

HELPING STRUGGLING READERS

Successful Reading Techniques

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Early Reading

To get ready to read, children should be comfortable with print.

We don't expect babies to walk before they can crawl, yet when children enter school, they are often asked to do things they cannot yet do. Children must be comfortable with print, and with the shapes of the letters of the alphabet, before they can begin to read.

Some children will have had little or no exposure to the printed word at home. If they have not been read to, they won't know the standard conventions of reading a book. Their limited experience with print calls for some catching up. Struggling learners of any age may have gaps that occurred at the kindergarten level. Our techniques help struggling readers become comfortable with print in the following ways:

- **Readiness Skill: Directionality** We train children's eyes to track print correctly, moving from left to right and top to bottom—something they don't automatically know how to do. This is very difficult for some children, and we provide aids to help them correctly follow a line of print.
- **Phonics Skill 1: Upper- and Lowercase Letter Names** Children must be able to visually recognize and know the name of each letter of the alphabet, in both upper- and lowercase forms. To simplify this overwhelming task, we group letters by their visual similarities, and children learn one group before proceeding to the next.
- **Phonics Skill 2: Consonant Sounds** Learning the sounds that consonants stand for is the next step. We teach children that with some consonants, the letter name is a clue to its sound; with the other consonants, mnemonic aids can help children recall the sounds.

- **Phonics Skill 3: Beginning and Ending Consonant Sounds**
Through an oral technique that raises phonemic awareness, we help children connect the consonant sounds they learned in isolation to the sounds they hear at the beginning and ending of simple words.
- **Phonics Skill 4: Rhyming Words** Children extend their auditory awareness of sounds in words by listening for words that rhyme, or end with the same sounds.

As we present these five skills, we help children learn and link them through a short, daily practice (R-T-P), reteaching as necessary until they have mastered the letter names and basic letter sounds and can recognize the consonant sounds when spoken aloud in easy words and in rhyming words.

DIRECTIONALITY

READINESS SKILL: Track print by following left to right across a printed page, and from the top of the page to the bottom.

Teaching left-to-right and top-to-bottom directionality is of utmost importance to early readers. We need to show them the starting point on a page of text and the direction to take to reach the end of each line, as well as how to switch directions and go down to the next line of print. While modeling this, we also call attention to the spaces between words, which tell where one word ends and the next word begins.

Left-to-Right Tracking Aids

Materials Colored strip of paper, about 9 by 3 inches, for each child. Write the child's name and draw an arrow pointing to the right under the child's name. Prepare a similar but larger strip for use with a big book.



Give each child a colored strip to place above or below the printed line being read. For children who have a tendency to reread the same line, placing the colored strip above the line eliminates this problem. Other children find it more comfortable to place the colored strip of paper below the line. Help children choose the appropriate placement.

Point out that the arrow is a reminder of which way they will move their eyes when they read. Because most children know the left-to-right directionality of their names, the name on the strip serves as a second reminder.

Use your larger colored strip and a big book set up before the class to model the correct use of the strip. Explain that any time they get confused about direction, children can look at the colored strip, see the arrow and their name, and know which way to move their eyes.

Demonstrate that children can slide their fingers under each word as they read, pausing at every space between words. As their fingers move from one group of letters to the next, the starting and stopping motion reinforces where one word ends and the next word begins.

Many struggling readers, even older ones, have difficulty tracking print in a left-to-right direction. Regardless of their age, children who reread or skip words or entire lines of print should continue to use a tracking aid until they track print effortlessly. Children will not need this assistance forever; by monitoring their progress, you can help them decide when they are ready to give up their tracking aids.

Some children, especially kinesthetic learners, move their bodies in a left-to-right direction as they read. The body movement reminds them which way to move their eyes. Children should be encouraged to use whichever method works best for them.

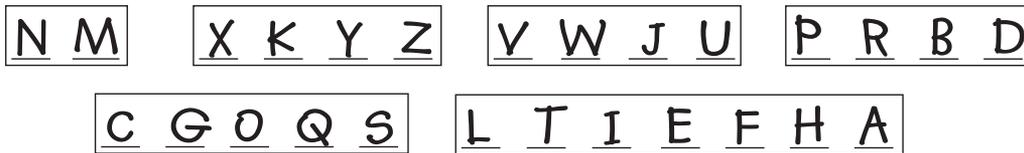
UPPER- AND LOWERCASE LETTER NAMES

PHONICS SKILL 1: Recognize and name all the written letters of the alphabet, upper- and lowercase.

Before they can read, children must be able to discriminate among the symbols that we call letters. To reduce the amount of confusion for struggling learners, teach the upper- and lowercase letters separately—uppercase letters first, then lowercase, since many look similar to their uppercase counterpart.

Teaching the Uppercase Letters

Materials Laminated sentence strips, cut to size to display six letter groups (see top of p. 11); water-based markers



Children who are unfamiliar with print don't see letters, but rather a series of straight and curved lines. To aid children in the discrimination process, we group the uppercase letters by visual similarities. The line under the letters prevents children from reading them upside down.

Present one group at a time. Fold the strip so only the first letter is showing. When children are familiar with the name and shape of the first letter, introduce additional letters in that group by unfolding the paper.

Compare each new letter to the others in that group. How are they the same? different? Introduce a variety of methods for practice of correct letter formation and letter names. For example:

- Using the letter strips, children trace each letter with their fingers and then name it.
- Using the laminated strips, children trace the letters with water-based markers, naming each letter after tracing it.
- Children use their fingers or tools to write letters in the air or in sand, naming each letter they form.
- One child "finger writes" a letter on another child's back. The second child must try to name the letter "written." (This is a more abstract mode of practice and should be used only when children are quite familiar with the letters.)

Teaching the Lowercase Letters

Materials Laminated sentence strips, cut to size to display the six letter groups shown; water-based markers

We also group the lowercase letters by visual similarities. Use the same techniques suggested for teaching the uppercase letters. Once children have mastered naming both sets of letters, they can begin to match the upper- and lowercase forms.

