

# BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Harvard Elementary School

## Make reading aloud a special family time

Reading aloud as a family can strengthen your child's vocabulary, improve his reading scores—and allow you all to enjoy books and reading together.

For successful read-alouds, follow these tips:

- **Pick a regular time** and stick to it. Some busy families plan to have reading time during breakfast.
- **Read the book** before you read it aloud. You'll be more comfortable reading it aloud if you're familiar with the text.
- **Read books everyone enjoys.** It will show on your face and in your voice if you like the book.
- **Leave them wanting more.** Stop reading when the story becomes exciting and your child can't wait to hear what will happen next.



**Source:** R. Freedman and S. Frost, "Making the Most of Read Alouds," *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, Illinois Reading Council.

*"A writer only begins a book. A reader finishes it."*

—Samuel Johnson

## Try these tips during writing assignments

Reading and writing are closely related. Even for great readers, writing assignments can be tough. Good writing involves everything from understanding a subject to knowing how to organize thoughts and checking spelling and punctuation.

When your child has a writing assignment:

1. **Have your child "talk through" some ideas** before starting to write. Clear writing starts with clear thinking.
2. **Encourage your child to take notes** or make an outline before writing.
3. **Offer plenty of praise.** Be specific. Say, "I really like the way you've described what led up to this event."
4. **Don't criticize.** If kids think you always look for what's wrong, they won't want to share their writing with you.
5. **Remember that good writing means more** than correct spelling. Focus first on what your child is trying to say. Later, you can suggest that the piece should be edited.
6. **Be patient.** Good writing takes time!

## Help your child become a fluent reader



*Fluency* is the ability to read smoothly, accurately and with expression. To improve your child's fluency:

- **Encourage her to listen** to an audio recording of a book while she follows along.
- **Reread favorite books.** Repetition of familiar books improves fluency.
- **Remind your child** to pause between sentences.

**Source:** "Fluency," Reading Rockets, [nswc.com/fluency](http://nswc.com/fluency).

## Retell fairy tales in unusual ways

Read a favorite fairy tale together. Then, ask your child to change the characters and details to create a new version of the story. For example, how would *The Three Little Pigs* differ if told from the wolf's perspective?



**Source:** T.A. Young (Ed.), *Happily Ever After: Sharing Folk Literature With Elementary and Middle School Students*, International Reading Association.

## Preview textbooks with your child



A first textbook is an important milestone for a young reader.

When your child brings the book home, preview it together. You can:

- **Look for the author's name** and the date of publication.
- **Read over** the table of contents.
- **See what chapters** look interesting.
- **Look at pictures,** graphs, maps and other illustrations.

**Source:** "The First Step in Studying a Textbook: Previewing," Cuesta College, [nswc.com/textbookreading](http://nswc.com/textbookreading).

## Encourage your child to keep a list of new words to build vocabulary

Children see and hear new words every day. How can your child remember them all? Ask her to write down new words or words she may not be sure about.

She can make a special section for new words in her school binder. Or she can use a small spiral pad to write down new words. An index card will work, too. Have her keep one in her bookbag during the day.

Writing just the words is okay to start—this saves time. In the evening, your child can look up the new words in the dictionary and add the definitions to her list.

Even if you can explain the meanings quickly, help your child find them in a dictionary—either in print or an online dictionary. Knowing how to use and read a dictionary entry is a useful skill for your child to have.



### Play games to review sight words

*Sight words* are words your child should be able to recognize at a quick glance. To review sight words, play:

- **Bingo.** Make Bingo cards using sight words.
- **Go Fish.** Write sight words on index cards. Use them in place of playing cards.



**Source:** "Teaching Sight Words—Effective Strategies for Reading Success," K12 Reader, [nswc.com/elemsightwords](http://nswc.com/elemsightwords).

### For lower elementary readers:

- *A Walk in Paris* by Salvatore Rubbino (Candlewick). Join a girl and her grandpa on a walk through Paris. Along the way, learn interesting facts and vocabulary words.
- *Lily the Unicorn* by Dallas Clayton (HarperCollins). Lily the Unicorn loves exploring. Her new friend Roger the Penguin isn't so adventurous. Watch as their friendship develops!



### For upper elementary readers:

- *Bugs: A Stunning Pop-Up Look at Insects, Spiders and Other Creepy-Crawlies* by George McGavin (Candlewick). Learn about bugs' growth cycles and more in this pop-up book.
- *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* by Kathi Appelt (Athenium). Raccoons Bingo and J'miah are new to the Official Sugar Man Swamp Scouts, whose job is to help protect Sugar Man, the creature who rules the swamp.

## Incorporate reading into daily activities

Reading at home is one of the most important things you can do to help your child succeed in school. You can weave reading into many of the activities you already do. Even a reluctant reader may enjoy reading when she:

- **Reads books that are based** on her favorite TV shows or movies. You can also have your child read a book, then watch the movie.
- **Is surrounded by all types** of books, including comic books, cookbooks and more. Visit the library often and encourage your child to check out new reading material.
- **Laughs while she reads.** Have your child read jokes or funny stories aloud.



- **Uses websites** such as Storyline Online ([www.storylineonline.net/](http://www.storylineonline.net/)) to interact with books.

**Source:** "Integrating Reading into Everyday Life for Reluctant Readers," Scholastic.com, [nswc.com/integration](http://nswc.com/integration).



**Q:** My child gets frustrated when she can't read unfamiliar words. What can I do?

**A:** Help her "sound out" the words by blending the letter sounds. You can also pause at the word to ask, "What word would make sense in the story?" A guess based on context may be correct. Be available for your child when she needs help.

Do you have a question about reading? Email [readingadvisor@parent-institute.com](mailto:readingadvisor@parent-institute.com).

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