

Build vocabulary to boost reading skills



One of the best ways for your child to improve her reading and writing skills is to have a strong vocabulary. The more words she knows, the better. Help your child learn new words and develop her vocabulary by encouraging her to:

- **Read, read, read!** This is the easiest way to build vocabulary. The more your child reads, the more new words she'll encounter.
 - **Play word games.** Do crossword and other word puzzles.
 - **Examine the context of new words.** See if she can figure out what a new word means by reading the text around it or looking at pictures.
 - **Keep a list of new words** and their meanings in a special notebook. Have her look up definitions and review the list often.
- **Learn the roots of words.** See how many words she can think of that contain the same root—*predict*, *verdict*, *dictionary* and *dictate*, for example. What do these words have in common? What might the root *dict* indicate? (talk or speak)
 - **Use a thesaurus.** Look up *synonyms* (words with the same meaning) and *antonyms* (words with opposite meanings) for words she uses often.



Ask questions to improve reading comprehension



One thing that sets good readers apart is that they ask themselves questions while they are reading. The questions may focus on what's going on in the story, like: "What might happen next?" "Why did he do that?"

Good readers also ask questions about words they do not know. "It says she is *slumbering*. What could that mean?"

Teach your child to ask productive and insightful questions as he reads. Here's how:

- **When you are reading aloud to your child**, stop right before you get to an exciting part in the story. Ask your child, "What do you think is going to happen next?" Listen to your child's predictions. Then ask, "Why do you think that?" Turn back to the book and say, "Let's see if you're right."



- **While you are reading**, stop when you read an unfamiliar word. "James is *irritable*. What could that word mean?" Together, think about other clues that might show what the word means.
- **After you finish reading**, ask questions to help your child connect the book to things he already knows. "Did you ever have a day when you felt irritable like James?"

Reading aloud improves your child's skills



Reading aloud to children, even once they know how to read on their own, continues to be fun for parents and children. It's also a great way to continue building your child's reading skills.

When you read aloud with your child, choose books that are a bit harder than she could read on her own. Leave some time at the end for your child to read to you. Then, gradually increase the amount of time she reads aloud.

When your child reads to you, follow these tips:

- **Let her choose the books** she wants to read. You'll both have more fun if you're reading something she likes.
- **Listen to see if she understands** what she's reading. Clues will come in the tone of her voice. For example, does it rise for a question?



- **Periodically ask questions.** These questions should help her think about what she's reading, and they don't have to have a right answer. Say, "Why do you think he did that?"
- **Don't jump in right away.** If she's having trouble with a word, have her read to the end of the sentence. Can she figure out the word then? If not, tell her the word and let her move on.

Elementary School

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Reading
Extras

Reading aloud can help with your child's fluency



Your child can sound out words. But when it's time for him to read a story, he slows down and his reading sounds choppy. Your child's teacher may tell you that his reading lacks *fluency* and that he needs help reading more smoothly. *Fluency* is the ease with which a student reads.

When children lack fluency and have to sound out many words on a single page, they spend so much mental energy on the mechanics of reading that they often don't understand what they're reading.

Here are some tips for ways you can increase your child's fluency:

- **Practice reading together whenever possible.** Take a book with you on errands. Keep a book handy for when you and your child are waiting for the school bus.



- **Read and reread!** Once is not enough. If your child loves a book or poem, have him read it again. (And again.) Repeated readings help children gain fluency.
- **Take turns.** You read one sentence. Have your child read it back to you.
- **Remember that reading is like riding a bike.** Your child may wobble at first. But soon, he'll be reading confidently.

Encourage your child to explore nonfiction



Children ask a lot of questions. Helping them find answers to those questions is a great way to encourage their curiosity. So be sure to add some nonfiction books to your child's reading list. Reading these

books can help your child learn more about subjects that interest her. (Plus, there is an increased emphasis on reading informational texts in school these days!)

Here are some fun activities to get your child reading more nonfiction:

- **Look for books about how things work.** How does the wheat in a field end up in the pasta on her plate? How does the football game get onto your TV screen? Books can help your child learn the answers to these questions.
- **Turn your reader into a writer.** Have her write her own "how-to" book. She can explain how to kick a



soccer ball past a goalie. Or, she can show a creative way to braid hair. Help her choose something she does well and then write step-by-step instructions. She can illustrate her book as well.

- **Read nonfiction books yourself!** Set an example for your child. By reading non-fiction books, you're showing her that learning takes place everywhere and at any time—not just in school.

Brainstorming can inspire your child's writing



Writing and reading go hand in hand, and if your child enjoys writing, chances are he'll love reading, too! Help your child get excited about writing by getting creative.

If he's stuck thinking of a writing topic, try a little brainstorming to figure out a topic for a paper or to think of ideas for a story.

The next time your child gets writer's block, suggest that he:

- **Make lists.** Good examples are: Things I love. My favorite animals, places, toys or food. Things I know a lot about. Scary characters. Silly things adults say.
- **Exaggerate.** Ask silly "What if?" questions to spark new ways to think about people, events and scenes. What if my dog could talk? What if people had four hands? What if I could breathe underwater?



- **Become a critic.** Have your child write a few sentences about why he liked—or disliked—a book or a movie he recently read or saw.
- **Use visual images for inspiration.** Have him look at a picture and write down ideas it brings to mind.
- **Be an observer.** Encourage your child to take notes on what he sees around him. He can keep track of his observations, what people are wearing or saying.