

# How Students Learn to Read

**THE SCIENCE  
OF READING**

**MINNESOTA STANDARDS FAMILY GUIDE**

What Your Student Should Know  
Activities to Practice Literacy at Home  
Tips for Talking with Teachers



# About This Guide

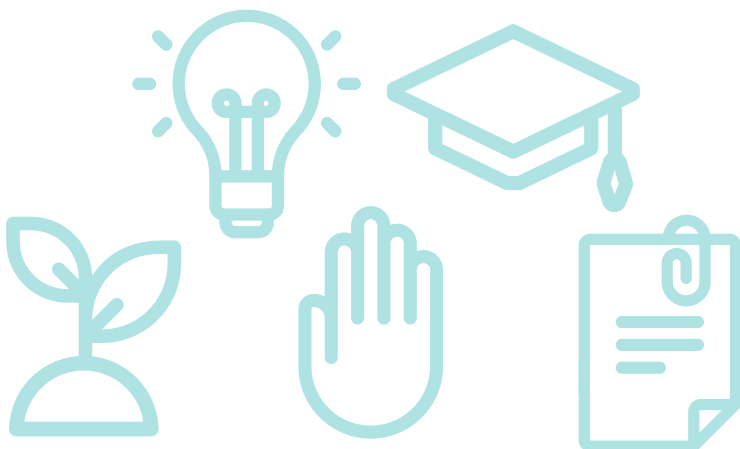


We all know reading is very important. It is one of the most important life skills for school & work. It also brings joy into our lives through stories and learning. From kindergarten through third grade, it's really important for kids to learn how to read well. After third grade, your child will need to be able to read to learn about all different subjects in school. That's why it is very important to get really good at reading during those early years of school. But some kids aren't getting the instruction they need to learn how to read. We are leaving a lot of kids behind.

But there is good news. When kids get clear & specific teaching in reading every year, called the science of reading or structured literacy, 95% of them can learn to read at their grade level. This guide will help you know if your child is getting that clear & detailed teaching & what to do if they are not.

**You can check what specific skills & content your student should be learning in English Language Arts (ELA) for their grade level at [greatmnschools.org/grade-level-materials](https://greatmnschools.org/grade-level-materials).**





## *This Guide Includes*



### **How children learn to read—**

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Learn about the two areas where clear & specific teaching helps most children become strong readers



### **Everyday activities to support learning—**

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Ways you can support your child in becoming a strong reader



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How you & your child's teacher can work together to help your child become a strong reader



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Definitions of common reading & writing words



# How children learn to read

People used to think that kids learn to read just by being around books, like they learn to talk. But that's not true. Reading is something that must be taught. That means we need to be taught how to:

1. Turn words on a page into the words we hear in our head (Word Recognition)
2. Understand what we just read (Language Comprehension)

## WORD RECOGNITION

- When we read, our brain looks at letters & turns them into sounds we hear in our head. Letters are like a code that makes different sounds. To be good at reading, students have to learn what sound each letter makes. For example, the letter p sounds like a /p/, & the letters ph sound like /f/. Students can only learn the code if someone teaches it to them



And



- This is called phonics, which means to sound out a word using the code. Usually, it takes kids two to three years to learn how to read English. English is really tricky, because it has a lot of letter & sound combinations
- This is why it is important for students to learn some common words by sight, so they can recognize them & don't have to sound them out every time. That way, they can recognize words that don't follow the usual rules

***If kids don't learn these basic phonics skills, most of them will have a hard time reading quickly & easily.***

## LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

To be good at reading, students need to know more than just how to say the words. They also need to understand what the words mean.

- Knowing about the topic of what they're reading is helpful for understanding. Even if a book is hard, if it's about something they know, they will understand the text better
- We can learn about things by experiencing them ourselves & by reading about them in books. Reading books about our own culture is important, & we can also learn by reading about Social Studies or Science. That's why students learn how to read in all subjects, including Social Studies & Science. They learn about more topics & learn new words, which helps them become strong readers
- It's important to know what a lot of words mean to be a good reader. We have a map of words in our head, & we make it bigger as we learn new words. Most of the words we know, we learned from hearing or reading them. The stronger our word map, the more we can understand what we read
- Reading makes our word map bigger. Reading helps us learn new words that we might not hear when people talk, and what those words mean. When adults read to kids starting at birth, it helps them learn more words & become better readers

***To become good at reading, students need to read interesting books & learn ways to understand them better. Then, they need chances to practice what they learned.***

Teachers can help kids become good readers by showing them how to understand what they read, & by teaching them new vocabulary. Learn more about the Science of Reading at [www.amplify.com/science-of-reading-handbook](http://www.amplify.com/science-of-reading-handbook)





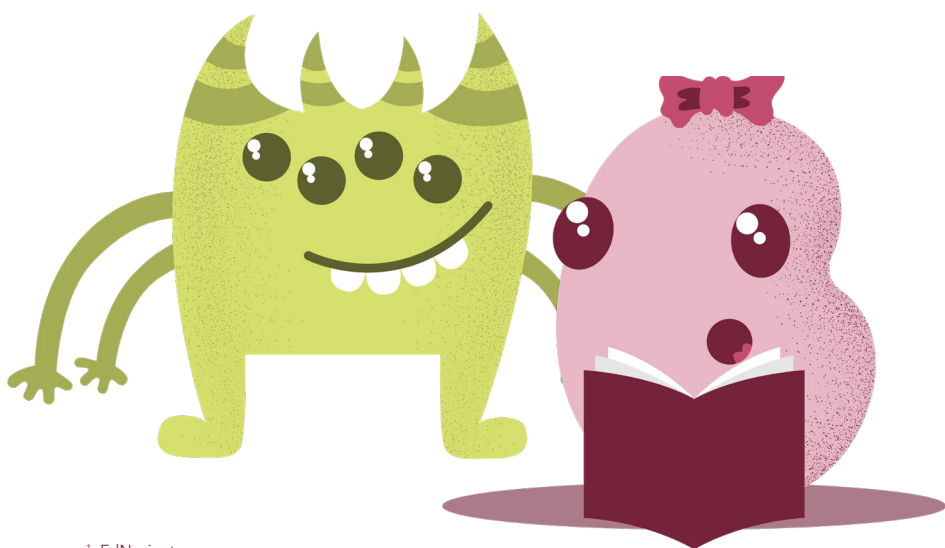
# Everyday activities to support learning

1. **Talk to your kids.** It sounds simple, but talking matters—even before your children can talk back. They need to learn about sounds & words, & you can help by talking to them, singing to them, & playing with rhymes.
2. **Read at home.** You can help your child by reading books with them or having them read to you. When you read to them, let them watch you sound out the word.
3. **Go to the library.** Get a library card & check out books from your local library. It's free! Anyone can get a library card, no matter their immigration status. You can learn where to get a Hennepin County library card here: [www.hclib.org/about/library-cards](http://www.hclib.org/about/library-cards)
4. **Ask your child's teacher how they teach reading.** One key question is, "How do you teach decoding?" You want to hear something like, "We teach phonics explicitly & systematically." If the answer is "we don't teach phonics," or "we learn phonics along the way," your child may not be getting the instruction they need. Check out "Tips for talking to teachers" in the next section for more questions to ask.



- 5. Watch for signs that something is wrong.** If your child is guessing at words, ask them to say all the sounds in the word & blend them together. If they have a hard time doing that, talk with the teacher. They may need more practice with letters & sounds. Look at their spelling, too. It is common for children to learn spelling after reading. But if your child can read many words but not spell them, talk to the teacher.
- 6. Ask for help if your child is having trouble with reading.** By the start of second grade, your child should be able to decode most words easily. If they can't, they may need more practice, & now is the time to get it. Don't wait until third or fourth grade to ask for help. By then, they will need to "read to learn," & it will be harder for them to catch up on basic reading skills. You can ask the school to test your child's reading level, & the school has to do it. You have the right to get the information you want.<sup>1</sup> You can get free, in-person or online tutoring through your local library, learn more here: [www.hclib.org/programs/homework-help](http://www.hclib.org/programs/homework-help)

**Want more ideas like this? Sign up for EdNavigator's "The Busy Families Guide to School" at [www.EdNavigator.org/guide](http://www.EdNavigator.org/guide)**



<sup>1</sup> EdNavigators



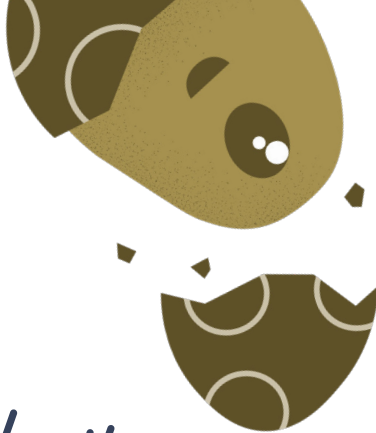
## *Tips for talking to teachers*

1. **How do you teach phonics?** You want to hear that they teach phonics frequently & directly. If the teacher says they teach phonics sometimes or that they don't need to, this could be a sign that something is wrong and the science of reading is not being taught.
2. **How should my child approach reading words they don't know?** When a child sees a word they don't know, they can try to sound it out by breaking it into smaller groups of letters. If the teacher tells them to guess by looking at pictures or the first letter of the word, that is not good.
3. **What reading program do you use?** There are many reading programs, & they are different in how good they are. Here are some good ones: Core Knowledge Language Arts, EL Learning, American Reading Club (ARC), Bookworms, Focus On, & Wit and Wisdom.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> EdNavigators

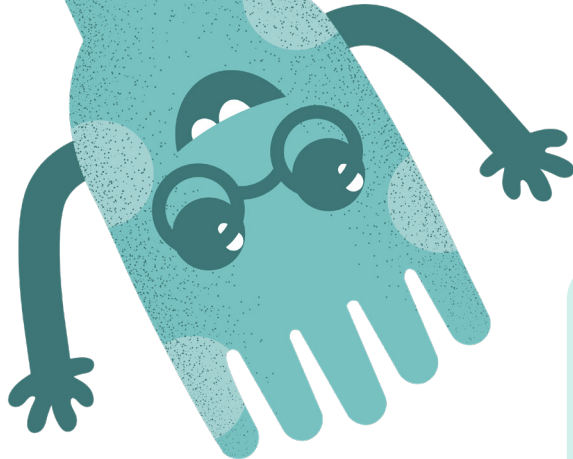




## *What to do if your child is behind*

If your child is having a hard time reading, it is important for their teacher to learn why. They might be having trouble recognizing words, or understanding what they read, or both. Once they know what the problem is, they can work on it with them & get them the right help. If you are worried your student is behind in reading:

1. Talk to the teacher. Ask them if your child is reading on grade level. Ask to see tests.
2. If their tests show they are behind, ask the teacher what specific skills your child needs to work on.
3. Learn what your child should be able to do in reading at their grade level. You can find this information in the MN Standards Family Guides: [greatmnschools.org/grade-level-materials](https://greatmnschools.org/grade-level-materials). Look in the English Language Arts section.
4. Find resources to help your child with the skills they need to work on. There is free in-person or online tutoring available through Hennepin County Libraries, learn more here: [www.hclib.org/programs/homework-help](https://www.hclib.org/programs/homework-help)
5. Talk with your child about how they feel when they read & what is hard for them in reading



## *Literacy words glossary*

### **LITERACY**



The ability to read & write. Students get better at literacy with clear & specific instruction & with practice.

### **PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS**



Being able to hear & know the different sounds in words when people talk, such as rhymes, syllables, & how sounds blend together in a word.

### **DECODE**



Connecting letters to sounds to form words. For example, children who have learned the English sounds /a/, /c/, & /t/ can decode "cat."

### **SIGHT RECOGNITION**



When we know a word without having to sound it out. Good readers do this with words that are very common or with words that do not follow the "rules" of phonics.



## BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE



When we already know something about a topic before we read about it. When we know more about the topic, we can understand the text better.

## LANGUAGE STRUCTURES

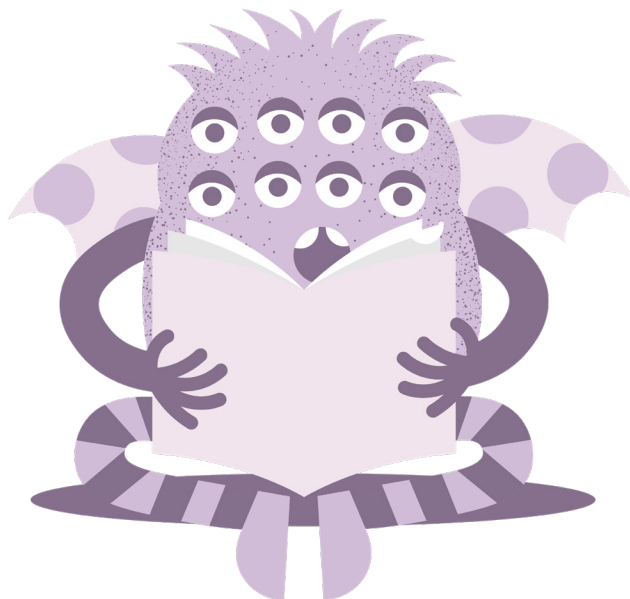


How sentences are put together, & how the order of words can change what it means. It's like building with blocks - knowing a lot of words is like having a lot of different blocks, but understanding sentence structure is like knowing how to put the blocks together to build something bigger and more meaningful.

## LITERACY KNOWLEDGE



The skills needed to read, write, & speak.





# NOTES

Handwriting practice lines consisting of three sets of horizontal lines: a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line.



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