

Reading Comprehension – How You Can Help at Home

The goals of reading are to understand written text, integrate new ideas, and generalize from what is read. As a parent, what should you know about reading comprehension to help your child improve his/her skills and achieve these goals? What are things your child needs to do to understand what he/she reads? Following are some skills necessary for good reading and some ways you can help your child to become a successful reader.

Skill	What it is	How you can help
Phonemic Awareness (Hearing Sounds)	Phonemic awareness refers to the <i>ability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.</i> Acquiring phonemic awareness is important because it is the foundation for spelling and word recognition skills.	Help child <i>hear the sounds</i> by asking him/her to think of a number of words that start with a specific sound, such as the “ssss...” sound. Make up silly sentences in which all the words start with the same sound. “Mom made me many meatballs.” Ask your child to clap or stand up whenever he/she hears a word that starts with a specific sound “bbb...” or “rrr...” or a word that rhymes with a particular word, such as “cat.” Reading and saying nursery rhymes together is a great way to increase phonemic awareness.
Phonics (Decoding Words)	The <i>ability to apply your knowledge to letter-sound relationships</i> , including knowledge of letter patterns, to correctly pronounce words. Understanding these relationships gives children the ability to recognize familiar words quickly and to figure out unknown words.	Encourage your child to write notes, e-mails, and letters. When your child mispronounces a word, remind him/her of the rules for that word (i.e., made – the e at the end is silent and makes the “a” a long vowel sound.)
Fluency	<i>Reading accurately and with expression – chunking words into phrases and using pauses appropriately.</i> Children who do not read fluently sound choppy when they read. Reading fluency is not the same as speed reading – it’s not just reading fast; it’s reading the way we should talk so that we can better understand what we are reading. Reading fluently is a bridge to comprehension.	In order to read fluently, we need a lot of practice with hearing how good reading sounds and with reading out loud. Read aloud often to your child; the more often she hears a story, the more familiar the words will become and the easier it will be for your child to read. Ask your child to read to you – he/she will get practice with reading and you will hear how he/she is progressing and where he/she may have trouble. If you don’t have time to listen to him/her read, ask him/her to read to a brother or sister, or to a pet or stuffed animal. Practice really does help us to improve. Ask your child to read into a tape recorder a number of times. The more times he/she reads, the better he’ll/she’ll sound, and he/she will be able to hear the difference.

<p>Expanding Vocabulary</p>	<p>Vocabulary refers to the words we must understand to communicate effectively.</p> <p>A reader cannot understand a text without knowing what most of the words mean. Students learn the meaning of most words indirectly, through everyday experiences with oral and written language.</p>	<p>Learn the meaning of new words. The larger your child's vocabulary, the easier it will be for him/her to understand the meaning of the text.</p> <p>Read to your child each day. When the book contains a new or interesting word, pause and define the word for your child.</p> <p>Discuss the meanings of unknown words, both those he/she reads and those he/she hears.</p> <p>Study word parts. If your child knows the meaning of a root word ("kind"), then he/she will know what the new word means when the prefix ("un"/not) or suffix ("ness"/state of being) is added (unkind, kindness).</p> <p>Talk about the relationships between words. Synonyms are words with the same or similar meaning (bucket/pail), and antonyms are opposites (good/bad). Your child may need help learning figures of speech, such as, "It's raining cats and dogs," in order to understand what he/she is reading.</p>
<p>Comprehension</p>	<p>Comprehension is the understanding and interpretation of what is read. To be able to accurately understand written material, children need to be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Decode what they read; 2) Make connections between what they read and what they already know; and 3) Think deeply about what they have read. <p>Comprehension involves combining reading with thinking and reasoning.</p>	<p>Show your child how to be an active reader. Discuss what your child has read. Ask your child probing questions about the book and connect the events to his or her own life.</p> <p>Help your child go back to the text to support his or her answers.</p> <p>When answering questions with a written response, stress the importance of restating the question as a part of the answer. Turning a question into a statement requires changing the order of the wording, such as "Why does Jane want to get back to the party?" to "Jane wants to get back to the party because..."</p> <p>Help your child understand the "unspoken" ideas in what he/she has read: such as inferences, the main idea of the story, and the differences between facts or opinions.</p> <p>Give your child many background experiences, such as visits to zoos and museums; and activities, such as cooking, shopping, and trips to other places, ordinary and not so ordinary. The more experiences your child has had, the more he/she can connect what he/she is reading to what he/she already knows.</p>