discuss the math software session and its results. Discuss whether students met their goals for the session. Discuss any concerns. Mention the date and time for the next software session. Preview math goals for the next session. Print results for the end of each math software unit.
53. **Follow-up Math Software Sessions:** Review math skills practiced during software sessions. Model the same approach as a Merit software lesson in the classroom. Ask students to co-model and practice these skills along with you. Offer a remembering device for problem-solving steps.
54. **Offer More Math Organizers:** Help students keep a list of important math words and phrases from software sessions. Make sure students understand their lists. Ask them to review math words and phrases during the week. Organize a plan to help them review.
55. **Make Math Practical:** Practice word problems, graphs, ratios and/or fractions by having students apply math to real-life situations. Use manipulatives or coins for reviewing fractions.
56. **Relate Math Skills to Test-Taking:** Have students return to their Merit math program, going through the Finals section. Discuss how skills they are practicing may apply to an upcoming math test. Follow up software units with written practice tests.
57. **Examine Problem-Solving Progress with Software:** As students complete additional rounds of math software, use the Teacher Program Manager (TPM) to see if individual students are completing rounds faster. Discuss math progress with individual students. Praise students for gaining new knowledge.

ABOUT MERIT SOFTWARE:

Since 1983, Merit Software has been improving students' basic reading, writing and math skills. All Merit programs are self-paced, skill-building programs that increase student achievement while providing measurable results.

Merit Software gives everyone involved -- teachers, tutors, parents and students -- the tools and opportunities to improve learning and to attain positive, measurable results.

The programs provide detailed coverage of the core competencies students require to succeed. Concepts in reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary and math are covered from the basics to higher levels.

Troublesome points are identified and broken down into understandable parts. Personalized explanations and tips are tailored to each student's responses.

A multi-sensory approach, made possible by including text-to-speech functionality in many of the English language programs, reaches out to students in ways not achieved by simply reading text on a screen.

Built-in tracking permits teachers and tutors to quickly discover individual areas of concern and to plan lessons in response to specific student needs

Instructors receive a clear and current measure of student achievement. Options for meaningful communication with students, parents and administrators are increased.

Merit customers get the support they need to achieve success with free technical help, which is available by email and telephone.

Key Benefits:

- **In-depth Instruction**
Students apply essential skills as they learn them.
- **Intensive Concentration**
Multiple forms of assistance maximize learning opportunities.
- **Personalized Learning**
Context-sensitive tips build students' confidence as learners.
- **Automatic Scoring**
Built-in tracking monitors student progress.

For information, pricing, full-working demos, and a FREE evaluation CD-Rom go to <http://www.meritsoftware.com> or call 800-753-6488