As your youngster reads more advanced books, he will face new challenges. Reading at the right speed, understanding complicated plots, and tackling new vocabulary can be hurdles for some children.

Here are suggestions for handling two common reading problems.

Reading too fast

Youngsters who read too quickly may not understand the material. Suggest that your child take time to imagine what characters look like or to picture the action. The mental images will improve his reading comprehension.

Also, encourage your youngster to ask himself questions and predict what will happen in a story. Looking for answers and checking his predictions will help him understand the plot and the character development as he goes along.

Word-by-word reading

When children stumble over vocabulary, they may be concentrating on one word at a time and lose track of what a story is about. Ask the school librarian to help your child find Hi-Lo Books, which combine plots for older readers with simpler vocabulary.

Then, have him work on gradually increasing his speed. After reading a paragraph at a pace that’s comfortable, he can repeat it a little faster. With practice, he’ll shift his focus from individual words to phrases, sentences, and whole passages.

Note: If you suspect your child has a reading disability, talk to his teacher.

Be involved

Show your child you care about her education by volunteering at her school. Here are some reading-related ways that you might offer to help:

• Read aloud to the class.
• Listen to English-language learners read aloud.
• Decorate a bulletin board with vocabulary words or book reports.
• Supervise a homework club or study group.
• Reshelve and repair books in the library.
• Help students with online research in the computer lab.
• Record yourself reading textbook chapters to help struggling readers.
• Be an adviser for the school magazine.
Writing with purpose

Writers use different styles depending on what kind of information they want to share and who will read it. Encourage your youngster to try writing with these three purposes in mind.

1. To entertain

Stories, poems, plays, and jokes are a few examples of writing that are for readers’ enjoyment. Suggest that your child write down jokes she hears and funny things that happen during the day. Or she might write dialogue to turn a frequently told family story into a short play.

2. To persuade

Sometimes writers try to convince people to change their minds about something. Your youngster can express her views in a letter to the editor of a school newspaper. For example, she might explain why she thinks students should choose their own cafeteria seats. Remind her to keep her audience in mind (school administrators) and to write logically and respectfully.

3. To inform

Encourage your child to share what she knows by writing instructions. She might write a step-by-step guide to teach a grandparent how to record a movie or jot down directions for a sibling who wants to make paper-bag puppets.

Fun with Words

Guess the phrase

Here’s a guessing game that will stretch your child’s thinking skills and build her word skills. All you need are pencil and paper.

Show your youngster how arranging words in a particular way can turn a phrase into a brainteaser. Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>million</th>
<th>= one in a million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eiln pu</td>
<td>= line up in alphabetical order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIND matter</td>
<td>= mind over matter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once your child has the idea, turn turns making up brainteasers for one another to guess. Hint: To find phrases to use, suggest that she look for them when she’s reading or listen for them during conversations. It helps to choose phrases that use prepositions such as “in,” “on,” “over,” and “under.”

She can also find examples online at http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/braintpics.htm. Or she could look in library books like The Pocket Book of Frame Games by Terry Stickels.

Oral reports

My son gets nervous when he gives an oral report. How can I help him be more confident?

First, let your son know that many people feel anxious when they speak in front of a group. Then, explain that he can gain confidence by rehearsing his report.

Have him start with a couple of practice runs while standing in front of a mirror. Once he is comfortable with that, encourage him to deliver his report to a live audience of family members or friends. Remind him to relax and take a deep breath before he starts.

Suggest that your son do several rehearsals before his presentation, and give him constructive feedback (speak louder, slow down). The more he practices, the more confident he will be in front of the class.

Our Purpose

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote their children’s reading, writing, and language skills.

Resources for Educators, a division of Aspen Publishers, Inc.

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www.rfeonline.com

ISSN 1540-5583

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MAGAZINES

- Youngzine
  This free online publication for ages 8–15 covers current events in science, entertainment, sports, the arts, and more. Youngzine also accepts reader submissions, so your child could send in book reviews, short stories, poems, and even school reports for publication. www.youngzine.com

- Kiki
  Help your youngster learn to take pride in her own sense of style with this fashion magazine. Article topics range from keeping a fashion journal to designing your own hat. Readers can also discover trends around the world and get advice about friends, homework, and other topics. www.kikimag.com

GAMES

- Scrabble Slam!
  Think fast in this letter-switching card game. To begin, one player arranges four cards to spell any word (book). Then, everyone races to slam down cards that make a new word. Example: You play “c” to make cook, and your child plays “l” to spell cool. The first player to get rid of his cards wins.

- The Family Dinner Box of Questions
  Where is the coziest spot in your home? Which TV family is most like your own? Find out how family members answer these questions and more with this dinner-table game. Pull cards from the box to spark interesting discussions and improve your child’s conversation skills. The Box Girls
All kinds of stories

As your child reads more and more books, she’ll discover that stories can be written in different ways. Here are suggestions for helping your youngster learn from—and enjoy—two kinds of stories.

Circular stories begin and end the same way. In One Frog Sang by Shirley Parenteau, for example, frogs jump out of their hiding places only to hide again as a car passes. It is called a circular plot because the frogs end up in their original places. Your child can visualize a circular story by drawing the events around the edge of a paper plate.

Cumulative stories start with a single incident that sparks a series of events. Your youngster can make a paper chain based on a cumulative book like There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Shell! by Lucille Colandro. Ask her to write one word (pail, sand, wave) for each page on a separate 2-by-6-inch strip of paper. Then, help her link the strips into a chain. She can read her chain and imagine how changing one link would affect the story (“If the lady didn’t swallow the pail, she wouldn’t swallow sand to fill it”).

Tip: To find more circular or cumulative stories, ask a librarian, or check out The Read-Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease.

Play and learn

Many toys and games that your youngster enjoys every day can help him read and write. With these ideas, you can encourage him to learn while he plays:

- During a game like Candy Land or Operation, ask your child to read the words on the board (“Peppermint Forest,” “wish bone”).
- Suggest that your youngster use writing toys to make letters and words. If he draws with sidewalk chalk or on a magnetic “doodle” toy or dry-erase board, he can label his pictures (“house,” “car”).
- Have your child tell stories when he plays with dress-up clothes. Ask questions to spark his imagination and build his language skills (“What does your pirate ship look like?”).
Sounds all around

Familiar letter combinations and patterns let your child unlock unfamiliar words. Try these activities that can increase the number of words he knows how to read:

- Have your youngster draw a large outline of an object such as a snowman. Together, brainstorm words that begin with the same letter or letter combinations as the picture. For snowman, he could think of sn words (snail, snap). He can write the words inside his picture and display it on the refrigerator.

- Find things around the house that have words printed on them, such as clothing catalogs and game instructions. Take turns picking a pattern (a, consonant, silent e) and having the other person find five words with that pattern (made, game). You can also do this activity after you’ve read a story to your child. Name a pattern that appeared frequently throughout the book (consonant, vowel, consonant). Go back through it together, and look for words that contain it (pet, cup).♥

Fun with Words

Roll and spell

Stretch your youngster’s word skills with this game that will encourage her to think of—and spell—shorter and longer words.

Each player writes the numbers 1–6 in a column down a piece of paper. Then, take turns rolling a die and spelling a word with the number of letters shown. Example: Roll a 5 and spell “tiger” next to the number 5 on your paper. The object is to spell one word for each number. If you roll the same number again, your turn ends.

Variation: For an older player or a more advanced speller, number your paper 1–12 and roll a pair of dice. On each roll, the player writes a word, phrase, or sentence with that number of letters. For instance, roll an 8 and write, “I love you.”♥

From TV to books

Q&A

Q: My daughter loves to watch TV. I’d rather she spent time learning. Is there a way she can do both?

A: Your child might enjoy reading books about her favorite TV characters. Help her type the name of a show into a library database or bookstore Web site. Some children’s book series (Olivia by Ian Falconer) have been turned into shows while some programs (Dora the Explorer) have inspired books. After reading several stories, you might suggest that your daughter write or draw ideas for new episodes about the characters.

You can also help your youngster research TV show topics. Perhaps an episode takes place in Egypt, the characters rescue a monkey, or a family celebrates Chinese New Year. Check out a library book to learn more about the subject.

Note: Experts recommend that children watch no more than one hour of TV per day.♥

Every Friday, my son Zach brings home finished classwork. We can’t save all of it, and sometimes it’s hard for him to decide what to keep.

Luckily, my middle schooler gave me an idea. He keeps a portfolio of work as part of his final grade. I realized that Zach could collect his best papers, too.

Now when he brings work home, he chooses one or two favorites—stories he wrote, spelling tests he did well on, drawings, and art projects. We hole-punch them and put them in a binder. Like his older brother, Zach includes a cover sheet for each item where he writes why he chose it (“My letters are very neat”).

At the end of the year, he can look back and see what he has learned. We plan to keep a new binder each year. Then, when Zach is older, he’ll have a collection of his favorite work.♥

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