

Building Readers®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

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Educational Service Unit 10

Decoding words a mystery?

In order for kids to read well, they need to “decode” (figure out) words—kind of like detectives. But decoding is often a mystery to parents. To help with it, build your child’s:

- **Vocabulary.** The more words he knows, the more he’ll recognize in print. Make a point to use new words often.
- **Grammar skills.** Play games similar to the classic “Mad Libs.” Write a story and then remove words here and there. Let your child fill in the blanks with funny nouns, adjectives and verbs.
- **Understanding of sounds.** Create a wacky new word that uses common sounds, such as “chouchy.” Help your child sound out its parts. Make up a definition—and other wacky words!



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Source: Edwin S. Ellis, “How Now Brown Cow: Phoneme Awareness Activities,” Reading Rockets, www.readingrockets.org/article/388.

“No one’s born being good at all things. You become good at things through hard work ... You might have to read something a few times before you understand it. You definitely have to do a few drafts of a paper before it’s good enough to hand in.”

—President Barack Obama

Ingenious ideas make reading more likely

For many kids, “leisure reading” isn’t as easy as picking up a book. They may struggle with reading or simply prefer other activities. To make reading more tempting:

- **Address reading problems.** If reading is difficult for your child, work with your child’s teacher to find out why. Solving the problem will ease reading stress.
- **Read aloud with enthusiasm.** Studies show that reading aloud to kids improves their skills. Then independent reading becomes easier for them.
- **Visit the library often.** Check out appealing books, including audio books. Play reading games on the library computer. And compliment your child when she reads!

Source: Peggy Gisler, Ed.S. and Marge Eberts, Ed.S., “Top 10 Ways to Improve Reading Skills,” FamilyEducation, <http://school.familyeducation.com/top-10-ways/improve-reading-skills/38329.html>.

Host a reading performance



Here’s a way to build your child’s reading confidence and *fluency* (ease of reading):

Have your child act out her favorite story. She’ll probably need to read it several times to remember the details. She might even memorize a few lines. Encourage her to speak with enthusiasm. Don’t forget to applaud to show how much you enjoyed your child’s performance!

Source: Esmé Raji Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading*, ISBN: 1-56512-308-5 (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, www.algonquin.com).

Read as a family—online



Looking for a website that teaches the whole family about reading?

Try PBS KIDS Raising Readers. At <http://pbskids.org/read>, you’ll find games for your child, like Synonym Sam’s Lab, and tips for ways to get your family reading together.

When your child is home sick from school, read together!



When kids are absent from school, they miss all kinds of lessons. Doing makeup work helps afterwards, but meanwhile, you can read! After all, reading skills help in every school subject. At home, your child can:

- **Read** aloud or listen to you read to him.
- **Listen** to audio books.
- **Write** down stories—and then read them with you.

These activities are both relaxing and productive.

Prepare for your child's textbook challenges

By third grade, many students lug home textbooks to read. Just the sight of these giant volumes can be intimidating! Some common complaints—and helpful solutions—include:

- **“This is too hard!”** Look over the assignment with your child. If it's long, divide it into parts, tackling them one at a time (perhaps even taking some breaks). Explain complicated information in simpler words. You might also find easy-to-read books on the same subject.
- **“This is boring!”** To build interest, suggest that your child draw pictures of information or teach you some facts. Another idea: Have your child write down questions to answer while reading. See if your child can pass his own “test.”

Source: “Having a hard time with reading your textbook?” Lewis Center for Educational Research, <http://hegel.lewiscenter.org/users/mhuffine/subprojects/Department/ls.php>.

Variety keeps your child interested in reading

Make sure that your child is reading a variety of books, both fiction and nonfiction, on a daily basis. To help your child get the most out of reading, have her:

- **Predict** the next actions in the story.
- **Take a break** to summarize and clarify what has happened so far.
- **Continue** to ask questions while reading.



Gerty Images/Photodisc

- **Visualize** the characters, setting and events.
- **Read** with a friend for fun.



Q: Our family's New Year's resolution was to read together every day. But I'm worried this routine will get boring. Can you suggest some fresh ideas?

A: Congratulations on choosing such a worthwhile goal! It's important to make reading fun—not a “chore.” When you need to mix things up, try activities such as:

- **Read in a new location.** Try reading at the breakfast table, or bring books somewhere silly, such as the mall.
- **Add sound effects.** “The car peeled out of the parking lot—*vroom!*” Or replace animal names with the sounds they make (“The *oink!* squeezed under the fence.”).

Do you have a question about reading? Email readingadvisor@parent-institute.com.



For lower elementary readers:

George Speaks by Dick King-Smith (Roaring Brook Press). Did Laura just hear her baby brother speak? She did! But when—and how—will adults find out what he says?

Who Loves Me? by Patricia MacLachlan (HarperCollins). A child wonders aloud about being loved, faults and all. A wise cat reassures her as she falls asleep.

For upper elementary readers:

Just Grace by Charise Mericle Harper (Houghton Mifflin). Being in third grade isn't easy. But “Just Grace”—one of three Graces in her class—makes it fun and funny.

Clementine's Letter by Sarah Pennypacker (Hyperion). Mr. D'Matz knows just how to handle Clementine's energetic personality. But a substitute might ruin this special year! Will Clementine do *anything* to get Mr. D'Matz back?

Inventing songs can help kids remember information



Ever had a song you can't get out of your head?

This annoyance actually comes in handy! Next time your child has to memorize information he reads, turn it into an amusing song. Sing it over and over. It may even help to record it. Play it while your child is falling asleep at night—or any other time he wants to listen.

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Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

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Writer: Susan O'Brien.

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