



# RAISING READY READERS

## The Key? Start Early and Practice Often

**Long before they enter school and begin formal instruction, children can and should begin developing the basic language skills they need to become readers. These pre-literacy skills include letters, sounds, speaking, listening and understanding that the printed word has meaning.**

Researchers agree that it's never too early to begin reading to your child. Imagine what happens when you hold your baby in your lap and read to them. You point to the pictures. Your voice changes tone as you describe each one. Your face reacts as you turn the page and see something different. In those moments, you've taken your child to the next step beyond talking. You've shown them that words and pictures connect. You've started your child on the path to understanding and enjoying books.

Even after your child starts kindergarten, you should still set aside time to read each day. Prompt your child

to identify words that are all around them, such as on billboards or labels or instructions. This will help your child understand that reading is the gateway to experiencing the world.

By age six or seven, most children are reading. However, some take longer than others and some need extra help. Don't consider the various milestones you read about in books or online to be hard and fast rules. But do know that giving your child the right kind of help in their early years can prevent reading difficulties later in life.

## Raising a Successful Reader

### ■ Teaching the Alphabet

Recognizing the letters of the alphabet is one of the strongest predictors of reading success for children entering school. To help foster this ability in your preschooler, practice letters as you go about the day. Ask your child to look for certain letters on signs as you run errands. Draw them from play dough or shaving cream. Search the Internet for "alphabet games" and you'll find all kinds of ideas for making learning the alphabet both fun and effective.

### ■ Building Vocabulary

Research shows that by five years of age, most children have learned between 3,000 and 5,000 words. They certainly haven't done this through memorization. Most vocabulary comes from listening. Children first learn the words and word combinations they hear repeated most often in conversations or books. The context helps them understand what words mean and how they are used.

The best way to help your child expand their vocabulary is to provide a word-rich environment—reading many different kinds of books with them, discussing those books, and exposing them to conversations on diverse topics with diverse people.





### ■ Focusing on Phonics

In order for your child to understand what they read, they must be able to read quickly and automatically, without stumbling over words. Phonics, the relationship between written letters and spoken sounds, supports that process. When your kindergartener learns that the letter B has the sound of /b/ or your second-grader learns that “tion” sounds like /shun/, they are learning phonics.

Read with your child each day. When they stumble on certain words, have your child sound them out. Point out words that begin with the same sound and sing songs with words that rhyme.

### ■ Understanding How Books Work

Even before children can read themselves, they start to understand the conventions of reading by watching you—left to right, top of the page to bottom, sentences are made of words, words are made of letters. When your child is very young, run your fingers under the words as you read. Pause at the end of a page and ask them to help you turn it.

Point out print in many different contexts, so your child understands that words aren’t just found in books. Show your child how words appear differently depending on where you are, like on menus at restaurants or signs at the park.

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## Understanding the Bigger Picture

At the end of day, we want our children to read so they can navigate and enjoy life. So don’t get so caught up in teaching your child individual letters or words that you forget the bigger picture—meaning.

From the earliest age, children instinctively look for meaning in the things they see and hear. This serves them well when it comes to reading comprehension. To improve their ability to understand and interpret what they read, ask what, why, where and how questions while reading stories. For example, ask why a character took a specific action. Or ask your child what they think might happen next. Encourage your child to ask you questions whenever they don’t understand something.

After hearing and discussing many books over time, children start to learn that stories have a beginning, middle and end, characters, a setting and a plot. They will often indicate that a story doesn’t make sense if it’s



missing one or more of these elements, even if they can’t yet explain why. Asking your child to compare characters or settings from one story to another further develops their comprehension ability.



## Connecting Reading to Writing

Reading and writing go hand in hand. As your child is learning one, they are learning the other at the same time. Find opportunities early on to foster this connection.

- ✓ Encourage your child to draw pictures about books or experiences. Drawing is great preparation for writing, because it develops the muscles needed to write and the ability to represent ideas.
- ✓ Help your child compose a note to a relative or friend. They can dictate as they watch you write and, when they get older, look for familiar words in the note.
- ✓ When your child first starts writing words, don't worry about the spelling. Instead, praise your child for their efforts.
- ✓ Have your child write labels for the things they use every day, such as shoes, bags or crayons.

## Making Reading a Daily Part of Life

- ✓ Establish a reading time, even if it is only 10 minutes a day.
- ✓ Encourage activities that require reading, such as cooking (reading a recipe) or identifying an interesting animal (using a reference book).
- ✓ Visit the library often. Let your child choose their own books.

- ✓ Create a special place in your child's room for books.
- ✓ If your child has a computer or tablet, make reading one of the primary activities they do during screen time.



And finally, make sure to demonstrate by example that reading is an enjoyable, valuable and regular part of your own daily life.

## Reading Resources

**PTA Reading Programs:** [pta.org/programs](https://pta.org/programs)

**Reading Is Fundamental:** [RIF.org](https://RIF.org)

**NEA Read Across America Program:** [nea.org/grants/886.htm](https://nea.org/grants/886.htm)

**Reading Rockets:** [ReadingRockets.org](https://ReadingRockets.org)

**First Book:** [firstbook.org](https://firstbook.org) **#1000BlackGirlsBooks:** [grassrootscommunityfoundation.org/1000-black-girl-books-resource-guide/](https://grassrootscommunityfoundation.org/1000-black-girl-books-resource-guide/)

## Other Resources

There is a range of other Parents' Guides to help you ensure your child thrives at school from K-12. Here are just a few examples:

- ✓ Preparing Your Child for School
- ✓ Raising Ready Readers—Helping Your Child Learn to Read
- ✓ Helping Your Child with Today's Math

For these and other guides, visit [NEA.org/Parents/NEAResources-Parents.html](https://NEA.org/Parents/NEAResources-Parents.html) or [pta.org/familyguides](https://pta.org/familyguides)



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