



Approaching Reading Readiness: Tips for Encouraging Language Development in Early Childhood

Recent attention on preparing students for the testing requirements in reading that begin at third grade has refocused efforts toward preparing children at the early elementary ages to meet those oncoming requirements. In turn, a great deal of attention is now placed on reading readiness—helping preschool children become “ready” to learn by the time they enter kindergarten. We know that children are born ready to learn. Because we also know that young children learn by playing (see our article [Play With Me!](#)), it is only reasonable to blend into their play the things that we wish them to be able to do when they reach grade school. Given this, how can you help ensure that your child is “ready” for reading without infringing on her playtime.



Looking ahead or working also with children grades K-2?

Help children through the transition between preschool foundations

to full reading comprehension instruction. Read our article: [Improving Reading Comprehension: Making the Oral Reading Connection in the Early Grades](#) at (no spaces): <http://www.designedinstruction.com/learningleads/oral-reading-comprehension.html>

Five tips for encouraging language development as your child approaches reading readiness:

Read to your child often. Reading with expression helps promote fluency and comprehension. Even if he is not ready or able to sit still for more than a moment or two, read as long as he can stand it, as often as he can stand it. Read a variety of books, songs, and rhymes to them. Reading to your child should be a pleasurable experience, so if she is not enjoying it, take a break, return to it later, or read it to her as she plays with something else. Talk about what you are reading. Encourage him to talk about the book. Is something funny, scary, or sad in the book? Call attention to details in the book that are relevant to her. “Listen, this character’s name starts like yours, Nancy. See, his name is Nicholas. Can you hear the /n/ sound?” Read the same thing several times. Sometimes it is frustrating to adults to read the same book over and over, but the repetition helps the child to build vocabulary and comprehension. Encourage him to

“Listen, this character’s name starts like yours, Nancy. See, his name is Nicholas. Can you hear the /n/ sound?”

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“You sounded just like the big billy goat when you ran across that bridge.”

use what you have read in his play. “Hey, that is just like the ship that Max used on his visit to where the wild things lived.” “You sounded just like the big billy goat when you ran across that bridge.”

Point out letters as you go about your day. While it is not appropriate to point out every letter or make the child recite them to you, noticing them will help her to become familiar with their shapes. When a different font is used, talk about what is similar and what is different about the shape of the same letter. As he is able to assimilate more, talk about the sound individual letters make, then about two or more letters together (br-, cr-, st-), then about different phonemic sounds made by putting two or more letters together (sh-, th-, ch-, ph). Help her learn the letters in her name.

Play word games with your child—great on automobile trips! Leave out rhyming words in a familiar chant and have him fill in the missing words. Take turns changing the rhyming words. “No more monkeys jumping on my HEAD! No more monkeys jumping, turning RED!” Ask him to tell which word does not rhyme in a list of three or four. “Which word doesn’t belong? Red, bed, said, seal?” Don’t put too much emphasis on being right. Keep the time used in such games to an amount that will not frustrate her. Incorporate these games into her play. “The baby sleeps on something that rhymes with bib.” “Let’s make something to eat that rhymes with lake.”

“No more monkeys jumping on my HEAD! No More monkeys jumping, turning RED!”

“Which word doesn’t belong? Red, bed, said, seal?”

“Let’s make something to eat that rhymes with lake.”

Help your child take words apart and put them back together. Separate words into phonemes, or sounds. Help him listen for beginning, ending, and, later, middle sounds, as vowel sounds are the hardest for him to distinguish. Change one sound for another. “What is *hat* without the /h/ and with a /k/ sound instead?” Have him plan a lunch menu where all the items eaten start (end) with the same sound. “Let’s have sandwiches, salad, and soda today.” Help her make up alliteration phrases. “Monty mostly met moms this morning.” Incorporate these activities into her playtime.

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“Monty mostly met moms this morning.”

Introduce new words to your child when appropriate. Tell her the meaning of the word, and use the new word often at first to get her used to hearing how it is used in speech. If the word is very difficult to pronounce, sound it out very carefully when you say it, then say it normally, for the first few times. Remind him of the meaning of the word as often as necessary. Encourage your child to use the word when appropriate. “You seem *elated* to see your grandparents today. Are you very happy?” Help her

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listen for syllables, the natural breaks in words. Clap these out, tap them with a stick or pencil, and, later, count them as you speak.

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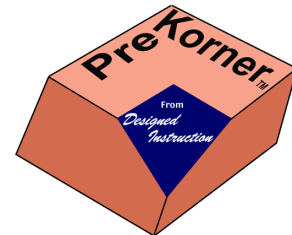
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