

Reading Tips for Parents



Reading is a tool of incredible value, one that every child needs. This tool, this key, can open doors of education, of a passion for learning, of self-knowledge and knowledge of others. That's why one of the primary goals driving No Child Left Behind legislation is that every American child becomes a reader by the third grade. We want no child to be left behind, including yours.

The question is often asked, "What type of reading instruction will my child receive?" No Child Left Behind bases their standards on what current research is finding to be the most effective reading tools. These include phonics, which is understanding letter combinations and the sounds that letters make. Phonemic awareness is an understanding of the sounds that make up a spoken language. Another approach is whole language or balanced reading, which encourages children to use the knowledge they have of language and expression to draw meaning from texts. In the activities suggested here, you will find both types of instruction.

This workshop is based on research that teaches us how children learn to read. It highlights practices, recommended by teachers, that you as parents can use at

home with your children to strengthen their reading ability. Reading is not a natural process for children, like breathing or laughing. Children will not learn to read on their own; they must be taught to read. According to what we now know about brain development, it is clear that parents should not leave the important tasks of language and literacy development to schools alone. As parents are a primary resource, both directly teaching your children and partnering with their schools is very important.

The question is often asked, "What about computer software to teach reading?" Computers can support activities done at home and school, but cannot replace reading and writing with your child.

Many parents begin reading to their children shortly after they are born and continue to read to them as they grow up. This is excellent, since research shows us that role modeling is one of the keys to learning to read. This learning begins when parents speak, laugh, and sing with their children, since spoken language is learned from speaking and listening. Studies have shown that this verbal interaction with children will help them to succeed in school. Conversely, children who do not hear a lot of talk and who are not encouraged to talk themselves often have problems learning to read. Once the process of learning spoken language has begun, children then begin to understand written language when they hear adults read

to them or see adults reading newspapers, magazines, and books for themselves.

"What if English is not my native language?"

Read to your children in your native language: reading is reading! Ask your librarian for picture books, even in English, that you can share with your child by simply looking at and talking about the pictures. Tell family stories or favorite folktales to your children. Check in your community for English as a Second Language classes.

Kindergarten

Learning at School

The Arkansas Department of Education enforces certain standards teachers must follow when instructing children in the Language Arts. Here is the condensed version of the Language Arts list, provided by the Arkansas State Department of Education as "Refrigerator Standards." At the end of kindergarten your child should be able to:

- print first and last name
- recognize and identify capital and lower case letters
- know the parts of a book (front, back, title page and author)
- recite simple nursery rhymes and finger plays
- make rhyming words from spoken words
- learn to read from left to right and top to

bottom

- know that letters make words, words make sentences, and sentences make stories
- recognize some of the most common words by sight (the, a, I, you, my)
- use the beginning sounds and some high frequency words to write simple stories
- speak in complete sentences

Learning at Home

Talk with and listen to your child as you eat together, shop for groceries, ride in a vehicle. Ask questions that are open-ended, such as, "How did you use a new letter in class today?" Write down what she says and read it back to her. This helps her understand that anything spoken can be written.

Have your child use her imagination to make up stories to tell you. Ask questions to encourage her to add to the stories. Tell stories about your childhood. Make a story out of something that happened to you.

Your conversations expose your child to more words and expressions, as well as more chances to practice and receive approval. Research shows that the size of a young child's vocabulary is a strong predictor of their ability to read, and that children with large vocabularies tend to become good readers.

Reading aloud is also a great tool: one of the many reasons being that the vocabulary of

the average children's book is greater than that found on prime-time TV. Read to your child every day for fifteen to thirty minutes, from books she finds interesting. Have younger children sit on your lap when you read, as they will want to see the pictures.

Look over the book before you read it aloud: show the cover to your child, read the title and author, ask what she sees on the cover. Sometimes you can first look at all the pictures and ask her what she thinks will happen in the story. Read slowly and with expression—don't be afraid to have fun with the characters. Your enthusiasm about reading can deepen your child's interest in learning to read and studies have shown that positive parent attitudes towards reading and writing help children become more successful readers.

Point to the pictures and say the names of the objects. As you read, follow the words with your finger so that your child learns to follow from left to right and turn the page. It thrills a child to substitute her name for the name of a character in a story. Ask your child questions as you read, such as "What do you think will happen next?" or let her ask you questions as you read (be patient). All interaction helps the child learn the reading process.

Limit the amount and kind of television your child watches. Children of all ages generally watch as much TV in one day as they read

for fun in an entire week. Overall, children under 13 spend 90 minutes a day in front of the TV, one quarter of their free time. Check out educational videos from the library to watch together and discuss with your children. Choose books over TV.

Kindergarten Activities

- Have your child identify and name the letters of the alphabet. Make an alphabet book with your child. Have her draw pictures or cut pictures out of a magazine; children also love to use old photos. Paste each picture or photo into the alphabet book. With your child, write above the picture the first letter of the word that stands for the object or person in the picture (for example, C is for cat, T is for top, and so on).
- Encourage your child to spell and write. Let her create a book using stickers. Place one sticker on each page (large index cards work well); if it is a cat sticker help her write above it, "This is a cat." When children create a book, they are learning to spell and write, and will want to read the book many times.



This is a cat.

Read many stories with rhyming words and lines that repeat; these are important because of the repetition of the sounds of

the language. Invite your child to join in on the repeated or rhyming parts. As she reads along with you, point to each word. Don't be concerned if your child has memorized the poem or story! Teachers say this is fine: the point is to learn the letters and sounds.

- Visit the public library. Let your child have her own library card. Go for story time or when activities are happening—you can watch your local newspaper for dates and events. Consider giving books or magazines as gifts to your children.

- Songs, rhyming games, nursery rhymes are ways children learn about language and sounds. For example, sing the Teddy Bear Song:

Teddy bear, Teddy bear, turn around.

Teddy bear, Teddy bear, touch the ground.

Teddy bear, Teddy bear, show your shoe.

Teddy bear, Teddy bear, that will do.

First Grade

In first grade, language and literacy skills combine to turn children into real readers and writers. Teachers have a very complete list of standards to fulfill in the first grade; here is the condensed "Refrigerator Standards" list. Your child should be able to:

- read predictable books and poems accurately, with expression and attention to punctuation
- identify unknown words when reading by

sounding out the word, looking at the pictures, and thinking about what would make sense in the story

- retell a story, including the beginning, middle, and end
- write upper- and lower-case letters legibly, using correct spacing
- write three or four related sentences in a paragraph using correct spelling for easy words and phonetic spelling for unknown words
- use wordbooks, picture dictionaries, and print in the classroom to edit spelling in their writings
- use capital letters correctly (I, first word in sentence, names of people)
- use correct punctuation (period, question mark, commas, apostrophes in contractions)
- tell a story in correct sequence

Parents must realize that children enter first grade (the point where reading really starts in school) with a wide range of reading levels. Some children seem to pick up information quickly and read with ease, while other students have to work very hard at reading. Teachers recognize this and adjust for individual students. If you suspect that your child is having reading difficulty, do not hesitate to act. Talk to the teacher about your concerns and check with the reading specialist at the school. Listen to the experts but also listen to your intuition. Reading is the foundation of all school success. A child that appears unmotivated could be a discouraged child

who needs special attention. Always encourage your child to read at home, as this reinforces what he is learning at school.

Parents are often concerned when English is the child's or family's second language. Remember that reading is what is important: parents should use their primary language to read to their child if they do not feel comfortable reading in English. Children need to be comfortable with their first language in the early years. But when they begin to learn a second language, English, it's important to remember that bilingual language development may differ from single language development: there may be a lag in both languages or the child may switch back and forth between languages. Eventually, though, the child will learn to distinguish between the languages and catch up.

The top three areas in which you can help your first grader at home are...

1. Help him learn the relationships between letters and sounds. Work together to point out the relationships between the letters and sounds involved in the things he is learning at school. On cards, write words that contain those letter-sound relationships, then take turns choosing a card and blending the sounds to make the word.

c	at	c at is cat
b	at	b at is bat
h	at	h at is hat

Next, use the word in a sentence. "The cat is in the hat." Also ask him to point out the letter-sound relationships in all of the things you are reading together at home—books, calendars, labels, magazines, and newspapers.

2. Help your child to spell and write. Say a word your child knows and have him repeat the word. Then help him write the word the way he hears it (the spelling does not have to be correct): this is called phonetics. Write a word on paper and cut the letters apart, then mix the letters and have him spell the word by putting the letters in order. Purchase magnetic letters and keep them on the refrigerator for him to practice with the letters. When riding in the car, keep the magnet letters in bags and take along a small cookie sheet, so he can form words on the cookie sheet. Some other useful tools are: magic slates, magna-doodles or small dry-erase boards—anything that allows him to practice what he is learning.

Poetry books are of high interest for children. "A is for APPLE. BANANA starts with B. C is for COOKIE. Which ones are good for me?" These verses play with sounds and language and also utilize the five senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell), allowing your child to connect strongly with what he is reading and saying.

As you are reading with your child, point out words that have similar spellings, such as 'hop' and 'pop'. Ask him to write similar

words: for example, 'top', 'mop', 'cop'. Play rhyming word games, "How many words can you say that rhyme with 'fox'? With 'Bill'?" Have your child help you write your grocery list, or list places to go on errands. Write the list in front of him so he sees the connection between writing and daily activities. Write notes to him and put them in his lunch or in little places around the house where he can find them.

3. Help your child build vocabulary, knowledge of the world, and comprehension. When you read a book, stop often and talk about the meaning of the book. Help him make connections between his life and what is happening in the story. Ask him about the characters in the book. Encourage him to ask questions. Ask him to explain in his own words what the book is about. Before you come to the end of the story, ask him how he thinks the story will end.

Write a story together. For example, write, "Once upon a time, there were two _____. They told their _____ they were going to look for _____." When you are finished writing, your child can draw pictures to go along with the words. Continue to visit the public library. Let him browse the shelves for the book he wants to check out: teachers stress the point that if you want him to be a motivated reader, let him make the selection. Set an example by checking out books yourself; let him see you reading for pleasure.

Start a special shelf at home for books you are reading together and books checked out at the library. Create a special reading area that is quiet and inviting. Look at the classroom and see the special area the teacher has set aside for quiet reading.

Second Grade

Here are the "Refrigerator Standards" for second grade in the Language Arts. Your child should be able to:

- read familiar texts with only one or two errors per 100 words
- begin to read short chapter books
- identify unknown words using letter sounds, complex words, prefixes, suffixes, and endings
- write stories with a beginning, middle, and end in correct order
- use capital letters correctly (names of people, places, days of the week, months, initials, greeting and closing of a letter)
- use correct punctuation (period, question mark, exclamation mark, periods in initials, commas in a date)
- write with correct subject-verb agreement (he is, they are)
- use synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms
- follow multiple directions

Your second grader is becoming more aware of herself as a reader. Your role is to help her read and write with greater ease and

confidence. Praise her reading and writing efforts, and correct her errors only if she asks for help. If she becomes bored with a book, let her stop reading: you want her to become a smarter, more independent reader who is willing to take risks.

The top three things to do at home are:

1. Use familiar reading materials to help your child develop fluency (the ease at which your child reads and understands).
2. Find opportunities for your child to spell and write.
3. Help your child develop her vocabulary and comprehension of the written and spoken word.

Talk about new words your child has read or heard. Ask her to make up sentences with these words or simply use the words in conversation. Help your child use the dictionary or thesaurus to check the meaning of new words she reads or hears and to find synonyms for those words. Remember that you are the reading role model in the home.

Help her become aware of prefixes, suffixes, and root words. You might say "Can you think of any other words that have the word 'close' in them?" (Some possible answers are 'closeable', 'closet', and 'closely'. Or, "Here is the word 'discover'. What other words do you know that start with 'dis-?'" (Some possible answers are

'disappear', 'disappoint', and 'disbelief'.) Show your child how to use context—the sentences, words, and pictures around an unfamiliar word—to figure out what the word means.

Second graders enjoy reading fiction and nonfiction. Help her relate the events in the book to events in her life. Read a fiction or nonfiction book together: ask questions about the characters in the fiction book or discuss the information in a nonfiction book. It is suggested that children read nonfiction as well as fiction for strong academic growth. Let your child select the books she is interested in; remember that the goal is for her to read and understand. Ask her to tell you in her own words what the book is about, why she likes a certain character or plot.

Read for information. Show her how to read a map, graphs, or charts found in books or newspapers. Show her how to read directions, such as a recipe or steps to complete a craft.

Have her create a journal. This can be a daily recording of events or a "dialogue journal" the two of you keep, in which you "talk" to each other by writing notes.

Third Grade

According to the "Refrigerator Standards"

for the third grade, your child should be able to:

- read longer selections and chapter books independently
- summarize major ideas in stories or informational texts
- distinguish the main idea and supporting details, cause and effect, and fact and opinion
- write a selection of two paragraphs with a main idea and details
- use appropriate format in writing (margins, titles, indenting)
- revise and edit own writing;
- use a variety of resources to locate information (maps, charts, graphs, diagrams, dictionaries, encyclopedia)
- write a variety of forms (story, poem, play, essay)
- give and follow multiple-step directions

By third grade most children are reading different types of books well by themselves. Reading should feel pleasurable and worthwhile to your child. As a parent your role is to encourage him to keep good reading habits and take responsibility for his own learning. Create a space in your home where he can comfortably read and write. Provide reference materials such as dictionaries as well as basic school supplies. Should you continue to read aloud to him? Yes! Children of all ages love to hear stories read aloud. Try reading from the newspaper, magazines, and chapter books. The benefit to him is that this increases his listening

comprehension and vocabulary. Ask his teacher or librarian to suggest books appropriate for him. A reminder to dads, uncles, and grandfathers: you need to read to him too! Why? A recent study reported that 40% of fathers do not read to their children. Men bring something new to reading as they share their experiences or interpretations. Be a positive role model and show him that reading has something to offer everybody.

After reading a book, ask lots of questions: "Why do you think she is acting that way?" "Which characters do you like best/least?" "What part of the book is funny?" "Can you think of a different ending?" "Would you share this book with a friend?" "What new information did you learn?"

The Value of Parents

The desire to learn is a key to your child's reading success. As a parent you can help your child want to learn in a way no one else can! One of the ways you do this is by your active involvement in reading: enjoying and modeling reading yourself, reading with him or her, talking and storytelling together, discussing what you've read together. Above all, praise your child for his or her efforts! Remember that learning to read is built on a foundation of language skills that children start at birth—enjoy the process!