

Teaching Reading at Home

Teaching your children to read can be one of the most rewarding journeys of a home school parent. The ability to read fluently and comprehend what is read provide the foundation for what it means to *learn*. Many children can learn to read using any curriculum, and many home school parents approach reading from the mindset of exposure: The more a child is around books, hears books read, looks at books, etc., the more that child will naturally learn to read. But what about the child who struggles with—or seems averse to—reading? Additionally, even if your child seems to be reading well for his/her age, it can often be difficult for a home school parent to know if a child is reading at grade level. Therefore, the goals of the information in this document are

1. to provide guidance on choosing a specific reading curriculum for your child(ren),
2. to provide guidance on what is developmentally and grade-level appropriate for emergent readers in grades 1-3, and
3. to provide guidance on how to identify the needs of struggling readers as well as teaching strategies that can address those needs.

1. Choosing the Right Curriculum

Learning to read is more complex than people realize. We highly recommend you use an actual reading program and work with your children on specific reading skills five days a week.

Structure and consistency are key. A good goal is to spend 20-30 minutes each day on direct reading instruction with your kindergartener, and then add on ten minutes for each additional grade (i.e. 30-40 minutes for first graders, 40-50 minutes for second graders, etc.). Please know these times are merely suggestions as you know your child and his/her attention span best. (The recommended time also doesn't need to happen all in one sitting; you can have two fifteen-minute sessions (e.g.) if that works better for your schooling environment.) Again, though, daily practice is critical for success. Regardless of which reading program you choose, reading to and with your children every day should be standard practice at home, and children need to be exposed to a variety of texts and genres (i.e. nursery rhymes, fables, fairy tales, stories, poetry, non-fiction, history, science, etc.).

While children should read and be read to every single day, the practicing of explicit skills is necessary for the development of both strong readers and children who love to read. A solid reading curriculum should involve instruction in phonics/phonograms (correct pronunciation of sounds, to include blends and digraphs), sound-letter association (correct reading/visual identification of sounds), letter patterns and decoding (correct identification of patterns such as consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC), e.g., as well as manipulation of sounds (switching out the /a/ in words like bat, cat, fat, mat and replacing it with /o/, e.g.)), syllabication (correct identification of syllables both heard and read), and a solid base of both sight-word recognition and high-frequency word recognition.

Terms to look for and know when selecting and implementing a reading program:

*phoneme**—the smallest unit of sound in the English language

*phonogram**—sound-letter association

*Phonemes and phonograms are what make up the notion of phonics.

blend—two or more letters combined to make a sound (i.e. /tr/ in trick is /t/+/r/)

digraph—two or more letters that make a single sound when combined; the letters do not separate into individual sounds (i.e. /ck/ in trick)

decoding—sounding out words using proper recognition/pronunciation of phonograms

syllabication—recognition that syllables involve a single vowel sound (not necessarily just a single vowel); a word with one vowel sound (i.e. flat) has one syllable and a word with two or more vowel sounds (i.e. mon-key or ba-na-na) has two or more syllables

sight words—any word a child can read and pronounce automatically without having to sound it out; sight words are individual to each reader, such as a child's name

high-frequency words—words that occur most often in written English (i.e. of, but, can) but are not yet necessarily sight words for a young reader (i.e. could, would should); knowledge of high-frequency words as sight words is essential for fluent reading

Additionally, reading instruction should also include writing instruction, especially proper pencil grip, the proper formation of letters, spelling rules, and the general structure of written language (i.e. letters form words which form sentences which form paragraphs). While the Cottage School Program does not endorse any specific curricula, we have found that the following suggestions address all the aforementioned skills when teaching literacy skills to children. Keep in mind these are just a small handful of suggestions. There are many home school curricula options on the market, and you need to choose one that best suits the unique learning needs of your children. Again, **structure and consistency are key, and teaching children to read is best done on a daily basis.**

The Writing Road to Reading by Romalda Spalding (aka “Spalding”)

<https://spalding.org/>

This is what all of TCA uses to teach students reading, spelling, and writing skills. Because CSP does not meet every day, it is imperative that parents practice the Spalding method at home with their children on a daily basis, to include using the phonogram cards and teaching the writing/spelling rules and approaches. Spalding is a very thorough program yet also requires a great deal of commitment at home. The website offers some training videos as well as additional recommended books, and *The Writing Road to Reading* text may be checked out from the CSP Lending Library. All families of students in grades K-2 at CSP are required to purchase a set of phonogram cards.

Core Knowledge (aka CKLA for “Core Knowledge Language Arts”)

<https://www.coreknowledge.org/>

Another one of TCA's educational philosophy approaches involves using Core Knowledge as developed by E.D. Hirsch. (Note that Core Knowledge is not the same as Common Core.) From the website homepage, hover over “Community” and then select “Families” to begin researching curricular options for home school families. Hirsch is the author of the popular books, *What Your _____ Needs to Know* (Kindergartener, First Grader, etc.), books used by TCA.

All About Reading/All About Spelling

<https://www.allaboutlearningpress.com/index.php>

Similar to Spalding, this curriculum offers a very structured and multi-sensory approach with a variety of student resources and parental supports. It is mastery-based and uses (like Spalding) Simultaneous Multisensory Instruction (SMI). The curriculum is designed to be user-friendly

and easy for parents with a script provided for each lesson and a recommendation to commit to only 20 minutes of instruction with the curriculum a day.

The Well-Trained Mind

<https://welltrainedmind.com/>

This is a classically-based home school organization providing a variety of curriculum options. The above link is specific to the organization's reading program.

Sonlight

<https://www.sonlight.com/homeschool/subjects/language-arts/phonics/>

Sonlight offers several options for phonics-based reading programs. Note that this is a faith-based company and may not be a good fit for families who prefer a non-faith-based approach.

Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons

<https://startreading.com/>

This curriculum might be a good fit for families who prefer a more relaxed approach, although it does not offer much in the way of interventions or supports for struggling readers. It can work well with children who seem to pick up on reading quickly/easily.

Starfall (<https://www.starfall.com/h/>) or *ABC Mouse* (<https://www.abcmouse.com/abc/>)

These two companies offer online reading instruction in the form of various games and activities while focusing on all the basic elements of the reading process. They could be a good fit for children who do well learning on a device. Note that a membership fee is required for both programs.

BOB Books (<https://bobbooks.com/>) or *Letter Land Books* (<https://us.letterland.com/>)

While neither of these are specific reading programs, they are excellent supplementary materials that can be used in helping children learn how to read.

2. Understanding Developmental Literacy Skills

One of the benefits of being a home school parent is that you can teach at the pace your children are able to learn. However, it can be hard to know if a child is "on target" with his or her grade level peers. Click <https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/resources> to be taken to the Colorado Department of Education academic reading competencies web page. Scroll down a little on the page until you see "READ Act Tools & Resources." (See graphic on the next page.) Select the appropriate grade level for your child(ren) to see a document of suggested competencies. The information will provide you with the literacy benchmarks a kindergartener, first grader, second grader, and/or third grader in a mainstream classroom would be expected to meet.

Additionally, [this matrix](#) from the CDE website, while long (35 pages), addresses each competency by grade level as well as provides a couple of suggestions of instructional approaches for how to teach benchmark literacy skills. (By clicking on the words "this matrix," the user will be taken to a document on the Colorado Department of Education website.)

READ Act Tools & Resources

READ Act Communications Toolkit

This toolkit is intended to be used by district leaders, principals and teachers to communicate with parents about the Colorado READ Act. All resources can be modified and personalized to meet individual needs. Resources include fact sheets, videos, drop-in letters and a sample social media campaign.

- [READ Act communications toolkit for educators](#)

READ Act Minimum Skill Competencies:

These competencies from the State Board Rules can be used to support classroom instruction and as a tool to assist teachers in writing reading goals for students on a READ plan. The READ Act Minimum Reading Competency Skills serve as a guide for the end of year skills necessary to indicate a student is on track for acquiring basic grade-level reading skills.

The competencies are from the Colorado Academic Standards (CAS) and broken down by grade level (K-5) in the following documents:

- [Kindergarten Minimum Skills Competencies and the CAS](#)
- [First Grade Minimum Skills Competencies and the CAS](#)
- [Second Grade Minimum Skills Competencies and the CAS](#)
- [Third Grade Minimum Skills Competencies and the CAS](#)

MATRIX:

The Minimum Reading Competency Skills have been arranged in a matrix as a support for educators to show the progression of minimum reading skills for kindergarten through third grades. Instructional examples, as available, are included in the matrix.

[Minimum Skills Matrix all Grades](#)

3. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Readers

There are times when, no matter how structured the reading program or how committed you are to daily practice, a child still struggles with learning how to read or seems to strongly dislike reading. If you ever suspect that your child may have a specific learning challenge (i.e. dyslexia), know that such a diagnosis can only be made by a doctor. Talking to your pediatrician is a good place to start. Whether your child ends up with a formal diagnosis or not, there are ways you can pinpoint specific areas of weakness in order to apply interventions during your literacy time at home. The below suggestions don't even scratch the surface of possible interventions. However, they can give you a glimpse of what focused, explicit instruction related to specific literacy skills can entail.

If your child seems to struggle with **associating phonemes (sounds) with specific letters**, try:

- A. Brainstorming words that start with a specific phoneme (i.e. /b/, /d/, /f/). This activity can be done with both lower case and upper case letters.
- B. Using alphabet books such as BOB Books or Letter Land books (both referenced above), perhaps focusing on one sound/letter a week.

If your child seems to struggle with distinguishing the **differences in the sounds of words**, try:

- A. Identifying how words are the same and how they are different based on their sounds (i.e. cat/cup or trap/truck).
- B. Identifying how words are different or the same based on beginning, middle, and ending sounds (i.e. rock vs. sock (beginning sounds), cat vs. cut (middle sounds), mom vs. mop (ending sounds). You can make flashcards with letters and ask your child to switch out the beginning/middle/end letter and see how this changes the word.
- C. Working on rhyming skills. Rhyming is one of the best ways for children to develop auditory discrimination.
- D. Segmenting phonemes. This means having a picture of a cat (e.g.) with three boxes below it. Encourage your child to write what sound he/she hears in the beginning, the middle, and the end (one box for each sound). You can choose whether to enforce

spelling or to have the exercise be based more on concept (i.e. writing *k* instead of *c* indicates the child understands the sound even though the word is misspelled).

- E. Identifying similarities and differences. For example, provide three words in a row—two that have a similarity (i.e. the same beginning, middle, or end sound) and one that is totally different. Ask your child to point out which one is different and tell you why.
- F. Providing extra practice with short vs. long vowel sounds.

If your child seems to struggle with **syllable identification**, try:

- A. Clapping as each syllable of a word is said.
- B. Using colored blocks (or any type of manipulative) to show the syllables in a word.
- C. Using root words and combining them to make compound words (i.e. note + book = notebook, air + plane = airplane).

If your child is struggling with **fluency** (i.e. oral reading is slow, choppy, or lacks inflection), try:

- A. Reading pattern books (i.e. “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, what do you see?”).
- B. Using a structured repeated reading approach. This means you read a passage aloud while your child follows along, then the two of you read it out loud together at the same time (choral reading), then your child reads it aloud independently. You can also employ echo reading, which is where you read a sentence and have your child echo how you read it.
- C. Helping your child identify phrasing, either by highlighting text, drawing brackets/ parentheses around text, or simply telling you. Many phrases in text begin with prepositional phrases, which can help you as the teacher know which phrases to isolate for fluency purposes (i.e. in the lake, out of sight, at the store).
- D. Explicitly teaching and identifying punctuation in text if your child omits or adds punctuation while reading orally.
- E. Involving the whole family with Readers’ Theater. Readers’ Theater involves texts in script form (like a play), but the text can be read/performed multiple times while changing the tone of the text. For example, how would one read/perform “Little Red Riding Hood” if everyone was sleepy? Angry? Happy? As children use their voices to communicate various emotions (and probably enjoy some silliness in the process), they are learning that text has meaning and meaning is reflected in tone of voice. You can google “Readers Theater” to find a variety of printable scripts at your disposal. Older children can take a familiar story and write their own scripts for the family.

If your child is struggling with **comprehension**, whether it’s because they don’t understand what was read (even if it was read fluently) or they don’t understand specific vocabulary, try:

- A. Helping your child identify the purpose for reading (i.e. learning, enjoyment, to solve problems, to gain information, etc.).
- B. Activating prior knowledge to help your child develop context for the text.
- C. Making predictions based on the title and/or illustrations.
- D. Identifying the sequence of a fictional text/story (i.e. plot line/events of the story).
- E. Discussing elements of literature such as setting, characters, point of view, and theme.
- F. Identifying main ideas and/or supporting ideas of informative texts.
- G. Identifying problems and solutions in both fiction and non-fiction texts.

- H. Using graphic organizers to help your child identify everything from text structure to content. (See the resource list below for websites that offer a myriad of graphic organizer strategies.)
- I. Pre-teaching specific vocabulary that is important to the story (i.e. a child needs to understand the meaning of the word “runt” in order to understand what is taking place at the start of *Charlotte’s Web*).
- J. Teaching suffixes (even to younger children) and their meanings, such as -s/ -es makes a noun plural, or -ed makes a verb past tense.
- K. Teaching synonyms and antonyms.

Additional Resources

Teaching your children to read can sometimes feel like a daunting process. The more you can make reading fun and allow your child to choose what he/she reads when direct instruction isn’t required, the better chance your child will both enjoy reading and become skilled at it. Should you ever desire to monitor your child’s reading progress or try and determine the approximate grade level reflective of their reading ability, literacy assessments that you can complete at home with your child can be found on the CSP website, Homeschool Resources, Literacy Support.

If you want to do more research on instructional strategies that enforce literacy skills, the below websites offer reliable and research-based guidance.

Reading Rockets (one of the best literacy resource websites)—<https://www.readingrockets.org/>

Reading A-Z (has a wealth of instructional resources but requires a membership)—<https://www.readinga-z.com/>

ReadWriteThink (go to “Parent & After School Resources” about halfway down on the main page)— <http://www.readwritethink.org/>

Adolescent Literacy (better for older or more advanced young readers), plus an excellent source of graphic organizers— <http://www.adlit.org/>