

## Tips for Teaching Children to Read

Above all, reading is the most fundamental ability a child will master. It's at the core of every other subject taught during the early school years—without a good grasp of letters, words, and sentences, it will be virtually impossible for a student to grasp topics like math, science, and social studies. Reading is also integral to achieving healthy mental and emotional growth, a rich vocabulary, and a fertile imagination.

Parents, relatives, and teachers have the opportunity—and, in many cases, the duty—to teach children how to develop the basic reading skills that will serve as the backbone of their educational development. There are countless ways in which these mentors can help make the learning process a fun and rewarding journey. Below are some of our favorite tips and techniques, a compilation of suggestions from professional educators and tutors who specialize in teaching kids how to read.

- Don't limit the learning just to books. Take the time to show children the myriad of places and ways in which reading emerges as part of everyday life: on a cereal box, a street sign, or the instructions for assembling a toy, for example.
- Teach them the anatomy of a page. When a child looks at a book for the first time, he most likely won't realize that the words are read from left to right, or that the top line is first. Take the time to point out the "course" of a page, pointing out the page number, titles and headings, the order of the lines and words, and the spaces between words.
- Choose big fonts. This makes a huge difference to kids who are just learning how to discern different letters from one another. Select a book that uses large, simple lettering with very obvious spaces and punctuation.
- Choose small words. In the early learning stages, your child should be focusing on the basic building blocks of sentences, like "the," "is," "me," and "you." The multi-syllable words can come later, when the student has the basic foundation to build upon.
- Master the art of labeling. What better way to teach a child how to associate words with objects than by labeling their favorite everyday items? If they know the word "sharpener" is used to describe that cool thing that grinds their pencils, they'll be more eager to parse and pronounce the word.
- Help them make friends with letters—and teach them that a letter is more than just a pretty face. In addition to coaching them to recognize and trace a letter, also

introduce the associated sound. It will be easier for the student to learn all three together rather than going back and making the connection later.

- Dissect sentences. A string of words together can be overwhelming to a new reader. Break up a sentence into individual words, and then demonstrate how they all fit together in a certain order to form a cohesive concept or idea. Flash cards are a great way to mix and match different words to form sentences.
- Teach the art of the syllable. Recognizing the cadence and rhythm of multi-syllabic words is a formative step in the development of early reading skills. Clapping out the number of syllables in a word is an effective way to demonstrate the concept.
- Coach phonemic awareness. Phonemes are specific sounds that make up a word. For example, the phonemes /m/-/oo/-/s/ combine to form the word “moose”. Have children sound out the individual phonemes to form basic words, like “dog” and “cat”.
- Start with words where the sounds of the letters correspond to their most common pronunciations (for example, “can” instead of “cello”).
- Promote individual reading. After each lesson, leave the book with the child and encourage them to read some more on their own. Even if they haven’t yet mastered the skill, they can practice some of the techniques you’ve taught them, such as digesting a sentence from left to right and sounding out the phonemes.
- Save blended consonants, such as “stem” and “blend”, until after the child has mastered the basics of simple words like “cat” and “dog”.
- Blend old with new. While children thrive on the repetition of the same favorite stories over and over, it’s also beneficial to introduce different stories that use new words (and familiar words in different ways). Gradually increase the level of difficulty in the books you present.
- Choose books with subject matter that pertains to the child’s everyday activities. For instance, if the reader is preparing to transition to a new school or has just gotten a new pet, they’ll be more likely to relate to a book dealing with that topic.
- Encourage dialogue and speculation while reading. Stop every couple of pages and ask questions that prompt the child to think critically about the characters and storyline. By associating the words in a story with real-life emotions and events, they’ll be more likely to engage with the book.

- Point out the relationships between the sentences and the graphics on the page.  
Early readers use imagery as reinforcement of the meanings of letters and words.

By employing these time-tested techniques for introducing the basics of reading, parents and teachers can help children build the solid foundation they need to develop a lifelong love of the written word.