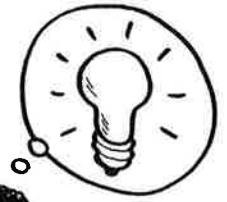


# BUILDING Comprehension Skills



Children need several basic building blocks to understand what they read and become strong readers. They must learn how to recognize words, use picture clues, and read smoothly.

How do young readers gain these skills? With lots and lots of practice. Make time each day to help your child work on his reading skills. Here are ideas for making the experience fun.

## Recognize the words

The more words your child knows, the faster she can read because she can focus on the meaning rather than sounding out each word. Use these activities to increase your youngster's sight word vocabulary:

- ✿ Ask your child's teacher for a list of commonly used words (called "sight words") that your youngster should know when she sees them. Slowly spell each word using magnetic letters on the refrigerator. Challenge your child to guess the word before you finish spelling it.

- ✿ Use a set of Scrabble letter tiles (or homemade ones) to make anagrams (rearranging the letters in one word to spell a new one). *Example:* Spell "but." Ask your youngster to use the same letters to form "tub."

- ✿ Make a word search for your child. In a 10 x 10 grid on graph paper, write each word (one letter per square) across, down, or diagonally. Fill in the remaining squares with random letters. Have your youngster circle each hidden word and read it aloud.



- ✿ Turn spelling words into trading cards. Write each one of your child's words on an index card,

and have him draw a picture on the back illustrating the word. For "buy," he might show a person with money in his hand. Then, hold up the word side of the cards, one at a time. If your youngster can read it, give him the card. If not, show him the picture, and ask him to try reading it again.

When he collects the whole set, reward him with a trip to the library.

- ✿ As your child learns new words, have her print each one on strips of colored paper. Help her make the strips into "links" for a paper chain (tape one strip into a circle, slip the next one through, tape that one's ends, and so on). Suggest that she read all the words in her word chain whenever she adds a new one. Challenge her to make a chain long enough to go around her room.



## Use picture clues

Picture clues help young readers figure out new words.

Encourage your child to look at each picture before he starts to read a page. If he gets stuck while reading, have him look at the illustration again for clues. Try these other tips for teaching your youngster to use picture clues:

- ✿ Let your child study the front and back covers of a new book. Ask questions that she can answer from what she sees. ("What kinds of animals are in this story?" "Do they look happy or sad?") Then, read the book together and check her predictions.

- ✿ Give your youngster a handful of coupons with pictures for things you have on hand (cereal, napkins). Have her use the pictures to locate the matching items. Then, help her read the main words on the labels.

- ✿ Watch a cartoon or short video with the volume turned off. Ask your child to tell you the story by watching what happens.



✿ Use sticky notes to cover the words in a story your child has never read. Ask her to tell you the story that the pictures show. Then, have her take off the sticky notes, read the story to you, and compare the two versions.

✿ Encourage your youngster to make a wordless book. He can draw pictures, cut out pages from coloring books or magazines, or print out computer clip art. Then, have him glue the illustrations onto construction paper. Staple the pages together, and let him “read” his tale to you.

## Read smoothly

Learning to read fluently comes from practice. One way is to read and reread the same books aloud. Here are tricks to keep the reading fun for everyone:

✿ Teach your youngster three-way reading. Choose a nursery rhyme or other poem, and read it three different ways. First, try slow motion. Next, read in a funny voice. Finally, read in a normal voice. Let your child try it all three ways. Ask her to think of a fourth way to read the rhyme.

✿ Try adding instant replays. When your youngster stumbles over a sentence, call “Rewind!” and have him read the sentence again. When he finishes the book, read tongue twisters to him, and let him call “Rewind!” when you mess up.

✿ Suggest a “read-along” to learn about punctuation marks. First, explain that you pause for a comma, stop for a period, raise your voice higher for a question mark, and use an excited tone for an exclamation point. Then, read aloud

and point to the marks as you go. Finally, your child can read along with you, using the punctuation marks.



✿ Write down a section from your youngster’s favorite story, and cut the sentences apart. Give him the first sentence, and have him read it aloud. Ask him to find the sentence that comes next. Let him read both sentences aloud and then look for the next one. Repeat until your child has put the whole story puzzle back together.

## Understand the meaning

Reading comprehension involves more than just understanding individual words. It means being able to understand the meaning behind the words. Give your child a strong vocabulary and strategies for discovering the meaning of what he reads with these activities:

✿ Find ways to expose your youngster to new words by going on a city safari. Make a list of places to visit together (library, museum, animal shelter). Encourage your child to keep a journal of new words she learns during your travels.

✿ Build vocabulary by exploring words in a picture dictionary. For a different approach, investigate books from the Eyewitness series from DK Children. These books provide lots of pictures based on a single theme (castles, weather, farms), with vocabulary to match.

✿ Ask questions as your youngster reads. Instead of yes-or-no questions, try ones that start with “what,” “why,” and “how.” *Examples:* “What does this story remind you of?” “Why do you think she did that?” “How do you think it will end?” Take it a step further, and have your child think of questions to ask you. Sharing ideas this way helps him think about what he is reading.

✿ After finishing a story, suggest that your little one retell it with puppets made from paper bags or socks. Guide her by asking her to show you the beginning, middle, and end. For “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” she might act out the bears leaving the house, Goldilocks exploring the rooms, and the bears scaring Goldilocks away.

✿ Put your child in a main character’s shoes. After reading “The Three Little Pigs,” you could say, “If you were the pig in the brick house, what would you have done?” Your youngster might make a plan for rescuing his brothers from the big bad wolf. Read the story again, and compare his ideas to what happens in the story.

