



Tips for Practicing Reading at Home to Increase Reading Fluency

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The goal of teaching a child to read should be helping to develop a fluent reader. Fluency is defined as fast and accurate decoding as well as using proper rhythm, intonation and expression. For students who struggle learning to read, the usual recommendations are programs that includes three parts: phonemic awareness, phonics and oral reading practice. These programs teach children to break apart and manipulate the sounds in words (phonemic awareness). They then learn that these sounds are represented by letters of the alphabet, which can be blended together to form words (phonics). Finally, they practice what they've learned by reading aloud with guidance and feedback (guided oral reading). While phonics and phonemic awareness programs require specific training and are therefore usually conducted by professionals, guided oral reading can be done by anyone with minimal training.

Guided oral reading has consistently been found by educators as the best method for improving fluency in children. It does not refer to a specific program, rather, it occurs when students read out loud to a parent, teacher or another student, who corrects their mistakes and provides them with feedback. The process begins with choosing a book that the child can read independently. There should be no need to correct the accuracy of their reading more than once per page. If the accuracy level is low, choose an easier book to read. Remember to correct errors both in the accuracy of reading as well as the inflection. Interestingly, despite its inclusion in the California state requirements for curriculum, there is no evidence that silent, sustained reading does anything to improve reading fluency among those with reading delays. Thus, daily oral reading for a period of at least 20 minutes is recommended for all children to improve fluency.

The following are five basic tips for reading at home with children. Reading can be a frustrating and emotional task for children with reading delays. However, using these guidelines can reduce some of the anxiety about practicing reading at home and reinforce the value of daily practice for children who can be easily frustrated.

- 1. Don't restrict reading to a bedtime activity** – Bedtime stories are used to ease a child into sleep, reading practice needs to be done during a period when a child is alert and ready to learn from the process of guided reading. Try using the time as a “cool down time” after dinner or when parents arrive home from the office. It is excellent way to spend time with your child in quiet activity.
- 2. Preview the book before reading it** – Parents are encouraged to look through the pictures with the child and have the child imagine what the story will be based on the images. This process helps with reading comprehension and teaches the child to use the context of all of the information in book to understand its content.
- 3. Don't be reluctant to repeat books** – Parents are often concerned that the child will memorize the text and read it from memory rather than decoding the text. However, an alternate way of thinking about that process is that it is helping the child to recognize words by sight. It is estimated that the average child decodes a word three to four times before they can recognize it by sight. The more words that they can recognize by sight the quicker that they can read. This is one of the goals of guided reading practice.
- 4. Play number and word identification games** – This tip emphasizes the need to use the book for purposes other than just telling a story. Games, such as finding every letter “Q” on a page, or looking for everything in couples, help children rapidly name letters and numbers, which is a key factor in developing reading fluency.
- 5. Don't immediately correct decoding mistakes** – Parents can help their child to figure out correct pronunciation through teaching a process of how to correct. Similar to the old proverb about teaching a man to fish, if we instantly correct all mistakes without teaching children how correct for themselves, they become dependant on others to help them become fluent. Instead, try asking questions when a child stumbles over a word. Ask if the word sounds right. Ask if the word makes sense in the sentence, or if it matches the picture. This technique helps children learn to use context to correct themselves as opposed to focusing on word-by-word reading processes.

Daily guided reading practice is an important tool to help all children achieve reading fluency. It is recommended for children between the ages of five and nine, but can be adapted at any age. It also promotes the value of reading and perseverance through adversity. Hopefully, these tips can help parents use reading time productively and reduce some of the concern about how to read at home.

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