

THREE BIG READING SKILLS KIDS NEED TO KNOW

“Although children go through a series of predictable steps on their journey to becoming readers, many things can derail them, such as having inadequate exposure to language at home or having a learning disability. Teachers who know the art and science of teaching reading, though, are able to provide skillful, effective reading instruction, and can help students who need it overcome obstacles to becoming readers. For 85 to 90 percent of poor readers, prevention and early intervention programs can increase reading skills to average reading levels.”

Dr. Marilyn Jager Adams,
Author of several books on the reading process

ONE –Phonemic Awareness and Automaticity – The Sounds of Language

Virtually every child raised in a normal linguistic environment can distinguish between different speech sounds in his or her native language. Almost all native English speakers can therefore hear the difference between similar English words like *grow* and *glow*.

Children who are not able to hear the difference between similar-sounding words like *grow* and *glow* will be confused when these words appear in print, and their comprehension skills will suffer dramatically. Children who are more familiar with spoken words because they have been read to while growing up and have regularly engaged in dialogue with significant adults develop an automatic ability to recognize how words sound.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. **Automaticity** is when phonemic awareness is foundationally in place in an individual and therefore they do not have unusual difficulty hearing and recognizing how a word should sound when they read.

If children are to benefit from phonics instruction, they need phonemic awareness. This is because children who cannot hear and work with the phonemes of spoken words will have a difficult time learning how to relate these phonemes to letters when they see them in written words.

A little about **Phonics**: Children's reading development is dependent on their understanding of phonics or the alphabetic principle – the idea that letters and letter patterns represent the sounds of spoken language. Learning that there are predictable relationships between sounds and letters allows children to apply these relationships to both familiar and unfamiliar words, and to begin to read with fluency.

TWO – Fluency – The Bridge Between Word Recognition & Comprehension

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately, quickly, and with expression. Fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension.

When fluent readers read silently, they recognize words automatically. They group words quickly to help them gain meaning from what they read. Fluent readers read aloud effortlessly and with expression. Their reading sounds natural, as if they are speaking. Readers who have not yet developed fluency read slowly, word by word. Their oral reading is choppy.

Because fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding the words, they can focus their attention on what the text means. They can make connections among the ideas in the text and their background knowledge. In other words, fluent readers recognize words and comprehend at the same time. *Less fluent readers, however, must focus their attention on figuring out the words, leaving them little attention for understanding the text.*

A little about Text Comprehension: Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading.

As they read, good readers are both purposeful and active. They may read to figure out how to use a microwave, for example, or a magazine for entertainment. Good readers also think actively as they read. They use their experiences and knowledge of the world, vocabulary, language structure, and reading strategies to make sense of the text and know how to get the most out of it. They know when they have problems with understanding and how to resolve these problems as they occur.

THREE: Vocabulary – Be Familiar with What Words Mean!

Vocabulary plays an important part in learning to read. Beginning readers must use the words they hear orally to make sense of the words they see in print.

Consider, for example, what happens when a beginning reader comes to the word *dig* in a book. As she begins to figure out the sounds represented by the letters d, i, g, the reader recognizes that the sounds make up a very familiar word that she has heard and said many times. *It is harder for beginning readers to figure out words that are not already part of their speaking (oral) vocabulary.*

Vocabulary also is very important to reading comprehension. Readers cannot understand what they are reading without knowing what most of the words mean. As children learn to read more advanced texts, they must learn the meaning of new words that are not part of their oral vocabulary.

