

Straight Talk About Literacy

FAQ: What is the largest predictor of early literacy success?

Answer: For anyone out there wondering what the largest predictor of early literacy success is —look no further than the alphabet. Successful reading is absolutely dependent on a child's mastery of letter/sound correspondence. The higher the rate of mastery, the greater the success. Early reading experiences require children to blend letters together to form words. Children who do not readily recognize upper and lower case letters with their sounds cannot succeed when asked to sound out several letters together.

Reading Research:

* Juel (1988) Allington, R., (1998) A poor reader at the end of the first grade has a 0.88 chance of remaining a poor reader even by the end of the fourth grade. Pikulski, J., 1994 Research shows that correcting reading problems beyond the second grade have a very low success rate.

FAQ: At what age should children recognize their letters and know their alphabet sounds?

Answer: Ages four and five have been documented as the best time to teach individual alphabet letter recognition and sound correspondence. See the research collected by the National Reading Panel in Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction.

FAQ: How can I teach a child that has a short attention span or isn't that interested?

Answer: One great and painless way to teach alphabet sight/sound correspondence is to purchase the Leap Frog video/dvd series called:

Letter Factory
Talking Words Factory
Code Word Caper

Children with short attention spans or who are hard to engage in alphabet activities will love the Doctor Seuss type animation. These videos have also helped children who had to repeat first grade.

FAQ: What happens if my child starts grade one and doesn't know his letters and sounds?

Answer: If your child doesn't know his alphabet letters and sounds when starting first grade, he/she is at a high risk for learning to read. Purchase the Letter Factory video as soon as possible. Start cutting out pictures from magazines and have your child match them to initial letter sounds on a daily basis.

FAQ: What does phonics mean?

Answer:

Six Phonetic Instructional Approaches:

1. **Synthetic Phonics** - changing letters or combinations of two letters into sounds and blending them together to decode words.*
2. **Phonics through Spelling** - changing sounds into letters to write words*
3. **Analytic Phonics** - identifying the whole word followed by analyzing the letters and corresponding sounds*
4. **Embedded Phonics** - learning what a word says by: its shape, initial and final letters, contextual clues in the sentence, and picture clues (300 words per year can be taught using this whole word system).
5. **Analogy Phonics** - learning new words by using words they already know which share a part of the old word (especially those which rhyme) e.g. time, lime (word families)
6. **On-set Rime Phonics** - learning rime units followed by words which have the rime unit embedded. e.g. eat, heat, feat, b-eat-er

FAQ: What are the hardest alphabet letter sounds to master?

Answer: Short vowel sounds are very challenging. Mixing them up can alter individual words which changes the meaning of sentences significantly. e.g. misreading "bat" as "bit"

It's worth practicing them on a daily basis until mastery is achieved.

Short Vowel Tips:

"A" is the crybaby letter. He cries "Aaaa!" To enunciate properly: smile, open your mouth and keep your teeth **more** than a finger-width apart.

"E" is the happy letter. To enunciate properly: smile, and keep your teeth a finger-width apart.

"I" is the sick puppy dog letter. He isn't feeling well and cries "Iiii!" To enunciate properly: smile, and close your teeth a **fingernail-width** apart

"O" is the doctor letter. Open up your mouth to form an oval and say "aw!" (Squeeze cheeks)

"U" is the muscleman letter. He is trying to lift his heavy weight up. To enunciate properly: pretend you are saying "up" and leave off the "p".

FAQ: What if my child decodes, but doesn't comprehend even after repeated readings?

Answer: Some comprehension difficulties which can be addressed by the parent/teacher. Read the books Visualizing and Verbalizing by Nanci Bell and I read it but I don't get it by Cris Tovani.

*Get an assessment from an educational psychologist. It will cost around \$500.00, but then the school system will have the documentation it requires to respond with the special help your child needs.

FAQ: What is the difference between decoding and comprehending?

Answer: Decoding is being able to read words, but comprehending is being able to understand the meaning behind the words. Some children can do one, but not the other.

Teaching Decoding and Making Comprehension Connections:

- 1. Connection One:** Reading is about **making connections** between what you already know and something new.
- 2. Connection Two:** words in books are the **same** words we all use to speak with. Words are read by making and joining alphabet letter sounds together. Written words are separated by spaces to show where one word ends and the next begins.
- 3. Connection Three:** It is critical to know what words mean. If you don't know what a word means it is very important to find out by asking an adult to explain. Good readers always ask questions about what they don't know or understand. If you don't know what a word means you won't be able to understand the story or the new information you are trying to learn.
- 4. Connection Four:** the words you learn to read are found in **many** books.
- 5. Connection Five:** reading is about making pictures in your mind for the purposes of either learning new information or being entertained.
- 6. Connection Six:** the words you learn to write are the same words you learn to speak and read.

FAQ: What skill set does reading comprehension involve?

Answer: There are eleven major skill sets involved in comprehending text.

1. Setting a Clear Purpose for Reading

Identify the Motives:

Teacher wants/needs students to...

Author wants reader to...

Students wants/needs to...

Book Character wants/needs to...

2. Stimulating Background Knowledge

(Separate Useful from Irrelevant)

*This is like....something I experienced, viewed, read, heard about.

*This is not like...

3. Predicting: I think that...

In fiction, find the motive and predict according to story patterns (circle, contest, stuck, switch, copycat, transformation)

4. Notice and Utilize Text Organization

*headings, subheadings, italics, bold print, charts, maps, paragraphs, key words, diagrams, pictures,

5. Text Purpose

(Author's Motive: The Author wants the Reader to....)

a. What Paragraphs (narrative, descriptive, definition)

b. Why Paragraphs (persuasive)

c. How Paragraphs (contrast/compare, instructions)

6. New Vocabulary: especially Nouns & Verbs (locate and define within context)

7. Self-Questioning

(I don't understand...what, why, when, how, where, who)

8. Concept Development (This is like... This is not like...This makes me picture...)

9. Verbal Summarization (sequence/order the information orally in point form)

10. Memory Devices (create a mental picture, summarize material using diagrams, use mnemonic devices such as acrostics, key words, songs, raps, rhymes, poems, numeration to sequence, organize, retain and review information)

11. Give Reading Choices (Assignments that involve choices engage the reader more effectively)