



Introduction to reading

A guide to get you started reading with children

In this guide:

- Ages & stages
- Reading tips for Early Years
- •Reading tips for 6+
- Finding the right books for your families
- Introduction to Phonics



A rough guide of what children are learning to read in school according to age

Reading isn't really one skill - it's a whole collection of skills, which is why it usually takes children years to become truly independent readers. Every child learns to read at a different pace. Some children pick up the initial skills very quickly, while others may take a while to show much progress, and then race ahead. This is a very general guide to the stages of reading you might see.

- 0-2 years - n/a
- 3-4 years (nursery) - learning letter sounds, spelling their own name
- 4-5 years (reception) - starting to read simple words, learning all letter sounds and groups of sounds (e.g. 'th', 'oo', 'ee')
- 5-6 years (year 1) - reading sentences, learning tricky words that they can't sound out (e.g. 'the', 'no', 'want')
- 6-7 years (year 2) - by the end of this year they are expected to know capital letters, letter names as well as sounds, reading fluent sentences, recognise high frequency (common) words
- 7-8 years (year 3) - they should be reading at least simple chapter books, can work out unfamiliar words
- 8-9 years (year 4) - more in-depth chapter books with confidence
- 9-10+ (years 5 & 6) - able to fluently read all types of material



Doorstep Library

Early years reading tips

Little is good: short story time can have a long-lasting impact

Babies and toddlers have a short attention span, which means they can struggle to stay focused on any activity for a long period of time. For 0-3 children, choose books that are interactive, colourful, and not too long. Check out our book suggestions guide for 0-5-year-olds for some title recommendations.

Notice what the child is interested in. Do they have a favourite page? You don't need to stick with the story – pause and explore that page together. Let yourself be led by them.

Don't worry if you don't finish the whole book or if you can tell the baby you are reading with doesn't understand the words yet. Babies love to listen to the sound of voices and the interaction itself is helping them develop. Take a break whenever the child needs to – you can be led by them, if they're not having fun anymore, it's okay to stop and use the rest of the session to play a game or sing a song!



Book choices: finding the right book for your little tricky customers

Always choose your books based on your reader – even if it's a toddler who is still only babbling! Children develop at an incredible but variable speed in their first years of life, so a book which might be engaging for one child might not be for the next. Remember, every child is different!

The length and complexity of the book as well as the child's age can provide a bit of helpful guidance when choosing books. A picture book might be too long for a 6 month old baby, for example. Similarly, you might lose the attention of a 4-year-old if reading to them a very simple board book. Choose your books carefully - not too short, not too long, and challenging enough to keep children on their toes (even if they might still be crawling!).

Repetition is key! Baby and toddlers might have a favourite book which they would like to read multiple times – and that is fine. It not only helps to better assimilate the words and embed them in their vocabulary, but also creates a sense of routine and security around reading. Slowly, you can then start encouraging them to venture towards new books – perhaps by drawing them in with similar characters or story lines.



Book choices: finding the right stories for your little tricky customers

Quieter, calmer stories can help if a young child is a bit shy and still isn't very comfortable in the sessions. Vice versa, they might help a very active child to settle and focus on the book. These stories might also work best (and guarantee you parents' gratitude!) if the child has just woken up from their nap or you are visiting them close to their bedtime. Using a soft tone of voice goes hand in hand with this type of story-time.

Reading together can also be playful and energetic! If the little one you are reading with has lots of energy to spare find a book with movements for them to copy. If they're in the mood to make a lot of noise then grab a noisy book or sing a song! Interactive books with flaps, textures and things to point out and name can also help keep them entertained!

As they grow, baby and toddlers often become interested on specific topics (e.g. cars, princesses, dinosaurs are all common ones!). Whatever their passion, find books that will get them excited for story-time and wanting more when you leave!

Listening to others speak lays the foundation for babies' language development so it's great for them to hear their parents read to them. If a parent shares they are not confident reading in English, ask your Team Leader to look for dual language books which might help. You could also suggest they ask at their local library who usually will have a good stock.



Reading together: bonding with storytime

Reading together is a great activity for the whole family. Baby and toddler story-time offers an easy opportunity to encourage parents and older siblings to get stuck in too, as an adult family member will be present supporting the child. Remember to never put the parent on the spot by making assumptions on their reading ability or by directly asking them to read. Model ways of engaging the young child through singing, rhymes, making noises or facial expressions – this will encourage the parents to join when they feel comfortable.

Pause reading to ask lots of questions. Begin with yes or no questions like “is the apple blue? Is it red?” or simple questions like “where is the crocodile?”. With a 4 or 5-year-old, you can start asking open questions like “what would you do next if you were in the story?” Build on their answers and you might end up with a brand-new story!

Babies love to observe facial expressions. Try having the child face you instead of the book and give really exaggerated facial expressions and movements! If old enough, they might love to be the ones turning the pages or lifting the flaps!



Reading out LOUD: make reading fun

Children love it when you do funny voices or sing to them – so don't worry about looking silly. You can even move about – reach up high like a giraffe or make your arm into an elephant's trunk!

Any book can be a noisy book when you make the noises yourself! Make sounds to go with the pictures of animals or transport and encourage the child to copy you.

If the books you have prepared for the session aren't doing the trick, try making up your own stories! If doing an online reading session, you could use objects from around your home or drawings as props. If visiting a family in person, why not use the pictures of the books you have, to make up an entirely new story? Get the child involved too!

Make a fuss of finishing a book or nursery rhyme. Finishing a book or song with a clap can make reading even more exciting for next time.

Above all, have fun! The most important thing is that everyone involved in the session is having enjoying reading together.





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tips for reading with children aged 6+



Getting in the mood

Setting routines for story-time is a great idea for getting your child in the mood for reading. Choose a particular time of the day, perhaps at bedtime, that you dedicate to reading. That will become your special time together to travel into different worlds – after a long day, this can be as relaxing for children as it is for parents!



Let your child lead you

Try paying attention to what your child needs when reading, what makes them happy while having a book in their hands. Would they like to read to you? Great! If they would rather you read to them, that is also completely fine. Listening to you can help them develop a love of reading just as much. It will still expand their vocabulary, allow their imagination to run wild, and build a positive memory of books and reading that will last a lifetime. Over time, you could ask if they would like to take turns reading, which will allow them to challenge themselves a bit without feeling too much pressure.



Use your voice

Using different voices for all the characters is great fun. Even if your impression of a cowboy, a troll or a frog is a little shaky, this is a great way to keep your child's attention. The sillier the better!



Keep it light and fun

This is especially important for children who are struggling with their reading or are reluctant to pick up a book. Keeping it fun and easy means they won't see it as a chore or homework. When reading for pleasure, you can still help them if they make a mistake, but remember that constant corrections can put them off and make the experience less enjoyable!



No book is a bad book!

You might disagree with your child's book choices, but the key is to keep that a secret if you can! If your child wants to read a book that you find a bit silly for example, still encourage them to go ahead (provided it is suitable for their age). All that matters at this stage is that your child has an interest in reading – their preferences might well change over time!



Ask questions

Books can really be an opportunity for children to develop their own thoughts and opinions, as well as a chance to empathize with others. As you read together, ask your children questions that will encourage them to think about the characters e.g. 'what would you do if you were in this character's shoes?' or 'how do you think they feel'? This will not only make reading more active and engaging but also allow your child to express their feelings and gain confidence.



Rereading is okay!

Sometimes children like to reread the same books several times and that can be very boring for you! But children gain confidence by reading familiar books more than once, and it is still good practice for them.



If not stories, what about facts?

If your child is struggling to get into stories, try factual books! Science, history, geography – there is something for every curious little mind! Factual books also make it easier to keep reading short if your child gets tired quickly or easily loses concentration. They won't have to follow a plot as they can easily move on to the next exciting fact!



Background knowledge

A little background about a subject can really help your child's comprehension when reading. So if you are reading about elephants, maybe you can have a quick conversation about elephants in which you and the child share what you already know before you read the book together.



Tracking

If your child is struggling with a page, follow the words they read with a finger. This helps keep their eyes moving smoothly from one word to the next.



You don't have to always finish books

If children are not enjoying a book, it is completely fine to stop reading! It is really important that children feel free to move on to something different - being in control will make them feel positive about their relationship with reading. You can always have fun making up the end of the story!



End on a cliff-hanger

If reading a chapter book, try to stop at an exciting point in the story. Have fun guessing what might happen next. That will make your child even more eager to pick up the book the next time!

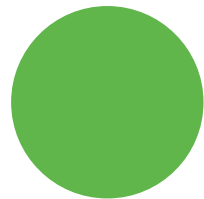
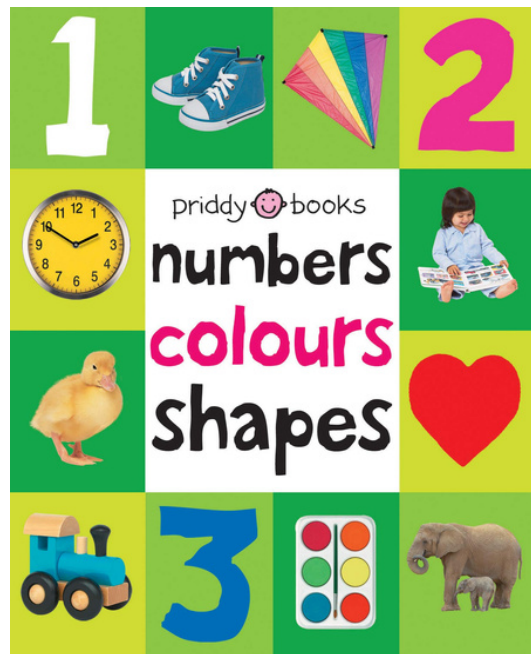
Choosing books:

- Plan books in advance for individual children – choosing books that align with their interests is key to their enjoyment and successful reading.
- They might be reading chapter books at school, but with us, they still want to read a picture book. That's fine, as enjoyment is key.
- If they are always reading below their ability, you can encourage them to try some other books. Try the two-book rule – you choose one, I choose one.
- If not sure of a child's level – ask them to read a little to you, a line each, a page each.

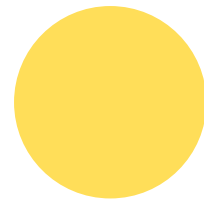
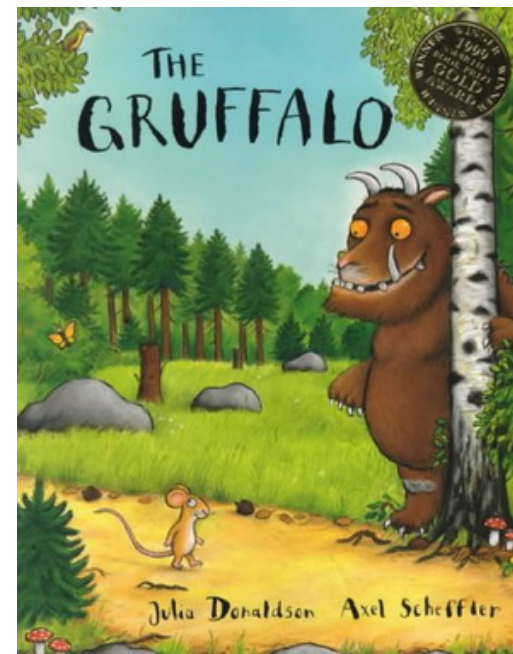
***A tip: For children already reading, the general rule is if they can't read 5 words on a page then the book is probably too hard.**

Doorstep Library's colour codes

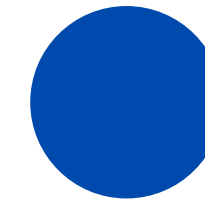
We use colour stickers to help you find the right book. Here are our main categories:



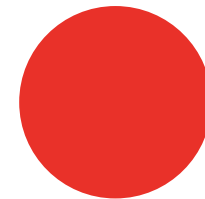
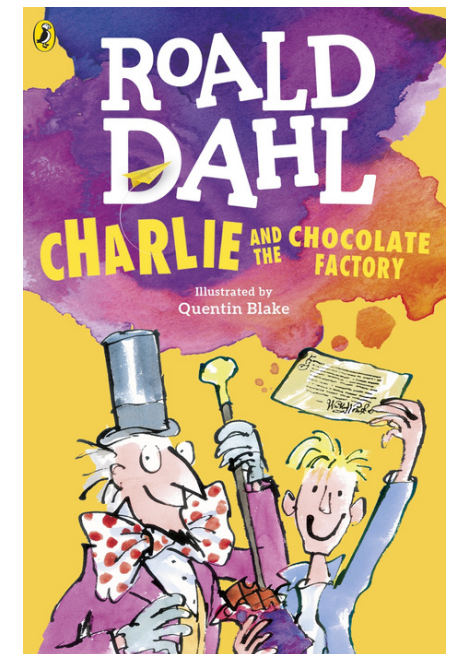
Baby books 0 - 3's



Picture books 3 - 6's



Early readers 6+



Chapter books 7+



Quick introduction to phonics

Phonics

Our Reading Sessions are about sharing the joy of books – sharing stories, wondering what will happen next, or learning facts about the solar system!

We are not teachers, so we don't set targets, or homework or teach phonics. However, the children you visit will be taught phonics at school – and it may be different than when you learned to read.

So it's useful to know as you may find that if a 5-year-old is reading to you, they will sound out letters and sounds. Hopefully, the overview below will give you a better understanding of the process that children go through when learning to read, and help you feel comfortable with the terminology involved.

Before you start reading below, [watch this video](#).

Phonics

Phonics is based on 'pure sounds' where children are taught to read letters by saying the sounds they represent. E.g. the letter 'm' sounds like *mmm*. When reading with children, it's really important to say the sounds correctly. The letter 'm' is Mmmmm, not muh. The letter 'L' is llllllll, not el

Once children are comfortable with the sounds of letters, they learn how sounds can be blended together to make words e.g. C-A-T makes CAT.

In this way, children can break down long words into their sounds, rather than having to memorise them, which should make reading easier.

The order in which the sounds are taught will vary depending on which scheme is used at school, but it won't be alphabetical order because that's not the best order to allow a child to start blending the sounds for reading.

Phonics

Some terms to be aware of:

Tricky words - Some everyday words in English have tricky spellings and can't be read by blending. Imagine trying to read the word said or does by blending each letter!

These are sometimes called **high-frequency tricky words**: common words that are essential as they make up the simplest of sentences. Words that you can't sound out just need to be learnt, e.g. *the, who, all, what, to, no, I, was, my, said*.

High frequency words - *a, an, if, as, at, the, and, will, that, with, this, them*.

At school, teachers use the term **blending** also referred to **sounding out**, depending on which phonic scheme the child's school is using.

Phonics

Learn more about Phonics at Oxford Owl:

- Here is a reference guide, where you can look up a letter to check its 'pure sound'
- Or, this video goes through the alphabet with you. Listen through a couple of times until you feel comfortable with these pure sounds
- Visit home.oxfordowl.co.uk/reading/learn-to-read-phonics/ for lots more help



Enjoy reading!