The Perfect Pair:

Using The Daily 5,
Second Edition
and The CAFE Book
Together

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Why would I use Daily 5 and CAFE in my classroom?

Gail and Joan of the 2 Sisters knew there was a better way of teaching than what they had been doing. They used a “spray and pray” method for years—teaching whole group, hoping the class got it, and then helping small groups and individuals while trying to keep the rest of the class busy with worksheets and centers. They developed Daily 5 as a way to make reading time more productive. The Daily 5, a structure of five literacy tasks, helps increase student independence while providing the teacher with time for small-group and one-on-one instruction.

What was initially designed to help them, as teachers, became an integral part of their students’ success. “As we figured out it would help us work with kids in small groups, what we realized is that it really helps kids even more. It moves kids even farther forward than we ever imagined because it creates independence in them,” says Gail.

With Daily 5 up and running, “we’d gotten our wish,” Joan explains. “Our kids were independent, so we were ready to work with individuals in small groups. But then we realized that we didn’t know what that might look like. While my kids are being independent, what do I teach individually and in small groups? And how do I manage it so that we let our assessments really tell us what those kids need? So figuring that out led to the research and the development of CAFE.”

CAFE is an acronym for Comprehension, Accuracy, Fluency, and Expanding vocabulary. The CAFE system aims to integrate assessment into daily classroom reading and discussion using the following four core elements (see page 6 of The CAFE Book):

1. You, as teacher, keep a notebook with a few key record-keeping forms, including a calendar, individual student conference forms, and strategy group planners.

2. Children meet with the teacher during literacy workshop conferences to be assessed; to receive focused, explicit instruction; to set goals; and then to follow up on progress.

3. You plan small-group instruction based on clusters of students with similar needs. Different needs, not reading levels, determine these groups. Often a group is made up of students working on the same reading goal.

4. Whole-group instruction is based on needs that emerge for many children.

CAFE provides a structure for conferring with students, a language for talking about reading development, and a system for tracking growth and fostering independence.
How do I start?

Gail and Joan recommend starting Daily 5 and CAFE simultaneously. You can start on the first day of school with the Check for Understanding lesson (see page 93 of *The Daily 5* and page 70 of *The CAFE Book*). When CAFE and Daily 5 are started together, the guidelines of the classroom are clear to students, and you can start one-on-one assessment quickly. It will also help your students be ready to set their own goals, because they’ll be clear about classroom expectations.

Intimidated by the thought of starting two new programs at once? It’s fine to start Daily 5 before bringing CAFE into the mix. “For some people, just making the shift to trusting kids to be independent and teaching them is big,” Joan acknowledges. “It really is okay for them to just do the Daily 5 first.”

The new edition of *The Daily 5* includes CAFE in the Daily 5 structure. Figures that show the structure of a Daily 5 block can be found on pages 14–19 of *The Daily 5*. They allow space for CAFE focus lessons as well as time for “Teacher Choices.”

Gail and Joan find that once Daily 5 is up and running in the classroom, teachers really want CAFE. It answers the question, “What am I doing, as a teacher, while students are working in Daily 5?” With Daily 5, you’re asking your students to make the change. CAFE can be a bit scarier because, as Gail describes, “with CAFE, I have to reflect on my own teaching. And I have to make that change. And it is always harder to personally change than to ask someone else to make the change.”

Where do I start?

Many teachers read *The Daily 5* cover to cover and feel inspired to start it the very next day. In fact, the sisters recommend reading it straight through before starting. CAFE may seem more daunting. Gail says that the sixty-page appendix will help a lot, and that you certainly “don’t have to totally synthesize and understand all [of the appendix forms] because those are reading more as nonfiction. You read them as you need them.”

A great place to start, especially if the two books seem like an overwhelming amount of information, is in the second edition of *The Daily 5*. Appendix I, which starts on page 169, provides a very detailed plan for the first three weeks of Daily 5, and CAFE is included from the first day. *The CAFE Book*’s appendix also includes day-by-day launching tips as well as Ready Reference forms for each strategy you’ll teach. The Ready Reference forms will make it easier to quickly read and implement one strategy at a time.
What improvements can I expect to see in my classroom after starting CAFE?

Both Daily 5 and CAFE are intended to help students become able to work independently, thus making your teaching day easier. Many teachers have noticed students’ performances improving because they have a way to assess and address their students’ greatest needs—and the time to do it in the school day.

One additional advantage of using the two systems together is how much time you’ll save with your own planning, because so much work is done during reading block instead of after school. CAFE’s “Seven Elements of a Successful Conference” (starting on page 57 of The CAFE Book) describes how this works:

1. **Check the calendar for appointments.** If there are appointments, meet with those students. If there aren’t any appointments, use the Keeping Track form (CAFE page 144) to determine which students you haven’t seen in a while.

2. **Prepare for the conference.** Each child has a separate section of your notebook that will help you remember what that child is working on and what he or she should be working toward.

3. **Observe the child and listen to reading.** Listen to whether he or she is applying strategies toward the goal. Write down what each child is reading and any notes.

4. **Reinforce and teach.** Decide whether to reinforce the previous goal or adjust it based on what you’ve seen that day.

5. **Practice the strategy.** Observe the child practicing the strategy to see if he or she is understanding it, and modify your instruction accordingly.

6. **Plan.** Once the child has been practicing the strategy and you see him or her exhibiting the behaviors of the strategy four or five times, you can jot down a note and the date and know that the next strategy is ready to be taught. You may want to meet with struggling students the next day, and students who are progressing proficiently in a couple of days. When students know when their next meeting is, it holds them accountable for their own learning. This replaces completing worksheets or checking off the number of pages they’ve read.

7. **Encourage.** Let students savor their growth.
Joan explains that before CAFE she “would spend a lot of time on a weekend or a night planning and planning for all these groups and lessons.” With CAFE, however, “the whole premise behind CAFE, and the touch points portion of CAFE is to say, okay, this is what my kids need. . . . As you’re walking to them you’re looking, what did I do with them last time? I made the plan. I’m going to sit down and say, ‘Okay, show me how you’re using Cross Checking. Let’s take a look at how you’re applying this.’ And then right then and there you’re going to record what they’re doing. The planning is done right there.”

Gail elaborates: “Our planning is really in the moment of that one-to-one conference and that small-group work. We’ve assessed them, we know what strategy we’re teaching, and we’re watching students. Are they getting that strategy or not with the story they’re reading? And right then and there I’m making my plan. Okay, they didn’t understand what I just taught. I need to change that. I’m going to make a note of how I’m going to change that tomorrow. Right then and there. So instead of having to go home now and make these elaborate plans for my small groups and my whole groups, I’ve already made them while I was sitting there with the student.”

Your workload can be focused on the good teaching to be done with the student instead of pulling books and lessons at the end of the day.

**What does successful implementation feel like?**

Teachers have noticed a palpable change in their classrooms once Daily 5 and CAFE are routine. “The room has a hum to it,” says Gail. “There’s a bit of talking, but it’s real, purposeful talk.”

It’s the sound of students holding themselves accountable for their own learning. As they get more comfortable, they grow more confident. The classroom becomes calmer even as it becomes busier. And you, as teacher, have time to teach.

“The teacher . . . has more to do during the day, during reading time, than they ever had before,” Gail admits. “We work with three groups every day but also confer with nine to twelve students every day. . . . That’s a tremendous amount of work to do when you’re there.”

“But it’s so much more gratifying, I think,” Joan says. “Because, again, you know those kids and you’re meeting their needs. You have this urgency, a positive urgency of I know what to work on. That child, if I meet with them for two minutes I’m going to help them move forward. . . . I used to do a lot of spinning my wheels.”
What are the advantages of implementing CAFE and Daily 5 throughout a school or district?

When Daily 5 and CAFE are used across grades, the consistency year after year really helps student growth. “Once kids learn that basic structure of independence, it’s like putting on comfortable shoes for them. . . . Stamina builds quickly, sometimes more quickly,” Joan says. “If a whole school does Daily 5 and CAFE, that transition into the new year goes so much quicker. You’re jumping into content so much faster,” Gail adds.

When every teacher has a different structure for his or her reading block, students have to learn a new system each year. When it’s the same, summer break might dull their memories a bit, but Joan points out that “the muscle memory is already there. It’s not about reteaching the routine. It’s just giving them some time to build stamina.”

The consistency of Daily 5 is powerful across grade levels, and so is the use of CAFE strategies. The strategies aren’t written for specific grade levels, so they can easily span a whole school. When students know the names of the strategies, that consistent language makes for consistent development. “You have conversations that are so deep because they’ve had the language and had that routine before,” Gail explains.

Joan has noticed that when teachers in a school approach strategies with similar language in every grade, students can use the language to convey their own learning. She remembers Sebastian, who was only in second grade, telling her, “I’m not comprehending like I used to.”

“It’s really, really powerful to have that consistency,” Joan says. “And that really does help them better understand where they are and what they need to work on.”