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CHAPTER

1



Early Literacy

A Foundation for Academic Success

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Early Literacy

A Foundation for Academic Success

Before Your Child Can Read or Write

Your child’s journey toward literacy starts long before she begins to read and write. You may not realize it, but whenever your child plays with a book, points to a sign or scribbles on a piece of paper, she’s building **early literacy skills**.

The term “early literacy” refers to the knowledge and skills that children learn before they start to read and write. Just as a child needs to learn to walk before she can run, she must gain certain literacy skills before she can learn to read or write.

Many studies have shown that when children start school with higher levels of early literacy skills, they have greater academic success later on. You can think of early literacy skills as the “tools” your child needs in order to learn to read and write. The better stocked the toolbox, the easier it is for her to learn.

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The Building Blocks of Literacy

What early literacy skills should your child learn before she starts school?

- **Conversation**
Your child’s ability to speak and understand speech is directly related to her literacy development. The better her conversational skills now, the easier it will be for her to understand what she reads later on.
- **Vocabulary**
The more words your child knows, the easier it is for her to learn new words and to gain meaning from the stories she reads.
- **Story comprehension**
Lots of experience listening to and understanding stories will eventually make it easier for your child to read and write stories on her own.

- **Print knowledge**

Before your child can read or write, she must understand how print works. For example, she'll need to know that print is made up of letters of the alphabet, that letters combine to make words and that print is read from left to right.

- **Sound awareness**

To be prepared to read, your child needs to understand that words can be broken down into syllables and smaller sounds, and that letters correspond to certain sounds.

Your child's early literacy skills do not develop in a specific order, one after the other. In fact, all of these skills are developing at the same time.

You Are the Key

Young children develop early literacy skills during enjoyable conversations and activities with their parents. By talking about the letters on a cereal box at breakfast, reading a book together or pointing out a stop sign while on a walk, parents turn everyday interactions into the best opportunities to help their child learn.

That's why you, the parent, are the best person to help your child build the early literacy skills she needs to become a successful reader and writer.

This guidebook provides you with simple, effective strategies to capture your child's interest and help her learn. They're easy to apply because you can use them during daily routines and conversations. Remember that the most important part of helping your child learn is to make learning enjoyable. Children learn best when they're having fun!



Anna is helping Ella learn about reading and writing as she guides her to sign her name on a birthday card.

How to Use This Book

Each chapter in this guidebook introduces a different early literacy skill and describes specific strategies that you can use to help your child develop that skill. At the end of each chapter you'll find a Try It Out! section with helpful questions to get you started. Once you've tried out the strategies with your child during book reading or other activities, turn to the Reflection Questions at the end of the chapter to think about how well the strategies worked. When you're ready, move on to the next chapter to focus on a different early literacy skill.

Try it out!
Make New Words Sparkle

Think about the words you've decided to highlight by Shooting for the SSTaRS. Before you try this strategy with your child, answer these questions:

- 1. Have you selected a good book for building vocabulary?**
 - ✓ Will the topic interest your child?
 - ✓ Does the book include words that will be new to your child?
 - ✓ Will you be able to add new words as you talk about the book?
 - ✓ Will the illustrations help your child understand the meaning of the new words?
- 2. Are you selecting good words to highlight?**
 - ✓ Are you selecting no more than five new words at a time?
 - ✓ Are you including Step 1 words that your child may not yet understand, even though they occur frequently in conversation?
 - ✓ Are you including Step 2 or Step 3 words that occur less often and are less familiar to your child?
 - ✓ Are you including various kinds of words (not just nouns, but also verbs, adjectives and adverbs)?
- 3. How do you plan to Shoot for the SSTaRS to make new words sparkle?**
 - ✓ How will you stress the words to make them stand out?
 - ✓ How will you show your child what the words mean with illustrations, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice or objects/props?
- 4. How could you make it easier to Shoot for the SSTaRS while reading the book** (for instance, writing on sticky notes, getting props ready ahead of time, writing down questions to ask...)?
- 5. How will you remind yourself to use these words again during conversations in different situations throughout the day?**

Reflection questions
After you've shared the book with your child, answer these questions:

- A.** Was your child interested in the book? Why or why not? Would you change anything?
- B.** Were you able to highlight the words you had planned? Which part of the Shoot for the SSTaRS strategy worked the best? Would you change anything next time?
- C.** Did your child seem to understand the new words? Why or why not?
- D.** Did your child use the new words during the reading or at other times in the day? Why or why not?

Once you've completed the whole book in this way and you've had the chance to practice each strategy, it will soon become "second nature" for you to use whichever strategies feel comfortable in different situations. With the help of this guidebook you'll learn how much fun it can be to build your child's early literacy skills and give her the best possible start when she goes to school.

Let's get started!