



What is the place of phonics in reading?

Phonics is the knowledge of the relationship between sounds and letters. In the English language these relationships are complex – one letter can represent many different sounds, and letter patterns or clusters can represent the same sound as one letter. Confusing!

This is one of the reasons that learning to read English can be so difficult for some children. It's not as easy as knowing a letter and the sound that goes with it. Did you know there are 26 letters in the English alphabet but 43-44 different sounds they can represent?

Strong phonic knowledge is definitely important to being literate. In fact, children probably use and develop phonic knowledge more when they begin writing and approximate spelling than when reading.

Proficient readers most often use phonic knowledge (or the letter clues) when checking that their word predictions are accurate. We also teach children that phonics can help to work out tricky words, but that this isn't the only strategy they can use. In fact, if children rely too heavily on sounding out their fluency and comprehension suffer.

Ask your child's teacher about ways you can support your child to develop these active reading strategies. They will be a wealth of information.

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Reading

Understanding how your child becomes an active reader



The ability to read is essential for daily life, but it has the potential to be so much more than functional. Reading has the power to transport us to new worlds and give great enjoyment. It has the power to teach and provide endless opportunities to be fascinated as we learn more about our interests. The ability to read can connect people and enrich their lives.

Learning to read, then, needs to involve more than saying the words on a page.

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Important things to understand about reading:

Strong and proficient reading involves:

- **Oral Language** – a wide vocabulary is *essential* for comprehension, accuracy and fluency
- **Knowledge** of the world (often called Prior or General Knowledge) to help make connections and comprehend.
- **Comprehension** – actively thinking to understand what is read
- **Fluency** – expression, pacing, phrasing that enhances understanding
- **Accuracy** – strategies for accurately reading words (*such as re-reading, using picture clues, using phonic knowledge, looking for small words within long words*)
- **Self-monitoring** – knowing when you don't understand what you've read and re-reading; knowing when you've read something inaccurately and fixing it up yourself

What does a good reader do?

Children from *Flinders Park Primary School* in Adelaide, SA, were asked this question. They responded with: "A good reader..."

- likes to read
- reads different kinds of texts and for different reasons
- chooses 'just right' books that they can read and understand
- knows how to work out tricky words
- visualizes as they read
- asks questions about what they read
- makes predictions
- makes connections about what they read
- reads a lot



The Disposition to Read

Apart from teaching children HOW TO read, educators are concerned with instilling a LOVE of reading – or a disposition towards reading. This is an incredibly important goal in education, both for the long and short term. In the long term, it will bring enjoyment and successful learning experiences into your child's life.

In the short term, the disposition to read is *essential* for reading growth. The more children want to read, the more they *will* read and the stronger their reading will grow. Reading is definitely an ability that requires frequent practice to develop. When we create the desire and opportunity for children to **read a lot**, we can feel confident their reading will develop.

The most important way families and schools can foster a strong disposition towards reading is to allow children to read a wide variety of texts that they are interested in. This means children choose what they read (sometimes with adult support or encouragement) and are not forced to read one particular type of text. Imagine if you were told you could only read 'historical fiction' and not the sports magazines or biographies you love? You'd soon lose the joy and motivation to read. This is the same for children. *We must be careful not to focus on the skills of reading to the detriment of the disposition to read.*

Reading is a very complex task. It involves much more complex thinking than just knowing sounds, letters and words.

"Reading is Thinking"

The children at *Flinders Park Primary* understand something very important about reading: it is not just "saying the words right".

If we think about reading as only "saying the words right", we limit our ability to understand or comprehend what we read. I can pronounce the words in a medical journal or legal document, but I don't understand them. This isn't *active reading* - in education this is sometimes called "*word-calling*".

Teachers work very hard to ensure children *do not* learn that good reading is saying the words right without thinking about them.

You may have heard your child talk about "comprehension strategies". These are the strategies that we use to make sense of what we read or view.

- **Making connections** to what we know (our general

knowledge)

- **Visualizing** or making mind-pictures
- **Asking questions** about what we read
- **Summarizing** along the way so we can hold onto the 'thread' of information or story
- **Predicting** what might happen next or what we might learn when reading a text
- **Synthesising** or merging information from reading with our general knowledge to create new ideas or thinking
- **Inferring** or 'reading between the lines' to work out what is happening that hasn't actually been written

Reading to your child and talking about what you read is one of the best ways to learn these strategies, right from early childhood.