

Building Basic Reading Skills



Parents play a very important role in the beginning phases of reading instruction for their children. Children who are talked to a lot during their early years grow up to be more apt to be readers. They tend to show an attraction to books and printed material at younger ages than other children do. Talk to your children about everything and anything. Engage them in conversations about what they like to do, places to go, or things to do together.

Another function parents play in the early steps toward reading proficiency is to provide many opportunities for children to read. Have children read billboards along the side of the road while traveling in the car. Suggest they read the cartoons from the newspaper to you as you prepare dinner. Grocery shopping provides many reading experiences, from reading the shopping list and matching the item needed to the item on the shelf, to reading labels and prices.

It is important that parents be aware of some basic reading skills that are being built while they are talking to their children and providing opportunities for them to read. These reading skills can be incorporated into activities giving the child a better basis for building reading skills in school.

Dr. Anthony D. Fredericks has outlined 6 basic skills children need in order to become proficient readers. These skills are easily presented to children by their parents as part of play or conversation.

Basic skill #1

Listening skill - Children need to learn how to listen to stories and develop an ability to interpret what is being heard. Ask children factual questions about what you just read to them. Ask questions about the important facts or main ideas of the passage.

Basic skill #2

Picture reading - This skill requires children to correctly determine information from a picture. Pictures rather than text can transmit many pieces of information. Have the child make up titles or stories based on one picture. Ask questions about a picture that accompanies a story. Help children distinguish between fact and fiction by pointing out the difference between a photograph and an artist's rendering. (Fredericks, 1984)

Basic skill #3

Auditory discrimination - Children need to learn to hear separate sounds in words. This is called phonemic awareness among reading specialists and teachers. We can encourage children to develop this skill by asking them to identify specific sounds or combinations of sounds in within words. Make a game of it by having the child raise his hand whenever he hears a certain sound.

Basic skill #4

Visual discrimination - Children need to know that there are differences between letters and they must learn that there are different sounds to go with them. Teach children the names of letters and have them match the upper case and lower case versions of the letters. Teach children how to recognize printed words you show to them.

Basic skill #5

Forming associations - Children need to see the relationship between the oral word and the printed word. Showing pictures, showing the word, and engaging the child in conversation using the word helps to build this skill.

Basic skill #6

Developing a positive self-concept - Children need to feel good about themselves and what they are doing in order to put effort into continuing the activity. Parents and teachers can build a child's self-concept by providing

free choice in reading material. A range of books from easy reading to challenging reading levels will allow the child to pick up an easy book for enjoyment, but also allows for children to experience a harder book for expanding their reading skills.

Adapted from Fredericks, Dr. Anthony, Ed.D (1984). Ideas that Stimulate Reading Achievement. The Art of Parenting, v4(2) as found in the *Tips on Helping the Learning Disabled Child with Homework* handout.

Helping Your Child Learn Phonics



You can help your child learn phonics by assisting them in making connections between letters and sounds as they are reading and writing. Using techniques listed below, you can help your child make the associations necessary to assist them in reading and writing.

1. Read aloud to your child every day. Rereading favorite books is especially encouraging for young readers.
2. Read and reread favorite nursery rhymes to reinforce the sound patterns of language. Share tongue twisters with your child and other forms of language sounds.
3. Help your child associate spoken words with their written forms by running your finger under the words in a familiar story. This helps your child connect words that they hear with words that they see.
4. Make alphabet books with your child to assist him/her in hearing individual sounds. Read alphabet books to him/her to help make the connection between sounds and letters.
5. Read stories, poems, rhymes, and songs that have repeated sounds at the beginnings of the words (alliteration) and/or at the ends of words (rhyme). Children tend to enjoy words that

sound like the word they describe (i.e., pop, meow, purr).

6. Write grocery lists, notes, messages, or reminders to family members while your child is watching. Talk about the sounds as you write.
7. Help your child notice printed words throughout your surroundings — on street signs, billboards, etc. Help them to use beginning letters as cues to understanding the meaning (in words such as women, men).
8. Encourage your child to write the best he/she can, even as your child begins with scribbles and random marks or letters. At first your child will tend to write the first sounds he/she hears, then move to the first and last sounds of words. Gradually, your child will include vowel sounds.
9. Make name cards for family and friends on paper strips. Use names that have the same first letter, but a different sound (i.e., Dianne, Dean, Don). Encourage them to recognize the same first letter, then the different letters that follow it.
10. At your local library, borrow tape recordings of some books that your child already has. Then, allow your child to listen to the tape and read along in his/her book.
11. Remember that children learn better when they have fun. Enjoying the text and making sense of the meaning is very important. Focusing on phonics may become taxing and cause a child to lose interest.
12. Help your child sound out the word and pronounce it in sections, not just letter by letter.
13. Have fun with your child. Make charts or cards of words with the same sound pattern, the same onset (the beginning of syllables), or the same rhyme (the middle-to-end syllables). Your child will enjoy reordering the cards into groupings of "like" sounds.
14. Put different onset and rhymes on strips of paper or cards and encourage your child to put different combinations together to make words — or nonsense words.
15. Teach your child the "predictability game," where you pick a predictable word in the text, cover it, and invite your child to

guess what word would fit there. Then uncover the first letter and ask what word would fit. Continue to reveal letter by letter until your child is able to predict the correct word.

16. Use writing with your child to help him/her learn phonics. At first, children use sound spellings to sound out syllables in their writing. Eventually, through reading and editing their writing, they are able to transform these sound spellings into conventional spellings.
17. Encourage your child to spell words the "best they can." Research shows that first grade children who are supported typically score as well (or better) on standardized spelling assessment than children who are restricted to correct spellings in the first draft.
18. To focus on one letter, help your child make books using the name of friends or family members. Focus on using the same letter with differing sounds in the book. If the subject's name starts with a "J," use "j" sounds in the book when possible.
19. Find books that explore word sounds and create a book or story that includes these sounds with your child.
20. Encourage your child to learn phonics, spelling, and grammar by providing an abundance of materials to read.

This information is taken directly from the Pennsylvania Statewide System of Assessment Classroom Connections kit developed through the Pennsylvania Academic Standards Implementation Project: A Partnership between the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units promoting educational excellence for the Commonwealth. The entire PSSA Classroom Connections kit and supporting information is available at <http://www.pattan.K12.PA.US> website.

Helping Your Child Become a Writer



Writing is one of the main forms of communication that we use to express ideas, convey information, share feelings, and direct activities. Whether your child has to write a letter, compose an e-mail, write a speech, or prepare a report, writing is the ability to communicate effectively. Whether your child is just beginning to make scribbles on paper or is more experienced in writing, you can do many things to help your child develop his/her writing skills.

1. Provide materials for writing, including pens, colored markers, crayons, chalkboard and chalk, and various papers. Brown wrapping paper, paper bags or the blank side of a typewritten sheet serve as cost-effective paper supplies. Older children will appreciate a desk lamp, stationery, stamps, a dictionary, and a thesaurus.
2. Encourage a young child's scribbles on paper. These markings are the beginnings of your child's efforts to communicate through writing. Through your support and guidance, your child will develop his/her writing skills.
3. Celebrate your child's writing efforts. Select a special place in your home (such as the refrigerator) to display his/her work. Find opportunities to share it with friends and family.
4. Help your children learn through modeling. Let your child see you writing items such as lists, reminders, notes, letters, etc.
5. Model for your child that writing is something that a person works at by writing down his ideas, making changes, and correcting what he's written.
6. Make children aware of the different forms of writing that surround them in their environment, such as signs, labels, cereal boxes, TV guides, catalogs, newspapers, telephone books, magazines, and books.
7. Create a message station on your refrigerator with magnetic letters. Keep it at a child's eye level so he/she can play with the

alphabet and create messages.

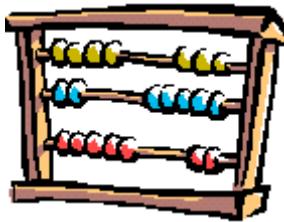
8. Help your child to develop an interest in writing by encouraging friends and family to write letters to your child. Help him/her respond to the letter.
9. Find purposeful opportunities for your child to practice his/her writing. Have your child write thank-you notes, lists, reminders or invitations to friends and relatives.
10. Avoid making your child "correct" or recopy something he/she has written informally.
11. Talk to your children about what they already know about a topic before they begin to write. Help them determine where to find more information about the topic.
12. Focus on the meaning that they are trying to communicate. Writing is not just copying down information, but creating text to express one's own thoughts.
13. Let your children be surprised by finding notes that you hide in their lunch box, under their pillow, in pockets, on bikes, on the refrigerator, or in drawers. Kids love to find things and it will create fun around writing.
14. Accept your child's best writing and spelling efforts. Build on a child's best efforts and encourage the positive aspects of his/her writing. Focusing on what isn't right or perfect about your child's writing sends a discouraging message and dulls his/her enthusiasm.
15. Take your child on trips to the library so he/she can see the vast numbers of books that people have written.
16. Have fun by writing stories featuring your child in the experiences you've shared. Your child can illustrate and you can write captions and "speech bubbles" for the characters.
17. Encourage your child not to focus on the mechanics until they have written their ideas and worked on the content and organization of their writing. "Work and rework" is an important motto.
18. Help your child make books by stapling or taping together paper in the form of a book. Explore story topics with your child.
19. When children's authors/illustrators visit your local library, take

your child.

20. Help your child experiment with words. Find books that explore word sounds and have fun with your child creating a book or story that includes these sounds.

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Math Computation



There are many different factors that impact the ability to acquire good math skills. One needs to: 1) understand visual relationships using numbers; 2) be able to memorize facts; 3) have good eye-hand coordination to accurately place numbers in columns; 4) be a sequential thinker. Math problems require a combination of several of these skills. If your child displays difficulty with math problems, worksheets or homework, try these ideas.

1. Provide a number line on your child's desk, table, or around the walls of his room to refer to for the correct way to write the numbers and for the correct sequencing of numbers.
2. Supply a box of small objects such as bingo chips to use when first learning the meaning of numbers. He can also use them for simple calculation before doing the problem on paper or to check his work.
3. Attach personal meaning to math problems by giving examples of how math is used for different things in the home (its use in shopping, etc.).

4. Have your child use lined paper in a vertical rather than horizontal position (or graph paper) to help with the placement of numbers, if that is a problem for your child.
 5. If your child has difficulty copying math problems from the book, ask if you can buy a math book so that he can write in it. Check to see if you would be allowed to make Xerox copies of the book so your child did not have to copy the problems.
 6. Find visual models of completed math problems for your child. Usually the textbook will have this kind of model. Have your child explain the model to you.
 7. Have your child construct a matrix of multiplication tables to keep in his workspace if he is having trouble memorizing these.
 8. Make a set of flash cards. Review these with your child once a day.
 9. Check your child's understanding of basic math words like, same, different, equal, more, less, etc. If he does not know these words, or shows a hesitation, have him work with objects until he understands what the concepts mean when doing math problems.
 10. Check with your child's teacher regarding the use of a calculator.
 11. When working on a series of problems, have your child glance through the worksheet and circle all the addition signs, subtraction signs, etc., in different colors before starting to solve the problems. This will call your child's attention to what process to use in solving each problem. (Moore, p85)
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Moore, Lorraine, Ph.D. (1996). Inclusion: A Practical Guide for Parents. Minnetonka, MN: Peytral Publications.

Preparing For a Test



Organizing for study

First of all, the student needs to determine what the test will cover.

Identify the chapters in the textbook, notes, assignments, past quizzes, or tests that might be included in the test. Collect all this information and keep it together. Compile a list and check off each item as it is collected. Be sure to complete any missed work and get class notes from friends if any class sessions were missed.

Plan the study time required to cover all the material over a period of time, rather than doing it all in one night. Several short study periods are better than one long study period. This also gives the student time to double check on information he is not sure of and collect any other materials he decides he needs.

Use a study planner to segment the study tasks required. The planner will document the student's progress through the material and act as a countdown timer toward test day. Instead of acting as a looming threat, it is seen as a motivator and helpful method of staying on task.

Effective techniques to help your child study for a test

When studying a textbook in preparation for a test it is a good idea to re-read the chapters being tested. Make notes on 3X5 cards to use as study cues. Use the headings and any words in bold type as key words to guide the study activities.

Instruct your child on how to approach the task of taking a test.

The following is a list of a few simple hints.

Tell your child to:

- Read all questions carefully
- Look for key words in directions
- Read True and False test questions carefully because if any part of the statement is false, the whole thing is false. Pay special attention to specific determiners like "always and never" which will help to decide on the answer.
- In a multiple choice test, read all of the choices before

choosing an answer. Use the process of elimination if necessary. Always put down an answer, even if it's a guess, unless instructed not to.

- In the matching portion of a test, always read the question or definition part first. Match the ones you know and then begin the process of elimination with the rest. Cross out the letter or number of the answers as you use them to avoid confusion and wasted time.
- Fill in the blanks of short answer questions on the ones you are sure of and then re-read for context clues for the rest of the blanks. Look for clues like the length of the line allowed for the response or answers that might be several words long.
- Essay questions should be read twice looking for the key words in the directions. Make margin notes to keep your ideas in front of you while writing your complete response. Use grammatical sentences and answer all portions of the question. Restate the question in the introductory sentence. Write legibly. Proofread your work.

A few more things for parents to do to help ensure the child's success

Help your child be physically and emotionally ready for the day of the test. You can do this by making sure the child has had a good night's sleep. Reassure him that the two of you have studied and have prepared for the test to the best of your abilities. Take away the child's stress so he can sleep.

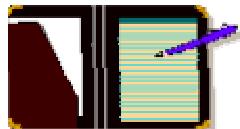
In the morning make sure he gets a good breakfast. It is hard to concentrate if the stomach is empty. A special "test day" breakfast could serve more than one function. It could be a good motivator and a special quality time you can use to reassure your child that he is prepared.

Resources

Canter, Lee (1987). *Homework Without Tears: A Parent's Guide for Motivating Children to do Homework and Succeed in School*. New York, New York: Harper and Row.

Instructional Support System of Pennsylvania (1998). *Classroom Testing and Grading Practices*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Strengthening Study Skills



Study skills are an essential component of becoming a good student. Understanding and using these skills can lead your child to becoming an independent learner. Supporting your child in these skills will help you both become lifelong learners. Highlighted below are several study skills to review and reinforce with your child.

Listening skills -

In a typical classroom students spend from 50-80% of their time listening. (Hansen 1993) Differentiate between hearing and listening. Listening is more active than simply hearing. Try this:

1. While someone is talking to you, ask yourself questions about what is being said. Go back then and supply the answers. This will embed the information in your memory.
2. Establish eye contact with the speaker. This makes the words more meaningful and personal.
3. Picture in your mind's eye what the speaker is saying. Mental pictures will help you both understand and remember what a speaker is saying.
4. Listen first, evaluate later. Don't prejudge the speaker or topic.
5. Take notes to remember what a speaker is saying.

Organization -

Many students fall apart because they have not learned the essentials of being organized. Older students learn to be organized out of necessity when they become busier and there are more responsibilities placed on them. There are several areas where we need to assist our children in becoming organized: assignments, materials, and time.

1. Assignments - An assignment notebook will assist your student in keeping track of homework, test dates, announcements, and other important information. If his teacher does not require a notebook, you as the parent could require one of your child.

2. Materials - Supply your child with a portfolio type notebook that has several folders in it. Tell your child to label each folder for a different class. File the papers at the end of each class period instead of waiting until the end of the day or week.
3. Time - Managing time is critical to the overall effectiveness and stress management of most students. Work with your child to develop a time management plan or schedule. Help your child do a time study for a week. List each activity and how long it takes. After one week, sit down and construct a plan for the next week. Block out time for schoolwork, TV watching, playtime, family time, etc. Work with the schedule for a week and then adjust as needed.

Taking notes -

Note taking skills vary depending on the person and the topic. Notes are one way of recording important information that the listener thinks will be needed later. How a person takes notes needs to be an individual decision. It is when a person has no useable methods to take notes that we need to step in.

Ask your child's teacher if he has instructed in any particular note taking technique, or can suggest one your child can use. Three of the most often used are outlining, key words, and mapping.

1. Outlining is a series of larger ideas with additional related information written under each relevant idea.
2. Key word note taking is a method of listing important key words with their meaning and importance directly after the key word.
3. Mapping is the visual interpretation of the information that needs to be remembered. Usually the main idea is in the center of the page with its subordinating information clustered around it and connected by lines drawn between related ideas.

Preparing for and taking tests -

Preparing for the test-

1. Don't wait until the night before the test to study
2. Find out what kind of questions to expect
3. Pay close attention to the teacher's instructions about the test
4. Use your class and textbook notes
5. List possible questions and then answer them
6. Review homework, quizzes and related work

Taking the test -

1. Skim the test to decide which questions will need more time and budget accordingly
2. Read directions carefully
3. Answer all questions, guess if necessary, unless there is a penalty for wrong answers
4. Review your answers for the simple mistakes. Do not change answers unless absolutely certain that it is wrong.

More suggestions on preparing for and taking a test may be found by clicking on [Preparing for a Test](#).

Becoming Responsible -

Parents want their children to grow up to be responsible for their actions and accomplishments. Sometimes parents help too much. When this happens, some of the responsibility is lifted from the student. They start relying on their parents to pick up more of the responsibility. Parents need to be careful not to fall into this cycle. Adapted from Hansen, Andrew J. (1993). *The Parent's Guide to Learning and Study Skills*. Reston, VA: The National Association of Secondary School Principals

Written Expression



Written expression difficulties surface whenever your child is asked to put his ideas down on paper. Just as reading is the lifting of print from the page and converting it to oral expression, written expression is the opposite. Children often have difficulty in converting their thoughts and ideas into the written form. There are several possible reasons for this difficulty.

Two of the most prevalent reasons are delays in small-motor development, and difficulties in expressing their ideas.

If your child is experiencing a delay in small-motor development, you might want to consider the following ideas.

1. Create a pencil grip out of adhesive tape by wrapping it around the pencil where your child grips it. This will give him a larger and more secure grip area. You can buy colorful pencil grips at office supply stores.
2. Check with your child's teacher as to the size of the lined paper that works best for your child. Have your child work on this same size paper at home.
3. Provide an alphabet card or letter line at your child's workspace so he can see how each letter is made.
4. Be flexible in allowing your child to either print or use cursive when working on an assignment. Check with your child to see if the teacher has expressed one method over the other.
5. Let your child dictate his thoughts and ideas to you so his ideas do not get lost in the mechanics of writing. Another idea is to have him dictate into a tape recorder and then write his story down on paper.
6. When appropriate, encourage your child to learn to do his written assignments on a computer. (Moore p82)

If your child has difficulties expressing himself on paper and does not have a motor problem, you might want to consider the following

ideas.

1. Before writing, have your child draw a picture to illustrate what he is going to write about. Have him find keywords to verbally describe the picture. Link the keywords into sentences and paragraphs.
2. Help your child develop a list of words associated with a particular subject. Then have him use this list of words to generate ideas for sentences for the topic.
3. Have your child keep a collection of pictures available from which he can get ideas. Group these pictures in categories depending on their usage.
4. Develop a series of question to help your child generate and organize his thoughts. For example: "What is it you are supposed to write about?" "Now picture it." "How much, or to what level of detail are you supposed to write?" "List all the details you can remember." "Begin grouping the ideas." "Form sentences around the ideas and put them in order."
5. Have your child work from an outline.
6. Use a mapping or webbing technique to organize the child's thoughts before beginning to write. A web or a map is a visual way to organize thoughts. Place the main idea in the center of the page and arrange the subordinate ideas around it. Under each ideas list all the details you can think of to describe the idea. Use this visual while writing so you don't miss anything important.
7. Have your child verbalize his thoughts. Once verbalized, it is easier to put thoughts into written form.
8. When appropriate, and after checking with the teacher, have your child use an alternative form, like videos, displays, demonstrations or models to assist in expressing their knowledge of material. (Moore p83)

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