

Other Readiness Level Suggestions

1. Children should participate in frequent warm interactive discussions of beginner books with caregivers. The very first books for young children consist of pictures with brief sentences or phrases that describe the pictures, such as “See the big red ball.” The child looks at the picture and hears the words read aloud, followed by spontaneous comments from the adult such as, “Oh, what a big ball! Can you point to the ball? What color is the ball?”
2. Likewise, children should hear books read aloud that have rhythmic, rhyming qualities. Mother Goose and the easiest Dr. Seuss book are two time-honored examples. As the books and rhymes are read and reread over a period of time, the child internalizes the language structures he hears. In this way, the child instinctively learns to hear rhyme and alliteration (two or more words beginning with the same letter sound, for instance, big bouncing ball). Later, the caregiver or teacher can play rhyming games to help the child consciously learn to listen and match rhyming words.
3. In addition, children should hear classic children’s stories, the kind which have an authentic emotional interest and definite story structure. Books such as *The Story About Ping*, *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*, and *The Three Bears* fit this category. In this way children learn to comprehend story structure and understand the slightly different, more complex vocabulary of our written language as opposed to the typically heard oral language from daily conversation and 30 second television commercials. Repeated readings give a child a chance to assimilate these vital language components.
4. Young children must be given a chance to “play read” all of the above materials. They must have a chance to have books of their own, to hold them and examine them closely, to have them within easy reach. When children begin to “read” the story in their own words after they have heard it read aloud, this is wonderful. Do not think that you should jump in and start trying to explain that those are not exactly the right words. For a while, give the child his or her own space to creatively respond to these stories without any worries about the printed words.
5. Children must have many rich hands-on sensory experiences with materials that will develop visual-motor skills. This includes activities such as working puzzles, manipulating clay, painting and drawing, matching and sorting games, using construction toys such as blocks, and cutting and pasting activities. For children in early childhood programs and primary classrooms, “playing” with these types of materials provides the vital fine tuning of a child’s senses necessary to develop the skills necessary to read and write.

6. Likewise, children must have extensive language experiences through social interaction with others. Having conversations with adults and peers, playing listening and memory games, singing songs, listening to and following simple directions, telling and retelling stories, and dramatic play activities with other children are all important means of developing a child's competence in the use of language.
7. Children should learn to match and sort materials. They will enjoy sorting a bucket of small items by color, size, or shape. They can compare two things to see if they are the same or different. Lotto games, in which a child chooses pictures to match the pictures on a card, are useful. Sequence cards allow children to learn to sort pictures according to which comes first, next, and last. Card sets are available commercially which allow children to sort pictures into logical groups, such as toys, vehicles, animals, and people.
8. The student should become familiar with the letters of the alphabet over an extended period of time. Read many alphabet books to children. Ideally, a child will be exposed to the letters of the alphabet from the time he is small. Sets of plastic letters with magnets, foam or felt letters, alphabet puzzles, and alphabet stamps, all provide a child with multi-sensory play experiences that develop familiarity with the letters, especially if an adult provides occasional low key input. These materials should be available at home and at school. After a child has learned about shapes and lines, and has learned to sort, you can encourage him or her to sort alphabet letters by shape. "Let's look for letters that have only straight parts." "Do you see some letters with round parts?" "Can you find a letter with a circle stuck to a stick?" "Let's see if we can find any letters with lines that cross."
9. Students will enjoy physical activities involving letters. For instance, draw the outline of a lower case b on a sheet of cardboard and have the student glue beans inside the outline. Make marshmallow m's, feather f's, and so on.
10. Some children enjoy forming the shapes of the letters with their entire body. You can encourage them to make this up for themselves, or you can use the diagram shown in the link below. You can also write huge letters on the sidewalk and have the student walk along the letter, following the same path as in writing.
11. When you talk about the letters, emphasize their sounds rather than their names. "The sound for this letter is mmmmmmm." "This is the letter that shows ssssssss." For many children, learning to read becomes much harder when they concentrate on learning the names of the letters before the sounds. It is necessary to think the letter sounds when decoding (sounding out) a word. Some children learn the letter names so well that they have enormous trouble switching to sounds when they are trying to read words.

12. Children should “echo read” books with a parent or teacher. Select rhythmic, rhyming stories with colorful pictures and a predictable story line. Choose books with large print and one or two sentences on a page. Point to each word as it is read. The student watches as you point to the words from left to write across the page. The child repeats each line after the teacher, while the teacher points. After several readings, the child will know many of the phrases by heart, and be able to chime in and read the story with you. A child is learning a number of conventions about print at this stage. He or she learns that print is read from left to right, and lines are read from top to bottom. Books are read from front to back, and the left page is read before the right page. The words are put onto the page in the same order that the words are spoken.
13. Even if they have not yet learned to read individual words, children are often able to match words by looking at them carefully. After echo reading a book, write several sentences from it on long strips of paper. Write two identical strips for each sentence, then cut the second one apart into separate words. Put the first strip and the separate word cards before the child, and have him or her find the first word and put it just below the same word on the sentence strip. Continue with each word until the sentence is completed. Read the sentence and have the student repeat after you, pointing to each word. If you have access to a pocket chart, this activity can be done with a whole class.
14. Children should have the opportunity to see words turned into print by dictating ideas and stories to adults. An emerging reader needs to know that print conveys a specific mental image or idea. Write this sentence at the bottom of a blank piece of paper, while the child watches. “A brave knight ran up a hill to fight a huge dragon.” Read the sentence aloud, pointing to each word as you read it, then draw a picture to illustrate the sentence exactly.
15. Then invite the child to tell you a story. It could continue the same theme or be something entirely new. Write the words down exactly as spoken by the child. Draw pictures to illustrate the story, or have the child do so. Read the story back to the child. Do stories in this way on a regular basis. If the child goes on and on with the story, you’ll have to say, “Now it’s time to end the story. What happened at the end?” Keep the stories together and reread them to the child as often as she wishes.

