

How Children Actually Learn to Read

A Parent's Guide to the Four Stages of Reading Development

Introduction

Reading doesn't happen by accident. It follows a predictable progression. Understanding these stages helps you support your child exactly where they are—and move them forward with confidence. Every child moves through these stages in order. Some move quickly, others need more time. What matters is meeting your child where they are and giving them the right tools to progress. **This guide will help you identify your child's current stage and choose products that actually teach the skills they need next.**

1

Letter Sounds & Recognition

Ages 3–5 | Pre-readers

What This Stage Looks Like

At this stage, children are just beginning to understand that letters have names and sounds. They are learning to recognize letters in different contexts and beginning to connect sounds to symbols. This is also when they start building phonemic awareness—the ability to hear individual sounds in words.

Key milestones:

- Learning that letters have names and sounds
- Recognizing letters in different contexts
- Beginning to connect sounds to symbols
- Building phonemic awareness (hearing sounds in words)

What Your Child Needs

Repeated exposure to letter-sound relationships through hands-on practice. Children at this stage need to see, say, trace, and manipulate letters to build strong foundational connections.

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

****Read, Write, & Wipe Phonics Cards**** Multisensory letter-sound practice ****LCD Doodle Tablets**** Screen-free letter tracing and practice

2

Blending & Decoding

Ages 5–7 | Beginning readers

What This Stage Looks Like

Children at this stage are learning to sound out simple CVC words (like cat, dog, and run). They are learning to blend sounds together smoothly, though reading is still slow and effortful. They may guess at words instead of fully decoding them.

Key milestones:

- Sounding out simple CVC words (cat, dog, run)
- Learning to blend sounds together smoothly
- Reading is slow and effortful
- May guess at words instead of decoding

What Your Child Needs

Lots of practice blending sounds into words. Children need repeated opportunities to decode words in engaging, low-pressure contexts. The goal is building automaticity so reading becomes less effortful.

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

****Read, Write, & Wipe Phonics Cards**** Continue building letter-sound mastery ****Paint by Word Canvases**** Hands-on blending practice ****LCD Doodle Tablets**** Practice writing CVC words

3

Sight Words & Word Recognition

Ages 6–8 | Developing readers

What This Stage Looks Like

At this stage, children are recognizing common words instantly (like the, and, was). They are building a bank of words they know “by sight” without needing to decode them. Reading becomes faster and more automatic, and they can read simple sentences and short books.

Key milestones:

- Recognizing common words instantly (the, and, was)
- Building a bank of words they know “by sight”
- Reading becomes faster and more automatic
- Can read simple sentences and short books

What Your Child Needs

Repeated exposure to high-frequency words in meaningful contexts. Children need to see and use these words over and over until recognition becomes automatic. Hands-on practice helps cement these words in memory.

RECOMMENDED TOOL

****Paint by Sight Word Canvases**** Reinforce sight word recognition through creative, hands-on practice

4

Fluency & Comprehension

Ages 7+ | Confident readers

What This Stage Looks Like

Children at this stage are reading smoothly with expression. They understand what they read and are reading for pleasure and information. They are ready to tackle longer, more complex texts.

Key milestones:

- Reading smoothly with expression
- Understanding what they read
- Reading for pleasure and information
- Tackling longer, more complex texts

What Your Child Needs

At this stage, the best thing you can do is provide access to engaging books and encourage regular reading practice. The foundation is built—now it's about building stamina, vocabulary, and a love of reading.

NEXT STEPS

Explore age-appropriate chapter books, visit the library regularly, and let your child choose books that interest them. Reading for pleasure is the best way to continue growing as a reader.

Ready to Support Your Child's Reading Journey?

Choose tools that match where your child is right now—and move them forward with confidence. ****Visit us online:**** www.jugglelearning.com ****Email:**** info@jugglelearning.com