

Building Readers®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

SETA Head Start

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Sound review is a sound idea

Before your child can learn to read, she will need to know that each word is made up of sounds. Most preschool children are ready for activities that will help them get familiar with the many sounds around them, and enjoy practicing making those sounds themselves.

Here are some things you can try:

- **Make animal sounds.** Ask your child to show you how the “roar” a baby lion makes might sound different than the “roar” of a grown lion.
- **Read *Mother Goose*** and other books of poetry. Emphasize the rhyming words with your voice. Tell your child to listen for the way those words sound the same.
- **Read *Dr. Seuss’ Mr. Brown Can Moo, Can You?*** and other books that are full of silly sounds. Encourage your child to repeat them.
- **Talk about letters.** Not all preschool children are interested in letters yet. But many are, especially the letters in their own names. When you are pointing out a letter, make sure you include the sound that letter makes. “That’s a *T*, for *Tommy*. It makes the *tuh* sound.”



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Source: “Early Years—Birth to Preschool,” *Read*Write*Now!* Activities for Reading and Writing Fun, U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/Family/RWN/Activ97/early.html.

Small activities develop strong finger muscles

To hold a pencil correctly, your child will keep it between her thumb and forefinger. As the pencil rests against her third finger, she’ll be able to write. This skill develops over time. Here are some ways to build the finger muscles involved:

- **Bury small treasures** (such as plastic toys) in a bin full of sand. Have your child use her thumb and forefinger to get them out.
- **Let your child** pick up coins from a flat surface. See if she can do it without sliding the coins to the edge of the table.
- **Paint.** Use the brush like a pencil if your child is comfortable with this. Other times, just finger paint.
- **Show your child** how to put a shoelace through the holes of a shoe. Let her practice lacing it any way she’d like.

Source: Becky Daniel, *The Jumbo Parenting Journal*, ISBN: 1-56822-963-1 (Instructional Fair, www.schoolspecialtypublishing.com).

Your child’s preschool teacher is your partner in education



Your child’s preschool teacher isn’t just an instructor. She’s your partner in your child’s education! So don’t overlook the fact that she’s an important ally. To keep the lines of communication open:

- **Say hello** during drop-off and pick-up.
- **Tell her right away** if you have concerns about your child.
- **Try not to skip** parent events or meetings.

Become a weekly reader



You probably already have “grocery day” and “laundry day.” How about “library day”? Set aside one day each week for a trip to the library with your child. If weekly is too often, try every other week instead.

Shaving cream + a bathtub = ABC excitement for your child



Make the most of your time: Turn your child’s bath time into “alphabet learning” time! You’ll need:

- **A can of unscented shaving cream.**
- **A bathtub full of water.**
- **A word-loving preschooler.**

Put your child in the tub and teach her how to form letters on the wall (or surface of the water) with the shaving cream. Once she masters the ABCs, move on to simple words.

Good listeners tend to become better readers

Listening may be a natural sense, but that doesn't mean good listening skills come naturally for your child! Still, these skills are critical as he moves down the path toward reading readiness. After all, he'll need to pay attention if he wants to hear the different sounds letters make.

To help your child become a better listener:

- **Make** eye contact when you speak to him.
- **Speak** slowly and carefully. Don't rush.
- **Model** proper listening skills. When he speaks to you, stop what you're doing and focus on what he's saying.
- **Respond** appropriately to his words.
- **Listen** to music or poetry together.

Source: "Teach Your Child to Be a Good Listener," Teach Kids How, www.teachkidshow.com/teach-your-child-to-be-a-good-listener.

Get creative to teach that all stories have endings

Entertain your child with a tale and strengthen her creativity at the same time by playing "What's Your Story" with her. She'll enjoy it so much, she may not notice you're teaching her something (namely, that every story has an ending).



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Here's what to do:

- **Begin** reading your child a story. Make sure it's one that she hasn't heard before.
- **When** you get close to the end, stop reading.
- **Ask** your child how she'd end the story if it were up

to her. Write down her ending as she tells it to you.

- **Finish** the actual story.
- **Talk** about how her ending differs from the real ending.

Source: "Read*Write*Now! Activities for Reading and Writing Fun," U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/Family/RWN/Activ97/early.html.



Q: Are some books better for my child than others? Should I nudge my child toward certain books?

A: Not necessarily. The "right" books for your child are the ones he wants to read again and again. So figure out what he likes—from tractors to kangaroos—and look for titles about those things. Remember, it's not about finding the "best" books. It's about finding the best books for *your* child!

Source: Mem Fox, *Reading Magic*, ISBN: 0-15-601076-3 (Harcourt, www.harcourt.com).

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



Books to delight your early reader

Spoon by Amy Krouse Rosenthal (Hyperion Book CH). Spoon has a large family and a great life. But lately he's been jealous of what his friends the fork, the knife and the chopsticks can do. Will he ever realize just how lucky he is?

Down, Down, Down: A Journey to the Bottom of the Sea by Steve Jenkins (Houghton Mifflin Books for Children). Gorgeous, splashy illustrations bring the ocean alive—from its silvery surface to its scariest depths!

Sharper cognitive skills are only a game away



Want to boost your little thinker's brainpower? Try playing:

- **What Am I?** Give your child a series of clues ("I'm hairy and swing from trees in the rainforest"; "I eat bananas"). As she masters the easy ones, move on to trickier riddles.
- **I Spy.** This old standby isn't just fun. It'll also sharpen your child's vocabulary and her thinking skills.
- **Common Bond.** Name two objects for your child and ask her to figure out something they have in common. If you say "lemon" and "baby chick," for instance, see if she can come up with "things that are yellow."

"There is no substitute for books in the life of a child."
—Mary Ellen Chase

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