

# How to “read” a reading assessment test from Let’s Go Learn



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**Screenshots showing how to ‘read’ a reading assessment test from Let’s Go Learn:**

**DORA = Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment**  
(for kids K-7th grade)

### **When might I see an assessment test?**

- Students in the “custom program” often take an assessment test at sign-up to determine what skills they are strong and weak in
- Parents may request a test anytime to get more insight into their child’s needs
- A school assessment test may be handed to you by the parent for more information

**As a tutor, you can gain valuable information by reading assessment test results and then selecting tutoring materials to strengthen those weak areas.**

**This will show you how to read the reading assessment test results from Let’s Go Learn.**

Please call Todd or Laura with questions!

# Assessment Test Analyzed - (Reading)

## Let's Go Learn DORA Report (Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment)

(Parent Version)

**CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

Student: **Brooke** [REDACTED]  
Assessment Date: **05/24/2013**  
Date of Birth: **07/02/2006**  
Age: **6 years 11 months**  
Grade: **1.9**

**Let's Go Learn**  
www.letsgolearn.com

### READING

Here is the front cover of what the test results will look like.

You will see the student's name, date they took test, grade, and age.

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Here is a table of contents showing what is in the report (there is a lot of detail!)



Here is a snapshot overview of the student's performance.

green check marks = mastery  
red arrows = area to improve

right hand column shows student's "achievement grade level" per skill

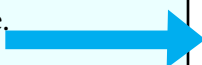
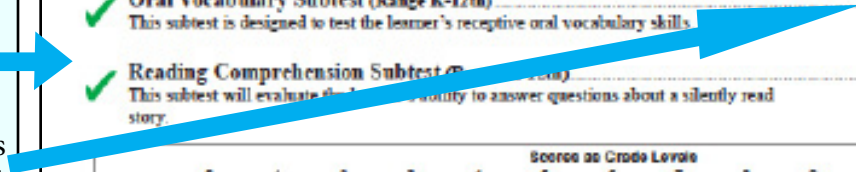
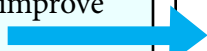
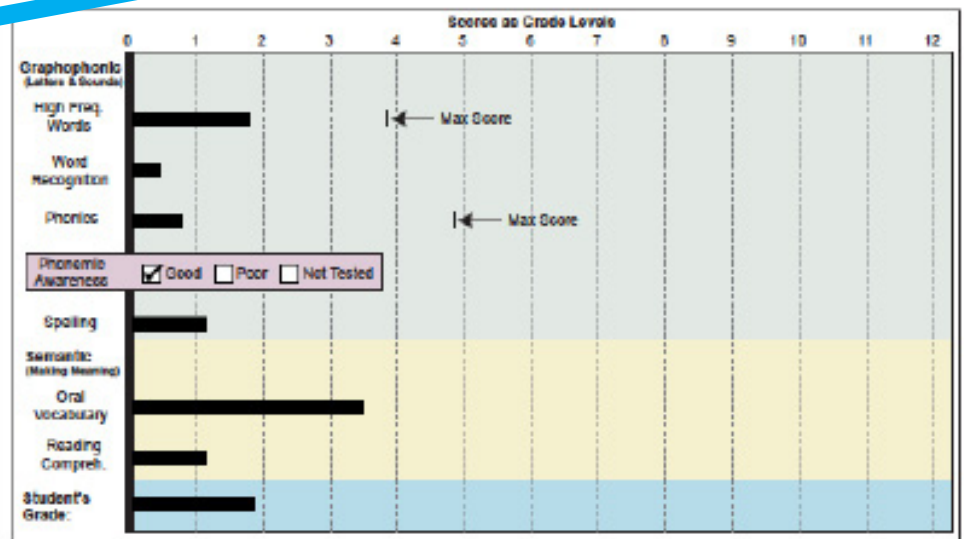
This bar graph shows visually how student is scoring compared to the grade level and maximum score possible.

Graphophononic (Letters and Sounds)

- ✓ High-Frequency Word Subtest (Range K-3rd) ..... Grade: high 1st  
This subtest examines the learner's knowledge of basic sight-word vocabulary.
- ➔ Word Recognition Subtest (Range K-12th) ..... Grade: mid K  
This subtest looks at the learner's ability to read a variety of phonetically regular and phonetically irregular words.
- ➔ Phonics Subtest (Range PreK-4th) ..... Grade: high K  
This subtest is made up of questions testing the learner's ability to sound out a word.
- ✓ Phonemic Awareness Subtest (Good/Poor/Not Tested) ..... Ability: good  
This subtest is usually only given to early readers. If tested it assesses the student's ability to manipulate and use individual sounds (phonemes) within words.
- ✓ Spelling Subtest (Range K-12th) ..... Grade: low 1st  
This subtest will assess the learner's spelling skills.

Semantic (Meaning Making)

- ✓ Oral Vocabulary Subtest (Range K-12th) ..... Grade: mid 3rd  
This subtest is designed to test the learner's receptive oral vocabulary skills.
- ✓ Reading Comprehension Subtest (Range K-12th) ..... Grade: low 1st  
This subtest will evaluate the learner's ability to answer questions about a silently read story.



## Summary of Student's Reading Strategies

Brooke's performance on this assessment indicates that within the semantic domain, comprehension strategies and vocabulary knowledge are areas of strength for him/her. The semantic domain addresses a student's ability to make meaning out of what he or she reads. Brooke's strength in this domain is suggested by his/her above-grade-level performance on the reading comprehension and vocabulary sections of the assessment. Brooke was found to be at grade level in the graphophonic domain. This area of reading generally deals with the ways in which individual words are processed and either written or read (via identifying letter-sound relationships). Brooke's continued progress in reading may be enhanced by providing more practice in areas which address the graphophonic domain. Students with this profile (above grade level for comprehension and at grade level for graphophonic skills) often benefit from doing work that enables them to discover how longer, multisyllabic words work. Encourage Brooke to look for smaller 'chunks' or words/word parts inside of these more complex, multisyllabic words, in order to use what he/she already knows to finally decode the word. When Brooke encounters words he/she is unfamiliar with, you may also want to encourage him/her to utilize his/her graphophonic abilities and the strategy of 'chunking' mentioned above, as well as his/her strong semantic abilities. For example, when Brooke encounters an unknown word, ask him/her what word he/she thinks would make sense in the sentence considering what has happened in the story up to that point, and have him/her check the parts of the word he/she knows in order to decode it. The specific suggestions on the pages that follow can be used to expose him/her to more activities in this area:

## More details follow!

In the pages that follow, there is a even more detailed breakdown of how the student performed and how to help the student improve.

## Individual Decoding Recommendations

- Initiate a conversation with Brooke about what he/she does when he/she encounters an unknown word in a text. If Brooke is aware that he/she substitutes a similar "known" word for the unknown word on the page when it is encountered, praise this approach, and encourage Brooke to make a guess at what the word might be, given the clues provided by the letters in the word and the content of the sentence as well. Point out to Brooke that even the most advanced reader encounters unknown words and must use different strategies to analyze and decode these words. This will begin to draw the student's attention to the effectiveness of word analysis strategies. The combination of using the context of the sentence/picture/story WITH the clues provided by the letters in unknown words creates a very sophisticated and powerful set of strategies that should be encouraged and discussed with Brooke.
- Find potentially tricky words before Brooke begins to read a story. Encourage him/her to deconstruct these unknown words beforehand by looking for known phonetically regular (i.e., letters and letter combinations which make sounds that are commonly seen in reading) parts in these words - in other words, to "chunk" or break up the words into more manageable units that can then be reconstructed or blended into a whole word. For example, if you think that the word 'interesting' might be difficult for Brooke, pull it out and have him/her look for words or word parts inside of the word 'interesting' that might allow him/her to successfully read the word. Brooke might, for instance, see the word 'in' at the beginning of the word, and 'ing' at the end of the word. This might help him/her to first blend the word together and finally to read it. Then, as Brooke reads the story, guide him/her in applying these same strategies for decoding. This will give Brooke the opportunity to experience success with his/her burgeoning word analysis strategies.
- Create a bank of tricky, phonetically regular words (words that have commonly seen and recognized letter combinations which may, however, be tricky for Brooke) that Brooke has trouble reading or writing. Then, have him/her categorize these words into "families" or words that contain similar "chunks." This will prepare Brooke to analyze and decode (break up and read) more sophisticated multisyllabic words that he/she will encounter in advanced texts. Some example words might be gate, rate, bait, wait, and ray. At different times these might be categorized in different ways. For example, the student might see them all, at first, as a group of words that all have the long A sound. Later, you might discuss with Brooke how there are several different ways to make the long A sound, then make new categories separating the words that have the -ate piece from those with the ai or the ay piece. **Finally, as more words are added, Brooke can be encouraged to create other categories as well, depending upon the words he/she collects.** read and write the words you collect.

- Continue to exercise Brooke's good spelling skills by challenging Brooke with words that he/she would like to practice spelling. Encourage him/her to spell unfamiliar or new words that he/she encounters.
- Utilize Brooke's more advanced level of reading skills by encouraging him/her to sound out more complex words.

## Individual Comprehension Building Recommendations

- Keep building on Brooke's already strong comprehension abilities by giving him/her consistent opportunities to read both silently and aloud. Ensure that he/she has opportunities to retell his/her understandings of these readings with peers or adults. Use these retellings as an assessment of his/her reading comprehension (if the retellings are complete and accurate, Brooke is comprehending that particular text well; if not, you may need to change texts or offer more support while reading) and adjust the kinds of strategies you use with him/her depending on his/her ability to accurately comprehend the text on a factual level. For example, if you've been working on predictions, and Brooke is doing well with these, move on to addressing another strategy, such as summarizing or making inferences about the text.
- Work on Brooke's ability to go beyond a literal understanding of the text by asking him/her various types of questions. After introducing different types of questions and providing plenty of examples, go through the process of asking such questions. Have Brooke think aloud about what question type is being asked and what information he/she should use to answer it successfully. Work together to find the answer, using the text, inferences, or personal opinions. Provide plenty of opportunities for Brooke to use this strategy independently, with modeling as necessary. The four types of questions in this strategy are as follows:
  1. Factual- These are factual questions which can be answered by looking directly at one spot in the text. For example, if you were reading *Where the Wild Things Are*, you might ask, "Why does Max's mother send him to bed without supper?" or "When Max wakes up in his room, what does he find his mother has left by his bedside table?"
  2. Pulling it Together- These types of questions are also factual, but one must use different parts of the text to answer them correctly. For example, you might say, "Describe what Max did on the monster island" or "Explain Max's journey to the island" or "How many monsters were on the island?"
  3. Text and Me- These questions are inferential and require that one use the text as well as his/her own schema to answer them. For example, you might ask, "Why did Max behave badly?" or "Why does Max go home?"
  4. On My Own - These questions are more conceptually or thematically based. They relate to the larger concept of the text and may be informed by having read the text, but they require no specific information from it. For example, "Explain why having a vivid imagination can be a wonderful thing."
- Continue to build Brooke's already strong vocabulary by encouraging him/her to read increasingly difficult texts and different types of texts than those he/she typically reads (perhaps expository [factual] texts on subjects of interest). Encourage him/her to collect difficult vocabulary from these texts. He/She should use the context of the reading to make educated guesses as to the meanings of such words. Upon completion of the reading, Brooke should use a dictionary to confirm his/her predictions about these words. He/She can add these words to his/her word bank and use them in thematic word sorts (where he/she puts the collected words in categories according to common themes or attributes they share) or sorts that draw his/her attention to the meaning of prefixes, suffixes, and roots.

Graphophonics

Begin. Sounds	Tested Correctly	Phonetic Principle	Mastery	Phonemic Awareness Task	Tested Correctly
Consonants		<b>Some Beginning Sounds</b> fish, moon, cat	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Phoneme Isolation</b> What is the first sound in van?	+
		<b>Most All Beginning Sounds</b> king, toy, world	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Phoneme Identity</b> What sound is the same in fix, fat, and sun?	+
		<b>Short Vowel Sounds</b> den, nap, fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Phoneme Categorization</b> Which word doesn't belong? bus, bun, rug.	-
		<b>Consonant Blends</b> snap, crisp, splat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Phoneme Blending</b> Which word is /t/ /i/ /g/?	+
Stops		<b>Long Vowel Sounds</b> kite, cake, mile	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Phoneme Segmentation</b> How many sounds are in grab?	+
		<b>Consonant Digraphs</b> chips, cloth, shod	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Phoneme Deletion</b> What is <u>am</u> without the /s/?	+
		<b>Vowel Digraphs</b> coat, team, train	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Phoneme Addition</b> What word do you have if you add /s/ to the beginning of park?	+
		<b>r-Controlled Vowels</b> dark, farm, part	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Phoneme Substitution</b> The word is bug. Change /g/ to /r/. What's the new word?	-
		<b>Diphthongs</b> joy, cloud, pause	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Phoneme Rhyming</b> What word rhymes with cat?	+
		<b>Multi-Syllable</b> jumping, structure, station	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Total Score:</b>	<b>78</b>

Here is another table report showing how the student is doing in 'graphophonics'

+ = tested, got it correct  
- = tested, got it wrong  
N/T = not tested

**Phonological Domain (Sounds):** Every reader needs to put sounds together with letters in order to sound out words. This is an essential skill to possess when you are presented with an unfamiliar word. Around 70% of English words are phonetic: words that can be sounded out. In order to develop this skill, the reader must have the ability to recognize distinct sounds and memorize the letters that correspond to the sounds. In addition, the reader must possess the ability to synthesize the sounds: consonants with vowels and consonants with consonants, etc. Single sounds must be blended together to make a word. This skill is important to phonics (sometimes called "word analysis" or "word attack"): the ability to sound out words. If you are presented with a word that you have never seen before, for example "phroist," you must use your phonics skills to sound out this unfamiliar word.

- Brooke can spell words like "gift".
- Brooke spelled "down" for "do".

**Graphic Domain (Visual):** In addition to sounding out words, good readers have the ability to memorize whole words. The frequency of exposure to words leads to memorization of the way words look. The reader will not have to sound out these words when he or she sees them; he or she will be able to recognize the word instantly. This also goes for words that cannot be sounded out.

- Brooke can read words like "could" and "looked".
- Brooke read "dare" for "bear" and "grope" for "group".

**Real vs. Non-words:** Written language is made up of symbols (letters) that correspond to sounds. Early reading skills include the ability to "decode" or sound out words that may be unfamiliar. Non-words are used as a way of creating a scenario in which decodable words can be presented while still ensuring their unfamiliarity. Using non-words when assessing a student's ability to decode is very helpful. A good reader uses a combination of both real and non-words in the Phonics subtest. The pattern of errors in real and non-words:

81 1/2% of errors were "real-word" questions.

Semantics

**Language and Meaning:** The reason we read is to gather information and make meaning from text. Letters and words make up sentences to form written language. This means that readers need to use contextual cues, as well as the ability to sound out and recognize memorized words, to get meaning from text. It is important to understand the meaning of the individual words as well as of the sentences and passages. For example, a second-grade reader may be presented with the sentence "The wind was in my face." Then that same reader might be presented with the sentence "I need to wind my watch." Even though this reader might be able to sound out the letters W-I-N-D, he or she must understand the sentence in order to recognize the correct meaning and pronunciation of the word. In addition, even if he or she knows what the word "wind" means, he or she may not understand the sentence "Let's wind this meeting up." Understanding what you read as you read it is just as important a reading skill as the ability to sound out or memorize words. Comprehension is the purpose of reading.

- Brooke was able to identify the meaning of words like "defeat" and "exhausted".
- Brooke had trouble distinguishing the meaning of words like "similar" and "candidate".

**Reading Comprehension, Factual vs. Inferential:** Reading is an act of communication; therefore, the purpose of reading is to gather information from a written source. Some of this information is factual. For example, you could read a story about a red fire truck. You would be able to answer a factual question: "What color is the fire truck?" However, some information is more complex and requires inferential thinking. You could be asked, "Why do you think fire trucks are red?" This question prompts the reader to think above and beyond the sentences in the story and consider things that are not straightforwardly stated. When examining a student with reading comprehension issues, it is always pertinent to determine the pattern of comprehension. Analyzing errors is a helpful way to understand a reading comprehension profile. Below is the analysis from this student's errors in the reading comprehension subtest:

33% of errors were in response to "factual" questions.  
66% of errors were in response to "inferential" questions.

**High-Frequency Word Subtest:** This subtest examines the learner's recognition of basic sight-word vocabulary. Sight words are everyday words that a reader sees when reading, often called words of "most-frequent-occurrence." Many of these words are phonetically irregular (words that cannot be sounded out) and must be memorized. High-frequency words like *the*, *who*, *what* and *those* make up an enormous percentage of the material for beginning readers. In this subtest, a learner will hear a word and then see four words of similar spelling. The learner will click on the correct word. This test extends through third-grade difficulty, allowing a measurement of fundamental high-frequency word recognition skills.

**Word Recognition Subtest:** This subtest measures the learner's ability to recognize a variety of phonetically regular words (words that can be sounded out) and phonetically irregular words (words that cannot be sounded out). This test consists of words from first-grade to twelfth-grade difficulty. These are the words that readers become familiar with as they progress through school. This test is made up of words that may not occur as frequently as high-frequency words but do appear on a regular basis. Words like *tree* and *dog* appear on lower-level lists and words like *different* and *special* appear on higher-level lists.

**Phonics Subtest:** This subtest is made up of questions that measure the learner's ability to recognize parts of words and sound out words. The skills range from the most rudimentary—consonant sounds—to the most complex—pattern recognition of multi-syllabic words. This test examines strategies that align with first- through fourth-grade level skills. Unlike the previous two tests, it focuses on the details of sounding out a word. Often nonsense words are used to reduce the possibility that the learner may already have committed certain words to memory. This will create a measure of the learner's ability to sound out phonetically regular words.

**Phonemic Awareness Subtest:** This subtest will measure a learner's attention to discrete sounds within words, or phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness only refers to the student's attention to sounds and not textual features of a word. In the phonemic awareness subtest, learners are tested on their ability to 1) segment words into sounds, 2) blend sounds together to make words, 3) rhyme, 4) recognize the same sound in different words, 5) delete, add, and substitute sounds to produce new words, 7) isolate sounds, and 8) recognize which sound in a series of words is different.

**Oral Vocabulary Subtest:** This subtest is designed to test the learner's receptive oral vocabulary skills. Unlike expressive oral vocabulary (the ability to use words when speaking or writing), receptive oral vocabulary is the ability to understand words that are presented orally. In this test of receptive oral vocabulary, learners will be presented with four pictures, hear a word spoken, and then click on the picture that matches the word they heard. For example, they may see a picture of an *elephant*, a *deer*, a *unicorn* and a *ram*. At the same time, the learner will hear the word *tusk* and should click on the picture of the elephant. All of the animals have some kind of horn, but the picture of the elephant best matches the target word. This test extends to a twelfth-grade level. This skill is indispensable to the learner's ability to comprehend and read contextually, as successful contextual reading requires an adequate vocabulary.

**Spelling Subtest:** This subtest assesses the learner's spelling skills. This subtest will not be multiple-choice. It consists of words graded from first- to twelfth-grade. The learner's spelling on the letters on the web page and his or her mistakes will be tracked. This subtest will measure phonetic or non-phonetic errors.

**Reading Comprehension Subtest:** This subtest evaluates the learner's reading comprehension skills. The learner will read a story. Twelve graded passages with comprehension questions will include a variety of factual and conceptual questions. For example, the first question may ask "Why do you think the boy sail the boat?" and the next question may ask "Why do you think the boy sail the boat?"

## Assessment Analysis Explanation

Awareness of the complexities and components of reading is vital to the full understanding of the results of any literacy evaluation. Comprehensive knowledge of your student's reading profile is the first step to constructing accurate and informed instruction.

Reading is made up of several skill sets. Understanding all there is to know about reading can seem like an impossible task. Linguists, reading specialists, and speech pathologists spend their entire careers studying the details of language-based activities like reading, writing, and speaking. Some reading tests boil a student's performance down to one number, often a grade level. "Your student reads at a \_\_\_\_\_ grade level." One number cannot possibly cover all the skills involved in reading. It is our goal to give you a general but succinct overview of the components of reading in order to fully appreciate this learner's reading profile.

Although reading is a multifaceted process, it can be broken down into three basic parts. (See page six for examples from your student's participation in each of these three areas.) Keep in mind that all of these parts work together, overlapping and entwining to create a balanced reader.

1) In the beginning, before reading instruction has begun, most students begin to learn about sounds. As they begin to speak, they begin to develop *phonemic awareness*, the ability to distinguish sounds within words. This ability to discriminate between one sound and the next leads to proper pronunciation. Later on it allows them to sound out words, a crucial skill for beginning readers. All readers are presented with words that are unfamiliar and must be sounded out. When a student is first beginning to read, this is happening frequently. As a student progresses through the years, fewer and fewer words are unfamiliar. An average adult reader may encounter an unfamiliar word that needs to be sounded out less than one percent of the time.

2) English is made up of many words called "sight words" or "non-decodable words." These are words that cannot be sounded out and must be memorized. A reader must learn them by memorization and will become more familiar with them with more exposure. The longer a student is exposed to reading, the larger his or her compilation of memorized words becomes. However, even words that can be sounded-out, sometimes called "decodable" words, become memorized words over time.

3) Our purpose for reading may be entertainment, information, or communication. However, the process to realize any possible purpose for reading is always the same: the absorption of language. Therefore, not only do readers need to sound out words and recognize known words, they must understand the meaning of the individual words they read and the overall concept of the passage. All these things must be done in concert as a person reads. Understanding what you read as you read it is also an essential check to sounding out and recognizing known words. A good reader will use the meaning of the story to make sure he or she is sounding out words correctly. If a reader is struggling to sound out or recognize words, comprehension will suffer.

A measurement of the strengths and weaknesses in these areas creates a reading profile. Effective reading improvement must address the student's reading weaknesses. A gap between these strengths and weaknesses can also create struggle for a reader. Even students with skills that are all within or above grade range may have a large gap between their skills. A large gap will create a struggle for any student. Determining a comprehensive reading profile for your student is the best way to begin his or her journey to reading success.

## Instructional Activities Overview

These suggestions are intended to get you started on the road to reading improvement. Instructional hints for all six subtests have been included. Priority attention, if needed in one of the skill areas, is indicated with an arrow.

Reading improvement requires dedication and commitment. If a reader falls behind grade level in a skill area, he or she has not been able to make sufficient progress in a specific period of time. For example, a third-grade girl spells at a second-grade level at the beginning of third grade. At the end of third grade, she may still spell at a second-grade level. If she goes on to fourth grade, she may not make much spelling progress because she is starting out with a one-year deficit. At the end of fourth grade, she will probably be almost two years behind her fellow classmates in spelling. The only way for her to catch up is accelerated learning; in other words, she must make more than one year of spelling progress in a single year. For this reason, daily intervention is recommended for any areas of weakness in the student's reading. Frequency is more important than quantity.



### High-Frequency Words

High frequency words are what they sound like: words that are frequently encountered, both orally and in text. These are often small words, such as *the*, *a* or *my*. Sometimes high frequency words do not sound the way they ought to sound according to their spelling, so they aren't easy for young readers to sound out. Take, for example, the common and seemingly simple word, "was". A child who is encountering this word for the first time won't think it is so simple, and will probably try to sound it out. In doing so, he or she would probably come up with "wass" (rhymes with "mass"). Since we actually pronounce this word "wuz", the child wouldn't recognize the nonsense word that he/she produced ("wass").

If children had to rely on sounding out every word they encountered, many of their attempts at pronunciation would be inaccurate. Needless to say, the "sounding out" approach to reading by itself would be both time-consuming and frustrating for a beginning reader. In order to avoid these problems and become more efficient, beginning readers need to turn as many words as they can into what are called *sight words*. Sight words are words your child recognizes instantly in print, without having to sound them out. The first sight word for many children is their own name. This is an appropriate first sight word, because it carries much meaning for the child. Aside from the child's own name, it is particularly helpful to turn high frequency words into sight words, since the child is sure to encounter these words often while reading.

*Try these exercises to improve the amount of High Frequency words your child knows:*

1. When reading to young children, hold them accountable for 1-2 words at each reading session. When you come to these words (for example "and" or "to"), stop and point to one of the words and have the child take his/her turn reading. Encourage them by saying things like, "I know you know this word; it is one we've been working on!" If the word is encountered too often, don't stop to ask it every time. Do the same with older children, but hold them accountable for more words. It is fine to leave cards or a paper out with their words written on them for the child to refer to the first few times you do this exercise.
2. Encourage your child to find sight words in many contexts – on signs, packages, magazines, etc. You can cut examples of the words out of magazines, if you'd like. As you drive through town you can have a "word hunt" and look for certain sight words together.
3. Write sight words on large cards or sheets of paper. Spread these all over the floor. Have your child jump quickly from word to word. As the child lands on a word, he/she must shout out its name. If the word the child says is correct, he/she can pick up the card; if it is incorrect, it cannot be retrieved. Keep going until all words are retrieved. A variation occurs when the parent or teacher shouts out the word to be jumped to, and the child must jump to the word that the adult shouts out.
4. Copy a sheet of complex writing (an adult novel, for example). You could also use a sheet of newspaper. The object is to get a page of text where the words are too difficult to read, except for the common sight words you are working on with your child. Have the child scan it and circle all sight words he/she sees, then have him/her read them to you. If your child enjoys it, you can time him/her and see how many words he/she can find in a minute or more. Only do this if it is enjoyable, however.
5. Some children enjoy working on sight words with flashcards. This is certainly the easiest method for parents or teachers to work with, but it is important to show your children these words in several contexts, too. If you use flashcards, try to make it into a game. Be enthusiastic and encouraging, and try not to make it drudgery.

*The bottom line is to point these useful sight words out in many contexts, and to try to make it fun for your child. Reading is so important that you don't want your child to be turned off by it early on because of experiences that made it seem boring and pointless. Collect and memorize sight words with your child in a fun and positive way, and watch your child's reading ability grow!*

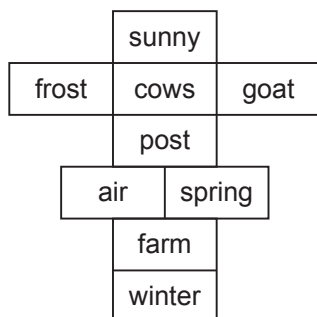
Word Recognition

Improving a reader's word recognition ability can be accomplished in several ways. The most important thing to remember is that it takes time. Effective readers have been building a catalog of easily recognized words over a long period of time, through the reading of thousands of words. One main thing affects the number of words a reader recognizes; exposure. The more a learner reads, the more words they become exposed to, the more words they are able to recognize instantly. (This is also true for word meaning, or vocabulary. The more you are exposed to unfamiliar vocabulary words, the more likely it will be that you will begin to understand the meaning, therefore expanding your vocabulary.)

Word recognition is slightly different from word analysis (sounding-out). You can think of it like this, words in English are made up of about 70% phonetically regular words (words that can be sounded out) and 30% phonetically irregular words (words that cannot be sounded out). Phonetically irregular words must be memorized so that they can be recognized when they are encountered in text. However, the phonetic words, even though they can be sounded out when encountered, will eventually be memorized too. An effective reader certainly doesn't sound out 7 out of 10 words that they read. Even if 7 out of 10 of those words could be sounded out, fluency of reading requires the reader to quickly recognize words. Think about a word that you know, like *spaghetti*. You could sound out the word when you encounter it, but it is likely that you will instantly recognize it when you see it on a jar of sauce in the super market. You don't have to sound out the word like you did when you saw it for the very first time because you have seen it so many times.

Improving word recognition with your child can be easy and fun. One approach is to begin keeping track of the words your child sounds out. If you are reading a story with your child about farm animals, and you notice that he or she sounded out the words *farmer*, *milk* and *storm*, jot those words down for practice later. Write the words on index cards and practice them until your child has instantaneous recognition of the words. Don't try to practice too many words at a time. Between ten and twenty is plenty. You may still keep collecting them from contextual reading but keep them on reserve until your son or daughter is ready for new words.

You can play lots of games when you are practicing words. One inventive parent in New York, New York said she likes to lay the card out on the floor in a hopscotch pattern. Her daughter jumps from word card to word card and has to say the word when she lands on each card.



For readers who may be reading chapter books, a good way to jump-starting. Have your son or daughter skim over a page or a few pages looking likely to be the ones they will have to sound out. They can sound these la out exactly how to say the word when they encounter it in the story. Then encouraging them to recognize the words you had previously worked on. recognize those words next time they are encountered in print.

Phonics (Word Analysis)

Phonics refers to the complex set of actions and background knowledge readers must call upon when sounding out words. The English language is tremendously complex. We have single letters that make more than one sound ('C' in cat and city), as well as letter combinations that make several sounds ('Ch' in chocolate, school and machine). We ask young children to learn all possible letters and letter combinations and match them with the sounds they make, while still trying to understand what is being read!

There are many specific activities that have been developed around particular word analysis goals: These range from activities dealing with relatively simple, three letter words, to multi-syllable words with several affixes. This page will offer general guidelines and helpful places to begin. Be sure to consult our website for monthly updates and suggested activities to deal with specific reading skills. It is best to make instruction as individualized as possible, so that it is most efficient and effective. Because of this, it is important to pay attention to patterns in your child's reading and/or writing that he/she is having trouble with. Once you've noticed an area of particular trouble for your child, you can offer support and intervention. For example, you may notice that while reading and writing, your daughter has trouble pronouncing and spelling words that begin with th. She pronounces each letter separately, so that the word 'then' is pronounced 't-h-en'. You can now focus on the th letter combination, and teach its use in spelling and reading.

Try these exercises to improve your child's Phonics skills:

1. Make a list of words with the same characteristics as the one your child is having trouble with. In the 'th' example from above, you can use words like *then*, *that*, *this*, etc. Have your child create the list with you. Study the words together: read them, discuss them, notice the th sound in all of them, and contrast them with other words that use just a 't' or just an 'h' to make the sounds (words like tap or hen). Do this over a period of several days or weeks if necessary. While studying a pattern, you will help your child become familiar with that pattern and others like it. Repeated exposure is an important component of mastery. As you read together, collect more words like the ones you are studying. In this way, you will call attention to the pattern again in another context.
2. Keep track of all letter patterns you are working on and even those you've worked on in the past. Keeping them in a notebook is a nice way to review patterns. It is also a great way for your child to see how far he or she has come!
3. Use letter tiles or refrigerator magnetic letters to form words with the pattern you are working on at that time. (If you don't have letter tiles, you can make a fun activity out of cutting out block letters from construction paper.) You will have to collect the letters and sounds ahead of time. If you want to work on the th sound, for example, collect these two letters, as well as enough vowels and extra consonants to form words like 'them', 'then' and 'this'. Have your child form these words around the th. Children love to manipulate objects, so they often like this activity.
4. It is a great idea to follow up any word analysis activity that focuses on reading with a writing/spelling activity. This can reinforce what they've learned, and allow them an opportunity to transfer this knowledge to the writing/spelling domain. You can dictate words you have just worked with, and have your child write them.







## Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is an important skill for children to possess because it allows them to make connections between how sounds work in words orally and how they correspond to letter patterns in words. Children who have good phonemic awareness are generally better at decoding words and spelling words. Good phonemic awareness helps relieve some cognitive burden in sounding out and identifying words as they make sense of text.

There are many types of instructional activities a teacher can employ in teaching phonemic awareness. However, phonemic awareness instruction gives students higher utility if instruction is ultimately implemented using letters. Because some phonemic awareness exercises (i.e., sound manipulation) are more complex than other phonemic awareness exercises (i.e., beginning sound identification), it is important to tailor phonemic awareness exercises to the child's needs and development level or age.

Here are some example activities for phonemic awareness:

1. **Phoneme Segmentation and Blending:** Have a book of one-syllable words with lines or boxes underneath them that represent the phonemes in the word. Make sure the lines or boxes are big enough for the child to point to. Have the child say the word the picture corresponds to. Say the word with the child. Have the child say and slowly stretch the sounds within the word. Then have the child slide his or her finger into the lines or boxes as he or she says each individual sound in the word. You can have the child slide pennies or other plastic manipulatives into these lines or boxes as he or she sounds out the word. After the child slowly breaks up the word into sounds take the individual sounds and blend them together quickly to form the original word. As the child becomes proficient in segmenting and blending the sounds, have the child identify the letters that correspond to the sounds. You can replace the manipulatives with letters as the child repeats the segmenting and blending exercises.



2. **Phoneme Manipulation:** Tell your student that you're going to play a game where the student is going to make new words by deleting sounds from words, adding sounds, or substituting sounds from previous ones. Here is an example dialogue:

Teacher: "Listen to the word I say. Slime. Now repeat the word."

Child: "Slime."

Teacher: "Now say the word again without the /s/."

Child: "Lime."

Teacher: "Good. Say that again."

Child: "Lime."

Teacher: "Now take that new word and replace /l/ with /t/."

Child: "Time."

You can continue the activity with different directions or starting activity, have the child write down each new word that is created and then added, or substituted.

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## Spelling

There are many strategies that children employ when they "encode" or spell words. Spelling is an auditory and a visual process. Children need to be able to hear discrete sounds in words and make letter associations to these sounds. The more children encounter a word by reading it or writing it, the less they need to rely on "sounding-out" strategies to spell it. Instead, they memorize how the word looks and appropriate letter sequence of letters associated with it.

Instructional strategies in phonics and visual memory will help develop a child's spelling skills. For example, when learning to spell single syllable words, have your child orally stretch the sounds in the word before he or she writes the letters. (For example, they could stretch out the sounds to a word like *scrap*, "SS-CCCCRRRAAPP.") Then have them say the sounds again as they actually write the letters.

For multi-syllable words have your child tap out or clap out the syllables. Ask your child to stretch out the sounds of each syllable, one syllable at a time before writing the word. Another useful strategy is saying each syllable before saying the letters of each syllable. If you are working on a word like *hospital*, encourage your child to say "hos, H-O-S, pi, P-I, tal, T-A-L." Then have your child write out the word saying the syllables and letters again, "hos, H-O-S, pi, P-I, tal, T-A-L."

Build a list of words to practice spelling from memory. Remember to include phonetically irregular words (words that can not be sounded-out) that your son or daughter might misspell frequently. Words like *who*, *though* and *sign* are good examples. Keep a running list of these words and practice them anytime. Practicing daily is recommended. Frequency is more important than quantity. Practicing spelling words for two hours once a week is not as effective as 15 minutes a day. Some families practice spelling words on car rides or for a few minutes before bed. You can make spelling more fun by having spelling tournaments or singing the letters of the word.

Collecting words with similar spelling may also be helpful. If your child is studying a word like *glorious*, you can also have your child spell *curious*, *studious* and *copious*. Even if your son or daughter is working on much smaller words like *ship*, they can also practice words like *hip*, *snip* and *chip*.

Capturing a list of familiar word beginnings and word endings is a good way to improve spelling. Reading specialists frequently have their students memorize prefixes and suffixes as a precursor to multi-syllable spelling. You can do this too. Begin making a list of familiar word "chunks", practice them with your child. When your son or daughter encounters these word chunks in a new word, learning to read and spell that word will be easier. Here are a few to get you started:

pre

dis

ture

tion

For extra fun, take the letters of a big word you have been practicing and scramble them. Have your child try to put the letters back in the correct order. Or for a change of pace, switch roles. You pretend to be the child. Have your son or daughter test you on the spelling words. Make intentional mistakes and encourage your child to check your spelling. These are some engaging ways for you to make spelling a part of your child's daily learning.

Oral Vocabulary

Needless to say, developing vocabulary can have a positive impact on your child's reading comprehension. There are many ways you can help your child master new words.

One of the most helpful things you can do to help your child – particularly your younger child – develop a robust vocabulary is to purposefully “boost” your vocabulary when you speak with him or her. Be conscious of the words you use, and try to introduce new words in your everyday conversations. For example, if you are driving down the street and see a truck, point out the “flatbed” or “semi” or “eighteen – wheeler.”

Studies indicate that children learn about ten percent of their vocabulary through vocabulary in school. The rest they learn from exposure to speech and – most significantly – from reading books to your child that are a level above what they can read independently will help your child.

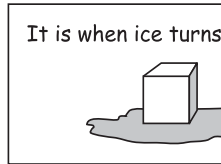
**The Word Bank**

One effective (and fun!) way is to create and use a “word bank.” A word bank is a collection of words that you and your child assemble while reading together. You can work to master these words through a variety of games and activities. You'll need index cards (to write the words on) and a recipe card box. You may also wish to buy some index card dividers to put inside the box to separate the newest words you have been working on and the mastered words etc.

To collect words, keep an eye out for words he or she has difficulty with. As you read with your child, encounter words that they may not know. You may wish to question your child about difficult words across just to make sure they know the meaning. A reader may partially understand a word in context but not understand the meaning. There are various reasons why a child might struggle with a particular word. For example, he or she might know a word and understand it perfectly when it is spoken, but not sound it out when encountering it in print. However, since we're concerned with word meaning, focus on words your child is unfamiliar with (both in speech and in print).

When you and your child run across unfamiliar words, while reading, take a moment to address them. Write the word out on the front of the index card and drop it into the word bank. Limit the number of words you make to three or four words per reading session. Help your child understand the meaning of the word by explaining it or referencing it in a dictionary. Have your child write a definition on the back of the card or her own words. If your child is too young to write, you can write it for him or her. It is also helpful to have your child draw a small picture on the back of the card displaying the meaning of the word. Once you have a word bank, or so cards, you can begin working on mastering new words. Encourage your child to use sentences with the words. Choose four or five of the words and take turns making up stories that use these new words. Practice these new words every day and most importantly, make it fun!

Here is an example of a word bank card submitted by a mom in Kensington, California. Her child was reading a story about icicles, he wasn't sure about the word “melts.” She made the card and he drew the picture.



Reading Comprehension

Like so many parents, you are undoubtedly aware that reading with your child is one of the most important things you can do to help him or her develop reading comprehension abilities. However, as reading to your child gradually gives way to your child reading to you, you might be unsure about the role you should play in the process.

**The Book Walk**

One effective way is to do a “book walk” with your child before actually reading a new book together. A “book walk” is a warm - up activity that helps a child make meaning of text by supplying him or her with necessary vocabulary and concepts. You'll need to preview the book yourself before reading with your child. As you do...

- Look for words that are likely to give your child trouble, such as words that he or she won't be able to sound out, or simply doesn't know. Is there enough context for your child to figure out the word alone? Check not only word context but also pictures (if any), which are legitimate and very important sources of information for the beginner reader. If there isn't enough context, you'll want to introduce these words during your book walk. (Note that if you think you'll have to “give” your child more than five words per reading session, you'll probably want to select a less difficult book.)
- If the book is a story or narrative, note the characters' names, and get a sense of the story line. Think about what your child may already know about the genre in general, and the subject in particular.
- Look for details or conventions that might confuse your child. For example, some picture books have dialog in bubbles (as in comics). Other books might have features your child has not yet encountered, such as a table of contents, index, captions, headings, charts, tables, etc. Remember that things we take for granted might be big news to a child! For example, one parent we know was surprised to learn that her young child was confused by the illustrator's use of “speed lines” to indicate movement in the pictures!

When it's time to read the new book together, have your child look at the cover and read the title (or read the title yourself). Ask, “What do you think this book will be about?” If it's a picture book, have your child then “walk” through the pictures and construct a story. Gently steer him or her to details in the pictures that will help him or her construct a more accurate and robust prediction. Remember, the idea here is not so much to “get it right,” but to pick up information in advance that will reinforce your child's actual reading of the book later. Be sure to be positive about your child's predictions!

If there are no illustrations, preview any other features that might prepare your child for the book: chapter headings, for example, or the other various graphic features noted above. You may even direct your child's attention to the dust - jacket or back-cover “blurb”. Introduce the concepts you selected during your own initial review. No need to go into detailed explanations, this may frustrate young readers. Just point things out succinctly and clearly as you “walk” along. Introduce the vocabulary you selected as well. Keep in mind that you want to prepare your child to 1) recognize the word when he or she re-encounters it; 2) be able to say the word; and 3) understand the meaning of the word.

For children that are still working on their letter-sound relationship skills, you might want to provide even more support with sounding out words. Bear in mind that your purpose here is to provide enough support so that your child experiences success when he or she reads with you. You neither want to do all the “work” for your child nor have your child struggle and grow frustrated. Once you've done the book walk and your child begins reading, there's nothing wrong with reminding him or her as needed of points introduced during your book walk, and there's certainly nothing wrong with enthusiastically praising him or her for mastering any of those points while reading!

**As you can see, these assessment tests can show you exactly where to focus your reinforcement.**

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