

# Concepts of print (emergent literacy)

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/ecliteracy/emergentliteracy/Pages/conceptsofprint.aspx>

The awareness of how print works including emerging knowledge about books, print, and written language, and how we use them.

## Concepts of print in English

Concepts of print can be described as a "set of rules" that are followed by readers and writers so that the text can be understood in the intended way. Concepts of print demonstrate to children the logistics of reading and writing, which allow the processes of literacy to take place.

For example:

- understanding that print relays a message
- knowledge about book orientation and directionality of print
- book handling (e.g. holding a book right way up, turning pages)
- emerging knowledge of the alphabet
- awareness of books, pages, words and letters.

Children who are learning about books and reading need to know these concepts so that they are able to understand the rules and begin to understand the message.

## Examples of concepts of print

The main understandings or elements of concepts of print for English include the concept of text, concept of book, the idea of directionality, mechanical features, and alphabet knowledge. Concepts of print are important for emergent reading and writing (Clay, 2013; Justice & Ezell, 2004; Piasta et al., 2016).

From a very young age children engage in writing and drawing to represent real things (Bradford and Wyse, 2010). Children can distinguish between drawing, writing, and numbers based on their understanding of the concepts they represent (Lancaster, 2007; Wells Rowe & Neitzel, 2010).

Using verbal and non-verbal cues to direct children's attention during reading affects their later print knowledge and literacy skills (Justice & Ezell, 2004).

Similarly, calling children's attention to the sound structure of words during reading promotes their phonological awareness (Piasta et al., 2016). Shared reading with embedded vocabulary instruction also helps children to make meaning from print, especially when reading is coupled with extension activities (Piasta et al., 2016).

### Concept of text

- Understanding that print relays a message

### Concept of book

- Book handling - holding the book the right way up
- Front cover, back cover
- Title, author, illustrator, blurb

### Directionality

- Beginning at the front of the book, ending at the back
- Turning pages left to right
- Concept of top and bottom of a page - beginning at the top of the page and ending at the bottom of the page
- Reading pages from left to right
- Reading words from left to right
- Return sweep - reading left to right then sweep back to the beginning of the following line of text.

## Mechanics

- Knowledge that words are separated by spaces
- Recognising the difference between symbols including, alphabetic letters vs. numerals vs. punctuation
- The purpose of punctuation and capital letters
- Understanding that most printed words are read the same way each time (e.g. the letters w-o-u-l-d will always say 'would').

## Alphabet knowledge

Alphabet knowledge is also considered a concepts of print component. This includes:

- knowledge of the names of each letter
- knowing the order of the alphabet
- recognition of each upper and lower case letter
- knowing the difference between letters and words.

The metalinguistic awareness of knowing the difference between a "word" and a "letter" is also important for alphabet knowledge. This is because children need these metalinguistic terms to talk about the concepts they are grasping, as they begin to recognise familiar words and letters.

It should be noted that children are not required to have an extensive knowledge of the sounds that letters make (phonics) before transition to primary school. However, being able to recognise and name letters (alphabet knowledge) is a very useful emergent literacy skill, encouraged in Language and Emergent Literacy Learners. The development of alphabet knowledge before school (along with phonological awareness and oral language) is an important predictor of early reading success.

## Links between concepts of print, phonological awareness and phonics

Part of the mechanics of concepts of print includes the recognition of letters. Once children have a grasp of the concept of letters and their names, then the letter shapes can be associated with their sounds.

Phonological awareness is the knowledge of how the sound system (phonology) works (e.g. syllables, rhyming, individual speech sounds in words).

While alphabet knowledge (part of concepts of print) is the ability to recognise and name upper and lowercase letters, phonics is the knowledge of sound-letter patterns: what sounds letters make.

## General ideas

Build a print rich environment:

- use labels, alphabet posters, word walls, reading corners

Incorporate print (with images) in everyday situations, including routines, transitions, mealtimes, and nappy changes:

- use labels, posters, signs, instructions, recipes
- Provide print-based play materials to enhance planned and spontaneous play:
- use labels, pretend money, name tags, signs, newspapers, books, lists, menus, diagrams, directions
- Use a poem or a song that children are familiar with and highlight the features of a text in different colours. This leads to discussion about the purpose of these features. For example:
- capital letters (highlight green)
- full stops (highlight yellow)
- Read a storybook to model and/or identify features of a text while reading, for example differences between words and letters, directionality, return sweep, front and back cover of book..
- Read books with different font types/sizes, bold, exclamation mark, question mark and capital letters.

## Ideas for alphabet knowledge

- Make letter shapes out of playdough, clay, or other materials
- Use magnetic letters (or writing) for recognising initial sounds of objects
- Bingo
- Go fish with alphabet cards
- Upper/lower case letter matching
- Early handwriting experiences - letter formation
- Alphabet soup
- Circle time - recognising cards or 3D letters from a 'mystery bag'
- What am I drawing? - draw a letter on each other's back; children need to guess the correct letter
- Read a familiar poem or story - highlight one or more familiar words, letter or letters of the alphabet within the story

## References

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## Concepts of print

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/literacy/readingviewing/Pages/litfocusconceptsofprint.aspx>

Concepts of Print refers to the awareness of 'how print works'. This includes the knowledge of the concept of what books, print, and written language are, and how they function. It encompasses a number of understandings that allow the reading process to take place including:

- understanding that print conveys a message
- knowledge about book orientation and directionality of print, and
- distinction between sentences, words and letters, and
- knowledge of the alphabetic system and the difference between letters and words.

## Understandings/elements of concepts of print in the English language

The main understandings or elements of Concepts of Print for English include the concept of text (how a text conveys a message), concept of book (how a book works, how different texts are organised), the idea of directionality (that English books are read from left to right, top to bottom), and other mechanical features (spacing, punctuation, the difference between letters, numerals, and other symbols).

### Components of concepts of print

Concepts of print are important for emergent and early reading and writing (Clay, 1993).

#### Concepts of text

Understanding that print relays a message

#### Concept of book

- Book handling - holding the book the right way up
- Front cover, back cover
- Title, author, illustrator, blurb

## Directionality

- Beginning at the front of the book, ending at the back
- Turning pages right to left
- Concept of top and bottom of a page - beginning at the top of the page and ending at the bottom of the page
- Reading pages from left to right
- Reading words from left to right
- Return sweep - reading left to right then sweep back to the beginning of the following line of text
- Concept of first, middle, last
- Word-to-word matching

## Mechanics

- Knowledge that words are separated by spaces
- Recognising the difference between symbols including, alphabetic letters vs numerals vs punctuation
- The purpose of punctuation and capital letters
- Understanding that most printed words are read the same way each time (e.g. w-o-u-l-d will always be 'would')

Through exposure to shared book reading in early childhood, and through modelled, shared, and guided reading in the early years, children develop concepts of print.

## Examples to support the development of Concepts of Print

Concepts of print should be taught through text within the literacy lesson, for example by:

- reading a poem or a song that students are familiar with and highlighting features of the text - e.g. capital letters, full stops and discussing the purpose of these features
  - reading a storybook and modelling and/or identifying features of text while reading, for example differences between words and letters, directionality, return sweep, front and back cover of book etc.
  - reading books with different font types/sizes, bold, exclamation mark, question mark and capital letters
- Building a print rich classroom environment - using labels, alphabet posters, word walls, reading corners also contributes to the development of concepts of print.

## Alphabet knowledge

Alphabet knowledge is also considered a Concepts of Print component. This includes knowledge of the names of each letter, the order of the alphabet, recognition of each upper and lower case letter, and knowing the difference between letters and words.

Alphabet Knowledge includes recognising all the letters of the alphabet by name. This includes recognising upper and lower case letters. The metalinguistic awareness of knowing the difference between a "word" and a "letter" is also important for alphabet knowledge.

## Relationship with phonics

While alphabet knowledge is the ability to recognise and name upper and lower case letters, phonics is the knowledge of sound-letter patterns, that is the sounds that letters make.

As there are 44 sounds (phonemes) , but only 26 letters, many letters make more than one sound. Also, letters are used to form graphemes, which could consist of one letter (graph), two letters (digraph), three letters (trigraph) or four letters (quadgraph).

An important first step to learn the relationships between sounds is to have well developed Alphabet Knowledge: that is to know what each letter is called, and to be able to recognise these letters quickly and reliably.

Once students have strong alphabet knowledge they are able to apply this knowledge to learn about the sounds that letters and letter patterns (graphemes) make, and how phonemes map onto graphemes, i.e. phonics.

### **Relationship with phonological awareness**

While alphabet knowledge is the ability to recognise and name upper and lower case letters, Phonological awareness refers to the awareness of sounds, rhymes, and syllables within words. Phonemic awareness (a critical subset of phonological awareness) refers to the ability to identify, segment, blend, delete and manipulate individual sounds. Alphabet knowledge is related to phonological awareness as children need to understand that words are made up of syllables, onset/rime, and individual sounds, and that letters of the alphabet are used to represent these sounds, as graphemes.

### **Examples of alphabet knowledge activities**

Contextualised teaching of alphabetic knowledge can occur through reading a fiction or non-fiction text to, for example:

- introduce the sound and the letter in focus, writing the letter before reading the text
- highlight particular letter/letters within the text
- identify initial sounds of words and distinguish upper and lower case letters
- recognise consonant digraphs/trigraphs
- discuss the different sounds that a letter can make from examples in a text
- find words that contain different consonant digraphs e.g. /sh/, /ch/, /th/ -lunchbox, shoes, should, the, that
- compile words or letters from a text into lists to make games that will promote multiple exposure

## **How does concepts of print relate to phonological awareness and phonics?**

Phonological awareness allows students to hear the differences between words and sounds. Concepts of Print includes the recognition of symbols as letter shapes. Once this understanding is established, the letter shapes can be associated with sounds, connecting the visual, auditory and oral systems.

## **References**

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