

Reading expectations and ideas to help your child at home:

(Taken from the Oxford Owls website April 2020)

Reading: Age 3–4 (Early years)

The early reading skills your child will learn at this age are an important foundation for starting school. The focus at this age is on sharing stories, songs, and rhymes together and building talking and listening skills. Luckily, there are lots of fun and easy ways to encourage early reading success at home.

At nursery, your child will be learning some key early reading skills.

- Linking sounds and letters
- Helping tell a story
- Singing songs and rhymes
- Getting ready for reading at home

There are lots of fun and easy ways to help your child get ready to read. Here are our top ideas.

1. Talk about books, words, and pictures

Before you start reading a book, talk about the title and the pictures on the cover (front and back). Ask your child what they think the story might be about. After reading, ask your child what they liked about the story.

Try asking 'how' and 'why' questions about the story and the pictures. For example:

'How did the bear get across the river?'

'Why was the fox cross?'

2. Listen to (and sing!) songs and rhymes

Singing songs and nursery rhymes helps your child to hear the sounds in words and build up a bank of favourites they know well. Play with words and sounds and make up nonsense rhymes too.

Encourage them to join in.

3. All join in

When you are reading to your child, ask them to join in with bits that are repeated. For example, 'Run, run, as fast as you can! You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man!'. Traditional stories, like The Gingerbread Man, often have repeated phrases, and children will love doing the voices!

4. Play rhyming games

Rhyming games are fun and will help your child start to hear and understand speech sounds. Try 'I spy' when you are out and about. Have fun with rhyming words – for example, can your child think of a word that rhymes with 'cat'?

In all games and activities, make sure you pronounce speech sounds clearly. Try to make them as short as possible – for example, the letter m has a short /m/ sound, not a continuous /mmmmmm/ sound. Try not to add an extra sound onto the speech sound either (for example, the sound is /m/ and not /m-uh/).

Reading: Age 4–5 (Reception)

In Reception, your child will be taught phonics, a method of learning to read words. They learn to read letters by saying the sounds they represent. They can then start to read words by blending individual sounds together to make words.

Alongside learning to decode the words on the page, your child will also learn comprehension skills. This helps them to make sense of what the words say and what the text means. Together, these skills will help your child on their way to becoming a keen and confident reader.

What your child will learn:

- Linking sounds and letters
- Blending sounds to make words
- Learning tricky words

There are lots of ways you can help your child with reading in Reception. Here are our top ideas.

1. Play rhyming games

Say ‘into the pot goes’ while pretending to place objects that rhyme into a pot (for example, a bat, a hat, a cat, a mat). Do this with your child and then see if they can do it independently. You can turn this into a game by throwing in words that don’t rhyme, and asking your child to catch these ones out. For example, a cat, a hat, a bird – this last word shouldn’t go in the pot!

2. Play phonics word games

Play simple phonics word games based on the sounds your child is learning and has learned at school. Start off using just the speech sounds and then immediately say the word. For example, you could say, ‘At the shop I will buy a /m/ /a/ /p/ – map, a /b/ /e/ /d/ – bed, a /d/ /u/ /ck/ – duck.’ Then, trying just saying the sounds and asking your child to work out and say the whole word.

3. Say the sounds right

In all games and activities, make sure you pronounce speech sounds clearly. Try to make them as short as possible – for example, the letter m has a short /m/ sound, not a continuous /mmmmmm/ sound. Try not to add an extra sound onto the speech sound either (for example, the sound is /m/ and not /m-uh/).

4. Listen to your child read

In Reception, your child will probably start bringing home books to read. Try to find time to hear them read every day. It could be snuggled up on the sofa, at bedtime, or before school. Be sure to be patient and don’t forget to be impressed! If your child gets stuck on a word, remind them to say the letter sounds individually and then blend them together quickly to hear the word. If your child still can’t work out the word, then tell them what it is and move on.

5. Read to your child

Learning to read can be hard work for many children, so it’s important to keep enjoying books together. Your child will also benefit from listening to books and stories that they can’t read themselves yet. This might include non-fiction books about things they are interested in or longer stories with more adventurous vocabulary.

Reading: Age 5–6 (Year 1):

In Year 1, your child will have a growing knowledge of phonics and will be building up a range of reading skills. The focus is now on developing their phonics and comprehension skills as they become confident and fluent readers.

In June, your child will take the phonics screening check to make sure they are reading at the expected level. For information about the check, see our Phonics screening check page. If you want to learn more about what phonics is, and how to say the phonics sounds, see our Learn to read with phonics page.

What your child will learn at school:

- Use phonics skills to decode words
- Blend sounds in words
- Read common exception words (tricky words)
- Read words that have different endings
- Read words with contractions
- Read books at the right level out loud
- Re-read books to build up fluency and confidence in word reading
- Listen to and talk about a range of stories and texts
- Learn well-known stories, fairy stories, and traditional tales
- Understand the books they read and listen to

There are lots of ways you can help your child with reading in Year 1. Here are our top ideas.

1. Listen to your child read

Books that your child brings home from school should be at the right level for them. The words should be readable for your child – we say they are levelled reading scheme books. They are written to ensure steady progress and success. Many of these books include helpful notes for parents inside the front and back covers. Bear in mind that reading or listening to the same book more than once is no bad thing – in fact, it is really important for children. Re-reading lets them see or hear words and phrases enough times to remember them, and also helps them to think again about the ideas in the book, perhaps noticing things they missed the first time.

2. Read to your child

Reading to your child will help them to enjoy reading and will build up vital comprehension skills. Children benefit from listening to books that they can't read themselves yet, as they will see and hear adventurous language and ideas that they might not have found in their independent reading. Non-fiction books about the things they're interested in and longer stories are both great for expanding your child's reading horizons.

3. Make regular time

Life is busy, but even ten minutes listening to your child read each day is one of the best ways you can support their education and help them to become a strong reader. Finding a time and place that fits with your routine can help make sure reading is a regular activity. Try straight after school while they are still in work mode.

If your child gets stuck on a word, try phonics first. Get your child to say the letter sounds (e.g. 'c' 'l' 'a' 'p') and then blend them together to hear the whole word (clap); this is called blending. If they

are really stuck then it's best to tell them the word and move on. If the book is at the right level then this should not happen too much.

4. Get them involved!

When you're reading with your child, try to keep them actively involved in the words and the story. Clap out syllables or chunks in words and names to help with reading longer words: pel-i-can! Sep-tem-ber! Or point out that some words are made up of two words (for example, wind and then mill makes windmill). You can have lots of fun with reading by making it an interactive experience. Encourage your child to join in with phrases, sound effects, and actions to make story time a shared experience. It's great for bonding, and talking, acting, and re-telling will all help to develop your child's reading.

5. Choose a wide range of books

A mix of fiction and non-fiction, real stories and magical stories, familiar characters and new experiences help to broaden your child's interests and keep story time fresh. Sometimes you might choose the book, sometimes they might choose the book, and sometimes you might read both!

6. Talk about books, stories, words and pictures

Asking your child questions can help them to think about their reading. Try to ask open questions that begin with 'how' and 'why'. If you can, try to get your child to go back to the text and pictures to tell you how they know the answer. Talking about what is happening in a picture, what the characters might be thinking, or what might happen next all help to develop early reading skills.

Reading: Age 6–7 (Year 2):

In Year 2, your child will be building up a range of reading skills. They should have strong phonics knowledge and growing comprehension skills, which will help them read more broadly, confidently, and fluently. In May, your child will take their Key Stage 1 SATs. The tests include maths and English sections, as well as two reading papers. To find out about the SATs and how you can help your child prepare, visit our Key Stage 1 SATs page.

What your child will learn at school:

- Use phonics to decode complex words
- Blend and recognise alternative sounds for graphemes
- Read words that use common suffixes
- Read more common exception words (tricky words)
- Read most words quickly and accurately
- Read some books out loud
- Re-read books to build up fluency and confidence
- Listen to and talk about a range of texts
- Understand the books they read and listen to
- Talk about books and poems
- Year 2 reading test

How to help at home

1. Encourage your child to read with expression

At this age, it is likely that your child will bring home books to read aloud to you. Try to listen to them read every day. As you listen to your child read, help them to decode any unfamiliar words if they get stuck and encourage them to keep going. The best advice is: be patient and be impressed! Your child's expression might sometimes sound stilted on the first read of a sentence or a page. This is because they are focusing on linking the letters to sound and then joining the sounds into words. To keep your child hooked into the story, read it again with expression – after lots of praise, of course!

2. Read to your child

Your child will learn a lot about how language works from speaking and listening. However, the type of language we use in writing is often different from that in speech. Reading regularly to your child, especially books that they cannot yet read on their own yet, is therefore a great way of improving their vocabulary and their understanding of language.

3. Choose a wide range of books

Try to read your child a mix of fiction and non-fiction, real stories and magical stories, familiar characters and new experiences. Sometimes you might choose the book, sometimes they might choose the book and sometimes you might read both!

4. Talk about books, stories, words, and pictures

Talking about books is a really useful habit to get into. Talk about the characters and what happens in a story, or what specific bit of information was most useful, and ask your child for their opinions too. Let them tell you if (and why) they don't like a book. Part of growing as a reader is learning that it's okay not to like books sometimes!

Asking your child open questions can help them to think about what they're reading. Try to ask questions that begin with 'how' and 'why'. See if your child can go back to the text and pictures to tell you how they know the answer. Talking about what is happening in a picture, what the characters might be thinking, or what might happen next all help to develop reading skills too.

5. Don't be afraid to re-read

It's tempting to think that your child should always be reading new books and changing their books as regularly as possible. While your child will benefit from reading widely, reading the same book more than once is important too. As well as giving your child the opportunity to encounter the same words and phrases enough times to remember them, re-reading helps children to think again about the ideas in the book. Maybe they will notice something they missed the first time? Having old favourites that you go back to again and again helps develop a love of reading.

6. Keep practising phonics

By now, your child will have had lots of practice with reading. This will mean that they will probably not need to sound out and blend the sounds in most words. However, there will still be some unfamiliar words that need to be decoded carefully. It's still important for your child to try sounding out and blending a word if they get stuck.

Reading: Age 7–8 (Year 3)

In Year 3, your child will hopefully be on the way to becoming a confident, independent reader. Many children who have got to grips with phonics and word-reading will shift their focus onto comprehension.

What your child will learn at school:

- Understand root words, prefixes, and suffixes
- Read more common exception words (tricky words)
- Read a wide range of books and retell stories orally
- Perform poems and play scripts
- Talk about interesting words and phrases
- Check that the text makes sense to them
- Read between the lines and justify thinking with evidence from the text
- Predict what might happen next
- Talk about books and poems
- Use dictionaries to check the meaning of words

How to help at home:

1. Listen to your child read regularly

By Year 3, your child will probably have a free choice of the book they read as their home-school reader. Although your child will probably be doing some reading on their own, listening to them read is still really helpful. Making time to listen means that you can help with any unfamiliar words and talk to them about the book to make sure that they understand. Seeing words in print is also good for your child's other English skills – reading aloud helps them to understand the words, to spell them, and to see how grammar and punctuation are used to make meaning.

2. Keep reading to your child

Once your child can read on their own, it is tempting to leave them to get on with their own reading – but reading a book to them can be just as important as encouraging independent reading. Reading to your child can help them develop language skills and comprehension. This is because it gives them access to books that they can't yet read independently, such as longer novels. It also provides a great opportunity to bond, and can form part of a relaxing routine to help your child get ready for a good night's sleep.

3. Don't give up!

When your child reads more challenging books, there might be times when they struggle and want to stop. Help them through these patches by reading a bit with them to get them started or hooked into the next chapter. Take it in turns to read a page or take on the role of particular characters or the narrator. Inventing different character voices is a great way to hook them in and distract them when they are feeling frustrated.

4. Talk about books, stories, and words

Talking about books is a really useful habit to get into. Talk about the characters and what happens in a story, or what specific bit of information was most useful, and ask your child for their opinions too. Let them tell you if (and why) they don't like a book. Part of growing as a reader is learning that it's okay not to like books sometimes!

Asking your child open questions that begin with 'how' and 'why' can help them to think about what they're reading. Try to get your child to go back to the text and pictures to tell you how they know the answer. When reading stories, good readers are always thinking ahead to start to work out what might happen next. You can help your child become better at this by asking key questions such as: I wonder if ... will happen? Who do you think will...?

5. Use pictures to discuss stories

Pictures are still a great way for your child to practise their comprehension skills. Talk about what is happening in a picture, what the characters might be thinking, or what might happen next. Use a photo or picture on its own, or an illustration from a picture book, non-fiction book, or comic strip. Many popular books for children of this age (often called 'middle grade books') include illustrations as part of the story.

6. Explore word meanings together

When your child comes across a new word in their reading, talk together about what the word might mean. Encourage them to use the other words and sentences around it to try to work out the meaning. Talk about other ways you could use the word. Give them an example of another sentence using the new word and encourage your child to do the same.

Reading: Age 8–9 (Year 4):

In Year 4, your child will be developing into an increasingly fluent reader. The focus will now be on building comprehension, but it is still important that children use their phonics skills to tackle new words. There are a variety of simple things you can do at home to support your child's developing reading skills. Read on to find out how your child will learn to read at school and how you can help at home.

What your child will learn at school:

- Understand root words, prefixes, and suffixes
- Read more common exception words (tricky words)
- Read a wide range of books and retell stories orally
- Perform poems and play scripts
- Talk about interesting words and phrases
- Check that the text makes sense to them
- Read between the lines and justify thinking with evidence from the text
- Predict what might happen next
- Talk about books and poems
- Use dictionaries to check the meaning of words
- Common reading issues

How to help at home:

1. Listen to your child reading and read to your child

At this age, your child might prefer to read independently and it's tempting to leave them to it. But listening to them read is still a worthwhile thing to do. This way, you can help your child with any unfamiliar words and can talk to them about the book to make sure that they understand. Reading to them is still important too. Reading to your child means that they will be able to hear books they might not yet be able to read themselves. Sharing and talking about books is also a lovely way to spend time together!

2. Value your child's choices

It's really important to value your child's choices, even when a book looks too easy or too difficult. Children can often read books that initially appear to be too difficult (especially if it is a topic that interests them). That said, you will probably need to guide them through tricky words, pictures, ideas, or even the layout of an information book. At this age, children will often have strong enough word-reading skills to read most books they choose, but that doesn't mean that they can always understand the text.

3. Open up the world of reading

Help your child to read widely. Books, magazines, websites, and apps all show how reading can help you to follow your interests and get involved. Show your child websites, books, and magazines that link to their hobbies – whether it's swimming, football, dance, music, art, or something else entirely. Always check that any websites children access are safe, and monitor their use of them.

4. Make a word bookmark

Using a piece of paper as a bookmark, encourage your child to jot down words they don't understand. They can do this when they read on their own or if you're reading together and they don't want to stop. After reading, try looking up the words together in a dictionary and talk about what they mean.

5. Read for a purpose

As well as reading for pleasure, your child is likely to need to read for particular purposes in Year 4. They will read to find information, to learn about something, or to answer questions. Practising this can be useful for success at school. Your child may be asked to investigate a topic or find answers to questions set in class. You can help them with their research skills by talking about where to look to find the answers, although you may need to remind them to look in books and use the library as well as the internet. Children can struggle with information overload so they need your help to 'search and sift' both sites and information to make decisions.

6. Don't give up!

As your child reads more difficult books, there might be times when they struggle and may be reluctant to continue. You can help them through those patches by reading a bit with them to get them started or hooked into the next chapter. Always balance this with sensitivity and valuing their choice – it's got to be fun!

Reading: Age 9–10 (Year 5):

In Year 5, your child will be encouraged to read widely. This way, they will become familiar with many different types of language and writing. They will talk about and explore their understanding of a wide range of books including stories, non-fiction, poetry, and play-scripts. There are a variety of simple things you can do at home to support your child's developing reading skills.

What your child will learn in school:

- Understand root words, prefixes, and suffixes
- Read and talk about a wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, and non-fiction
- Recommend books to friends
- Talk about and compare themes in books
- Learn a range of poetry by heart and read poems and playscripts aloud
- Check that the text makes sense to them
- Read between the lines and use evidence from the text to justify thinking
- Predict what might happen next
- Identify how the language, structure, and presentation of a text adds to its meaning
- Talk about how authors use language
- Tell the difference between fact and opinion
- Talk about books, building on their own and others' ideas
- Talk about what they have read in presentations and debates

How to help at home:

1. Keep reading to your child as long as possible

At this age, it is tempting to leave your child to get on with reading on their own. But hearing a story read to them is still very important for developing their comprehension. Here are a few reasons why: Hearing a story read out loud means that your child can have access to books that may as yet be too challenging to read alone. These challenging texts will help to develop their comprehension skills. Left to their own devices, your child might tend to pick lots of similar texts to read (for example, books from a favourite author or magazine). Reading aloud to your child gives you the opportunity to introduce them to books that they might not choose to pick up themselves, exposing them to a wider range of stories and types of text. Listening to an adult read gives a model for fluent reading. It allows your child to hear how a skilled reader uses expression, bringing the words on the page to life. Reading together gives your child time to discuss ideas and share opinions about what you're reading. This is great, as it helps children to think deeply about a text and practise explaining their opinions.

2. Listen to your child read

Even though your child is likely to be an independent reader by Year 5, it's still helpful to listen to them read. It means you can help them with unfamiliar words and talk together to make sure that they understand the book.

3. Read a wide variety of books

Encourage your child to choose texts with a variety of formats and layouts. Lots of children have favourite authors and genres, but it can be helpful to expand into new types of books every so often – and be sure not to neglect non-fiction texts, such as magazine articles, brochures, adverts, newspaper columns, signs, and notices.

Showing your child lots of kinds of texts will give them experience reading in a real-world context, and will also prepare them for national assessments where they are expected to engage with a wide variety of text types. Make sure you talk together about how the texts are presented – the writing will look different depending on what type of text it is from. Your child may now be reading more independently, but reading to your child can still be useful, especially if the books you read are a bit above their current reading level. Take a look at our free eBook library for ideas for older readers.

4. Join reading clubs and groups

Give your child as many opportunities as possible to share reading ideas and recommendations. This way they can share the excitement of reading – through a variety of clubs, groups, festivals, and so on. Many of these are online, such as Chatterbooks, but you can also visit your library and bookshop for information.

5. Use pictures to talk about stories

For younger children, pictures provide an excellent opportunity to practise comprehension skills. This can also be true of children as they grow older and become more confident readers. Talking about what is happening in a picture, what the characters might be thinking, or what might happen next all help to develop their reading. You might use a photo or picture on its own, or an illustration from a picture book, non-fiction book or comic strip. Many popular books for children feature illustrations as part of the story.

6. Read for a purpose

As well as reading for pleasure, your child is likely to need to read for particular purposes in Year 4. They will read to find information, to learn about something, or to answer questions. Practising this can be useful for success at school. Your child may be asked to investigate a topic or find answers to questions set in class. You can help them with their research skills by talking about where to look to find the answers, although you may need to remind them to look in books and use the library as well as the internet. Children can struggle with information overload so they need your help to ‘search and sift’ both sites and information to make decisions.

7. Don't give up!

In Year 5, children's enthusiasm for reading can begin to dip. One way to keep them reading is to be a reading role model yourself. Showing them that you read – a book, magazine, or even a football website – helps them to see reading as a purposeful activity. As your child reads more difficult books, there might be times when they struggle and may be reluctant to continue. You can help them through those patches by reading a bit with them to get them started or hooked into the next chapter. Always balance this with sensitivity and valuing their choice – it's got to be fun!

Reading: Age 10–11 (Year 6)

By Year 6, your child will hopefully be reading independently at home and school for lots of different reasons. Some children may still be reluctant to read adventurously and can get stuck on one author, series, or type of book. Having favourites is great, but Year 6 is also a good time to push the boundaries and read new genres and forms. In May, your child will take their Key Stage 2 SATs. The tests include maths and English sections, as well as a reading test. It's important at this age that your child is encouraged to develop a love of reading. This will help to build a strong foundation for learning when they go to secondary school and for later life.

What your child will learn at school:

- Understand root words, prefixes, and suffixes
- Read and talk about a wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, and non-fiction
- Recommend books to friends
- Talk about and compare themes in books
- Learn a range of poetry by heart and read poems and playscripts aloud
- Check that the text makes sense to them
- Read between the lines and use evidence from the text to justify thinking
- Predict what might happen next
- Identify how the language, structure, and presentation of a text adds to its meaning
- Talk about how authors use language
- Tell the difference between fact and opinion
- Talk about books, building on their own and others' ideas
- Talk about what they have read in presentations and debates
- Year 6 reading test

How to help at home:

1. Read a wide variety of books

Encourage your child to choose texts with a variety of formats and layouts. Lots of children have favourite authors and genres, but it can be helpful to expand into new types of books every so often – and be sure not to neglect non-fiction texts, such as magazine articles, brochures, adverts, newspaper columns, signs, and notices. Showing your child lots of kinds of texts will give them experience reading in a real-world context, and will also prepare them for national assessments where they are expected to engage with a wide variety of text types. Make sure you talk together about how the texts are presented – the writing will look different depending on what type of text it is from. Your child may now be reading more independently, but reading to your child can still be useful, especially if the books you read are a bit above their current reading level.

2. ... but value your child's choices too!

Your child might want to read something that everyone is reading at school, an old favourite they've read a hundred times before, or something you wouldn't pick yourself: another book about ponies or the biography of a footballer you've never heard of. Giving your child free choice of the book is a great way of building excitement about reading. If your child tends to want to read the same books over and over again, it can be difficult to balance encouraging your child to read outside the box with letting them choose their own books. The best course is to aim for a mix of old favourites and exciting new ideas. Don't tell your child they can't read a book they have read several times before – but do be sure to point out new titles that might appeal.

3. Listen to audiobooks

Listening to an audiobook together can work well (even better when it is played from the hallowed tablet or smart phone). This could be curled up at bedtime, but it could also be in the car or at home while you're getting ready for school.

4. Carry on reading aloud

Your child may already be a fluent reader, but there are still lots of advantages to reading aloud to your child. Reading to your child gives them the chance to listen to books that they might not be able to read independently. This includes books that are too long for their current level of reading stamina, books with tricky vocabulary, or books that introduce concepts that benefit from discussion with an adult. It also gives you lots of chances to talk about books with your child, and safeguards some shared time together. If your child is a reluctant reader, try meeting them halfway. Perhaps you read a page to them and then they read a page to you. Or, you read one chapter, then they read the next few to themselves, and then you read another.

5. Use pictures to talk about stories

For younger children, pictures provide an excellent opportunity to practise comprehension skills. This can also be true of children as they grow older and become more confident readers. Talking about what is happening in a picture, what the characters might be thinking, or what might happen next. You might use a photo or picture on its own, or an illustration from a picture book, non-fiction book, or comic strip. Many popular books for children feature illustrations as part of the story.

6. Read between the lines

Talking about stories, poems, and information books can help your child understand books in different ways. It's not just about what's happened or who did what. Talk about what a book means to your child and whether they think there are any less obvious meanings that the author wants us to spot.