

## SECTION

## 2

THE

## Reading

ADVANTAGE

helping  
children  
become  
more  
successful  
learners  
at  
home  
and  
school

In this age of expanding information, reading is essential to learning. Reading provides students with new information and ideas, helps them become better writers and communicators, and opens their minds to new worlds and possibilities.

Students with learning difficulties often struggle with reading. They may have difficulty decoding words and/or understanding and remembering what they read. You can use a variety of strategies and approaches to help your child become an accurate and confident reader. This section introduces a variety of ideas from learning the initial sounds of the alphabet to using a textbook efficiently.

The key to becoming a better reader is to READ. Encourage your child to make time every day to read for enjoyment. Make reading a part of your family's daily life. Reading aloud can be a favourite shared activity for all ages.

For the majority of people, silent reading is the most efficient way to read. It tends to be faster than reading aloud and for most people, the faster they read, the less likely their minds are to wander. For some students with learning difficulties, reading silently may not be the best way. Reading aloud may provide essential feedback (through hearing the words) for understanding and remembering what they are reading.

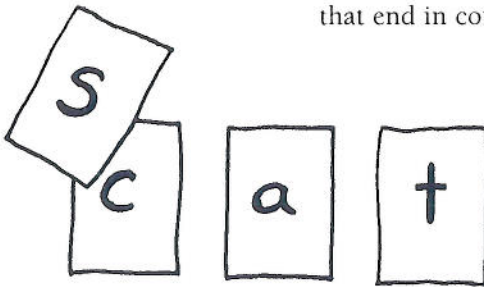
## Beginning to Read: Learning About Letters and Sounds

Help young readers learn letters and sounds by providing lots of opportunity for practising and working with the letters of the alphabet.

**Alphabet books:** In a notebook or scrapbook, write a letter of the alphabet at the top of each page. Encourage children to find pictures of things that start with each letter sound. Glue the pictures in the alphabet book and print the word underneath. Highlight the first letter.

**Matching cards:** Make up individual cards with single letters of the alphabet on one set and pictures that start with the different letter sounds on a second set. Play a matching game with the pictures and letters.

**Build a word:** Using individual letter cards or tiles from a game such as Scrabble, build a simple word like "cat." Make a new word by placing another letter card on top of the first letter. Rhyming words or words that end in common letter patterns work best with this activity.



### Letter/Sound Patterns

Examples of common letter patterns:

<b>ack</b>	<b>an</b>	<b>et</b>	<b>ent</b>
back	ban	get	bent
pack	man	jet	dent
sack	tan	met	lent

<b>ish</b>	<b>it</b>	<b>ot</b>	<b>op</b>	<b>un</b>
dish	hit	cot	cop	bun
fish	pit	dot	hop	fun
wish	wit	got	mop	run

## Learning New Sight Words

Sight words are those words that children can read from memory, without having to sound them out. Games are a fun way to practise sight words.

### Environmental Language

Reading opportunities are not confined to books; all kinds of printed information exists in our everyday environment. Draw your child's attention to times when you are reading for a purpose; e.g., following a recipe, and talk about how important reading is for life. Encourage children to read labels on product packaging, ads and signs along the road. T-shirts and clothing are another source of interesting environmental language. Make scrapbooks of words from favourite and familiar packaging and ads. Talk about the letter sounds in these words. Children are not only practising their reading skills but are learning that words provide much information in our environment.

### TIP

When choosing words for these games, ask your child's teacher for suggestions.

### Fish

Print each sight word on a file card. Place the word cards upside down in a pile. Take turns drawing cards from the pile. Players keep each word card that they read correctly. When all the cards are picked, the player with the most cards wins.

### Concentration

Print single words on file cards, making two cards for each word. Mix the cards and lay them out face down. Each player takes a turn choosing two cards and reading them aloud. If the cards match, and the player can read the word, the player keeps those cards. If the cards are different, they are put back face down and the next player takes a turn. When all the cards have been turned over, the player with the most pairs wins.

### Word Race

Set an egg timer or stop watch for one to three minutes. Players read aloud as many sight words as they can within the time limit. Encourage players to set goals for the number of words they can read.

### Build a Sentence

Print a sentence on a strip of paper and then cut the sentence into single words. Mix up the words and have children put the sentence back together and read it aloud. Copy sentences from favourite books and build up a collection of sentence strips.

## Paired Reading

For more information check your local library for the video, *Paired Reading: Positive Reading Practices* by the Northern Alberta Reading Specialists' Council.

## Paired Reading

Paired reading<sup>8</sup> helps students become more fluent readers and better able to understand and remember what they are reading. It also demonstrates that reading is an important and pleasurable activity for people of all ages. Paired reading is a supportive technique for struggling readers of all ages.

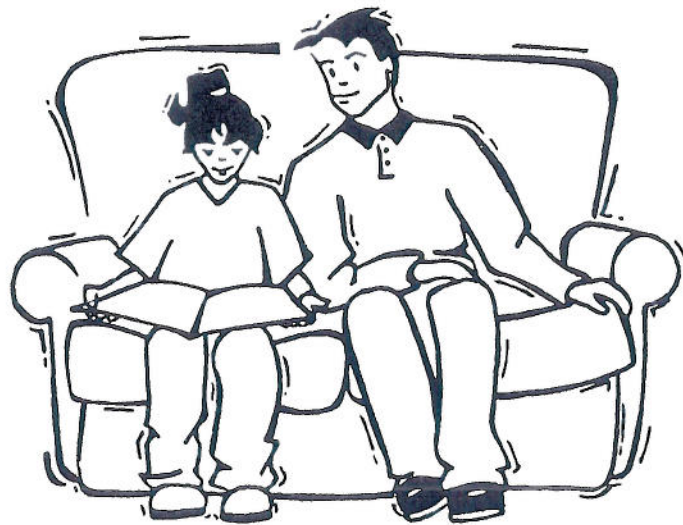
**To begin:** Find a quiet and comfortable spot. The child holds the book so that both partners can see the words.

To signal the beginning of paired reading, place your finger under the first word of the text. Partners can use a paper marker to mark their place or you can sweep a finger smoothly beneath the words. Begin reading the book together. Partners should try to read in unison.

**Solo reading:** Decide on a signal; e.g., tapping on the table, for the child to indicate the desire to try reading alone. When the child signals, allow him or her to read solo but continue to follow the print. Quiet encouragement such as "yes" or "uh-huh" tells the child that you are actively reading along.

**Helping with mistakes:** If the child makes a mistake, point to the word, say it, repeat the word with the child and then continue reading together. If the child struggles with a word, wait at least five seconds before helping. This gives the child an opportunity to try it alone. After this wait time, point to the word, say it, then put a finger back on the text. Repeat the word together and continue to read together until the child signals the desire to read alone again.

**Talk about it:** As you read the story together, you may want to take breaks to discuss the plot, characters and pictures.



<sup>8</sup> From *Helping children read: the paired reading handbook* (pp. 56, 59, 61, 62, 63), by R. Morgan, 1986, London, England: Methuen Children's Books (a division of Reed International Books Ltd.). Reproduced with permission.

## Read Around



Many students need a strategy for what to do when they come to a word they do not know. When this happens, encourage your child to read around:<sup>9</sup>

- Skip the word and read to the end of the sentence.
- Go back and read the whole sentence again.
- Look at the beginning of the word for letter-sound clues.
- Think: “What word would fit here?”
- Try out the word in the sentence: Does this word *sound* right? Does this word make *sense*? Does this word match the *letter clues*?
- Look at the picture for a clue.
- Ask someone.

## Keeping Your Place

Some students have difficulty keeping their place as they read.<sup>10</sup> They can use a ruler, blank file card or clear plastic strip under the line of print to help them keep their eyes and minds focused on the sentence they are reading.

## Choosing the Right Book

### Cover Information<sup>11</sup>

Many paperback novels for young readers have a reading level printed on the cover.

- Look for a number on one of the bottom corners of the back cover; for example, RL 2.4. This means, that in the publisher’s opinion, this book could be read independently by most students who can read at a mid Grade 2 level.
- IL refers to interest levels — it indicates the grade level that the ideas and story line would most appeal to. For example, IL 3–5 means a book might be of special interest to students in Grades 3–5.

### The Five Finger Rule<sup>12</sup>

Encourage your child to use the five finger rule to test whether a book is the right difficulty level for reading alone. Have children read the first page of the book. Whenever they come to a word they don’t know or are unsure of, they put up one finger. If all five fingers are up by the end of the page, the book is too difficult for them to read on their own right now. The book might still be a good choice for paired reading or for a read-aloud. Keep a list of titles and authors of the more difficult books so that children can come back to them when their reading skills are stronger.

<sup>9</sup> From *Smart learning* (p. 16), by D. Antaya-Moore & C. M. Walker, 1996, Edmonton, AB: Smart Learning. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

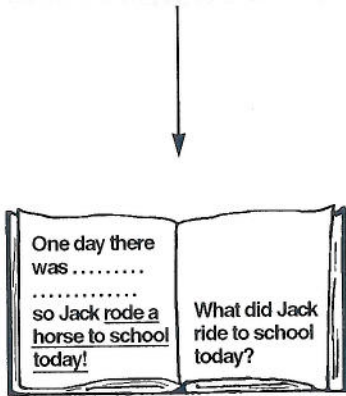
<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

## Helping Children Understand What They Read — Asking Good Questions

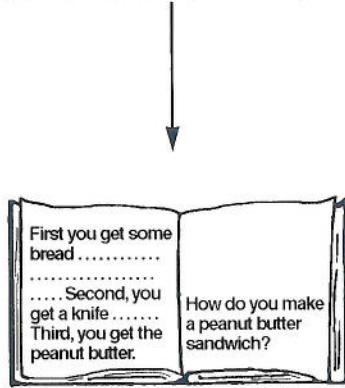
To help children think about and understand what they are reading, it's important to ask a variety of questions about the material. Good questions encourage different levels of thinking. Avoid questions that require only a "yes-or-no" answer.

Use Taffy Raphael's question-answering strategy to help your child think about what he or she is reading.<sup>13</sup> Where is the answer?

- **Right there.**  
The answer is in the story and it is usually easy to find.



- **Think and search.**  
Some questions can be answered by searching for the parts and putting them together.



- **On my own.**  
Some answers are not found in the text but in your child's head. Your child needs to use his or her own experiences, ideas and opinions to answer the question.

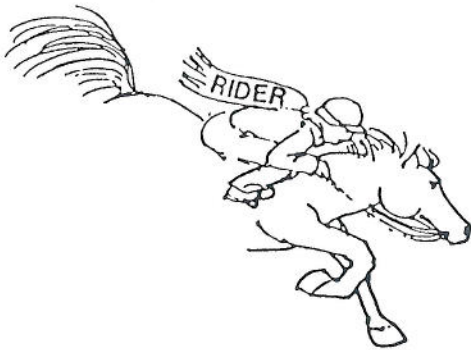


Don't be afraid to ask tough questions and to guide your child through the process of finding answers he or she doesn't know. Model the importance of going back into the text to look for information to support answers.

<sup>13</sup> From "Teaching question answer relationships, revisited," by T. E. Raphael, 1986, *The Reading Teacher*, 39(6), p. 519. Adapted and reprinted with the permission of the International Reading Association. All rights reserved.

## RIDER — A Visualization Strategy

Visualization is a strategy that helps students become actively involved in a story to better understand and remember it. It works best with descriptive writing, such as novels and short stories. Visualizing a story is like running a movie in the mind's eye. The author's text is central to the movie but readers add their own details and elaboration in order to make the story come alive for them. One strategy that uses visualization is **RIDER**.<sup>14</sup> This strategy helps students better understand and enjoy descriptive stories.



### Where to Look When Visualizing

Not everyone visualizes with their eyes closed. Encourage children to practise visualizing in whatever way is comfortable for them. This could include looking up at the ceiling or focusing on a distant point in the room.

Read a sentence.

Imagine a picture of it.

Describe the picture to yourself.

Elaborate: clothing, colours, setting.

Repeat steps.

<sup>14</sup> From *SPELT: a strategies program for effective learning and thinking: a teachers' manual* (pp. 160–161), by R. Mulcahy, K. Marfo, D. Peat & J. Andrews, 1987, Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

### Keep Them Reading

Many students become independent readers by Grades 4 or 5. But with increasingly varied leisure opportunities and technology competing for their attention, older students often spend less time reading for pleasure. It is essential to keep children reading, especially less-able readers. To encourage reading for pleasure:

- Tap into children's interests. Look for books that focus on these interests.
- Encourage children to build their own libraries. Invest in a book stamp or book plates to make new books an important part of a personal library.
- Set aside time each day when the television, computer and video games are turned off in your home. Use this time for reading and enjoying books.

## RAP — Paraphrasing

RAP is a strategy for reading, understanding and remembering factual information.<sup>15</sup> When children are first learning how to RAP, it is helpful to work through the strategy out loud with a partner.



**Read the paragraph.**

**Ask yourself about what you read.**

Does it make sense?

How does it relate to what you already know?

How does it relate to what you've already read?

What is the main point the author is trying to make?

**Put it in your own words (paraphrase).**

<sup>15</sup> From *SPELT: a strategies program for effective learning and thinking: a teachers' manual* (pp. 145–147), by R. Mulcahy, K. Marfo, D. Peat & J. Andrews, 1987, Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

## Highlight Helpers

Authors of textbooks sometimes highlight the key words by using *italic* or **bold** print.

Pay special attention to these words.<sup>16</sup>

The words below pictures may also contain key information.

## Highlighting Key Words

Highlighting key words is a strategy for reviewing and studying factual material across the curriculum.<sup>17</sup> It helps students review and organize specific information so that new ideas and concepts are easier to understand and remember.

- Read the paragraph.
- In your mind, identify the main idea. Use this for your title.
- Choose the key words in each sentence. (Usually one to five words per sentence or less than 10 per cent of the text.)
- Ask yourself: “Do each of these words provide an important piece of information about the main topic?”
- If it's okay to write on the page, highlight the words with your highlighter pen. If it's not okay to highlight on the page, make a photocopy or handwritten copy of the information. Use the highlighter pen sparingly. Highlight key words only, not whole phrases or sentences. See the following page for an example.

<sup>16</sup> From *Smart learning* (pp. 6–7), by D. Antaya-Moore & C. M. Walker, 1996, Edmonton, AB: Smart Learning. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.



### Native Peoples of Alberta

The **Native** peoples lived in **small communities**. They did not live in one place for long but **moved often** to **search for food**. They lived by **hunting wild animals** and **gathering wild plants**. The animals . . . (Ross, 1994, p. 9)

- Start with your title and organize the highlighted words in a web or list. A simple web for the Native people's paragraph could look like this.



### Learning New Vocabulary

Encourage children to keep lists of the new vocabulary they encounter. Often these words are highlighted in the text. Many textbooks have a glossary with definitions. Take time to discuss new words. Look at alternate meanings and uses of each word. Find opportunities to build these words into daily conversations with children.

### Reading Textbooks

From Grade 4 on, students need to use textbooks to get new information. *School Power: Strategies for Succeeding in School* offers a systematic approach for reading a textbook chapter.<sup>18</sup> Think of the process as a baseball game.

#### The Warm-up

- Read the chapter title.
- Read the headings and subheadings.
- Look at the illustrations and read the captions.
- Read the introduction.
- Read the summary and questions.

#### The Wind-up

Turn each subheading into a question. Start thinking about the information each section will contain.

Example:

- Subheading: *Causes of the Riel Rebellion*  
 Wind-up question: *What were the causes of the Riel Rebellion?*

#### The Pitch

Read each chapter section. Keep your wind-up question in mind. Look for the answers.

<sup>18</sup> Excerpted from *School power: strategies for succeeding in school* (p. 41), by Jeanne Shay Schumm, Ph.D. and Marguerite Radencich, Ph.D., ©1992. Used with permission from Free Spirit Publishing, Minneapolis, MN; 1-800-735-7323. All rights reserved.

**The Hit**

Answer your wind-up question. If you can't think of an answer, try again. Reread that chapter section again to find the answer to your question and make a hit.

**The Run**

After you read each chapter section, go back and review your wind-up questions and answers. This will add up to a run — you score!

**The Technological Advantage****Books on Tape**

Books on audiotape can encourage the enjoyment of literature and provide opportunities for supported reading as students read along with a tape. They are available commercially or you can make your own. In addition, Alberta schools can access selected curriculum resources in audiotape format for students who are print-disabled. They are available through the Alberta Education Materials Resource Centre's "Audiotape Service for Students with a Print Disability." Information on availability can be found in the Learning Resources Distributing Centre's (LRDC's) online or Internet Buyer's Guide. The LRDC sells the audiotape curriculum resources on a cost-recovery basis.

**Computer Software**

There are many reading instruction programs available for home computers. Look for programs that target the specific learning needs and interests of your child. When looking at a software program ask:

- Do the educational goals of this program match my child's current needs?
- Are there a number of skill/instructional levels?
- Can the level of complexity be controlled?
- Is there appropriate feedback when a child makes an error; does the program help children learn from their mistakes?
- Is there opportunity for meaningful interaction for children? (Or do the activities rely on "yes-or-no" items that encourage random guessing?)
- Do children need typing skills to use the program?
- Are the directions clear?

**CD-ROM Books**

Many popular books are now available on CD-ROM. This technology provides opportunities for students to interact with the text at a variety of levels and ways.