

Benchmarks

On the Road to Literacy

As unique as each child is, the process of learning to read actually follows a predictable and uniform pattern. The road to literacy is marked by identifiable benchmarks through which children generally proceed. Whenever teachers are asked to suggest one way above all in which parents can help their children become good readers, they invariably answer, "Read, Read, Read!"

Learning to Read

Learning to read begins with concepts about print. These are the stages most children move through as they first learn to read:

- Holds books right side up and turns pages.
- Chooses books and has favorites.
- Pretends to read.
- Points to the top, left; moves finger left to right to follow print.
- Uses pictures as clues to tell stories.
- Knows that print, not pictures, tells the story.
- Recognizes own name in print.
- Recognizes familiar symbols/logos.
- Sees self as a reader.
- Retells familiar stories.
- Knows there are letters and that letters form words; knows some letter names.
- Begins to rely more on print than pictures.
- Points to the word being read.

Reading to Learn

Once children have mastered how to read, the focus shifts to reading to learn. This is a transition they must make as they further their education. The following steps indicate that a child is becoming a fluent reader:

- Reads silently for extended periods of time.
- Chooses voluntarily to read for recreation.
- Selects a variety of reading materials including fiction, non-fiction, and magazines.
- Asks questions based on content.
- Knows when and how to seek more information.
- Uses reference materials to obtain information.
- Visits the local library to obtain reading material.
- Critiques and compares books, stories, and informational materials.

What You Can Do At Home

Parent involvement improves student performance at school. Educators say reading aloud

every day is the best thing parents can do at home to prepare children for successful school experience. Parents can also help children become good readers by:

- Asking children to read aloud to you – then ask what they like best about the story and main characters.
- Starting a family reading time – take turns reading aloud from a book for at least 15 minutes every evening.
- Getting a library card for each child and visiting the library regularly – ask the librarian to help you select books.
- Making sure children see you reading as part of your everyday life – and talk with them about what you are reading.
- Taking advantage of educational TV programs that teach the alphabet and letter sounds – this helps reinforce learning to read.
- Selecting books and magazine subscriptions as birthday or holiday gifts – besides being educational, this shows reading is fun.
- Reading together: a time to relax and feel close

Developing Good Readers

Educators have identified the strategies used by good readers. Parents can help their children get off to the right start in reading by actively involving the child while reading together. Try the following techniques to help develop good reading habits:

- Prompt observations about words, sounds, and illustrations - ask "What's this?" as you point to words and pictures.
- Run your fingers under the words as you read aloud - this helps the child associate printed and spoken words.
- Relate the story to the child's personal experience - "Do you remember when..." and "This sounds like the time you..."
- Ask your child to make predictions about the story such as "What would you do if you were the main character?"
- Encourage your child to become involved with the character and/or story - "Why do you think (the character) did or said that? "What else does this remind you of?"
- At the end of the story or reading time, make a game of asking your child to find familiar words – "Can you show me the word?"

Everyone A Reader: The ABCs of Learning to Read: What Parents Need to Know
