

How to teach your child to read

Teaching your child to read? We have some suggestions to make the task easier.

Teach the sounds of the letters together with their names.

The sound (or sounds) of the letters are often different from the name of the letter. In reading, it is the sounds that count. When you read to the child, point to the letter C, for example and say; "the name of this letter is [see] and it makes two sounds: [kkk] as in the word cat and also [sss] as in the word cent." Then ask child to give you examples.

Do not be rigid in how the child pronounces the sounds. Regional accents and weak auditory skills make it hard for children to say most sounds in an academically correct way. Accept a reasonable effort. Recognize that learning sounds is only an intermediate step to learning to read.

Teach lower case letters first.

Have you noticed that nearly all ABC books for young children teach uppercase letters first? Yet capital letters account for only five percent of all letters in written English. Therefore, pay more attention to teaching the lower case letters. Lower case letters are far more important in developing reading skills.

Do not worry about grammar at this point.

Preschoolers, kindergartners, and first graders are very concrete in the way they think and cannot handle complicated concepts. It is not necessary at this stage to teach them about consonants, vowels, long and short sounds and such. They can learn to read just as well without these rules.

By age four, most English speaking children already have an excellent grasp of grammar of the language and in due time, they will learn all the formal grammatical rules in school. At this point, you need to concentrate only on the mechanical skill of reading.

Teach your child writing along with reading.

Children learn to read faster and easier if they learn to write at the

same time. The motor memory of the letters, listening to their sounds and seeing them in writing will reinforce new learning. So, teach your child to write letters and words.

Limit the initial reading vocabulary.

Reading is a very complex process. Not all words can be read using simple phonic rules. Many important words need to be learned by sight. Teach only the simple and common words at first. The knowledge of 400 key words called Dolch words, is all a young child needs to be able to read well.

Audiotapes, video or software cannot teach children to read.

The young child can pay attention to any one activity only for a short time particularly if it is challenging. Instructional tapes and most software with music are distracting, and weak listening skills paired with short attention span make audiotapes and most videotapes non-effective.

Parents put a lot of faith in computers but software by itself also cannot teach your child to read. Unfortunately, most commercial reading programs emphasize flash and entertainment over structure and content. These programs entertain and engage the child but fail at actually teaching them to read. To really learn to read, your child needs the most important tool of all - the kitchen table - where you sit together and spend about ten minutes a day working through the process step-by-little-step.

Can I hurt my child by starting early?

Of course not, but you may help significantly. Studies conducted over the last thirty-five years concluded that early reading gives the child a significant advantage in school. Children who start reading before the first grade maintain their lead in reading and comprehension over their "regular pace" peers through grade school. Early readers are also likelier to excel in other academic subjects as well.

About 10% of all children show signs of reading problems in second and third grade. By starting early you decrease the chance that your child will be one these children.