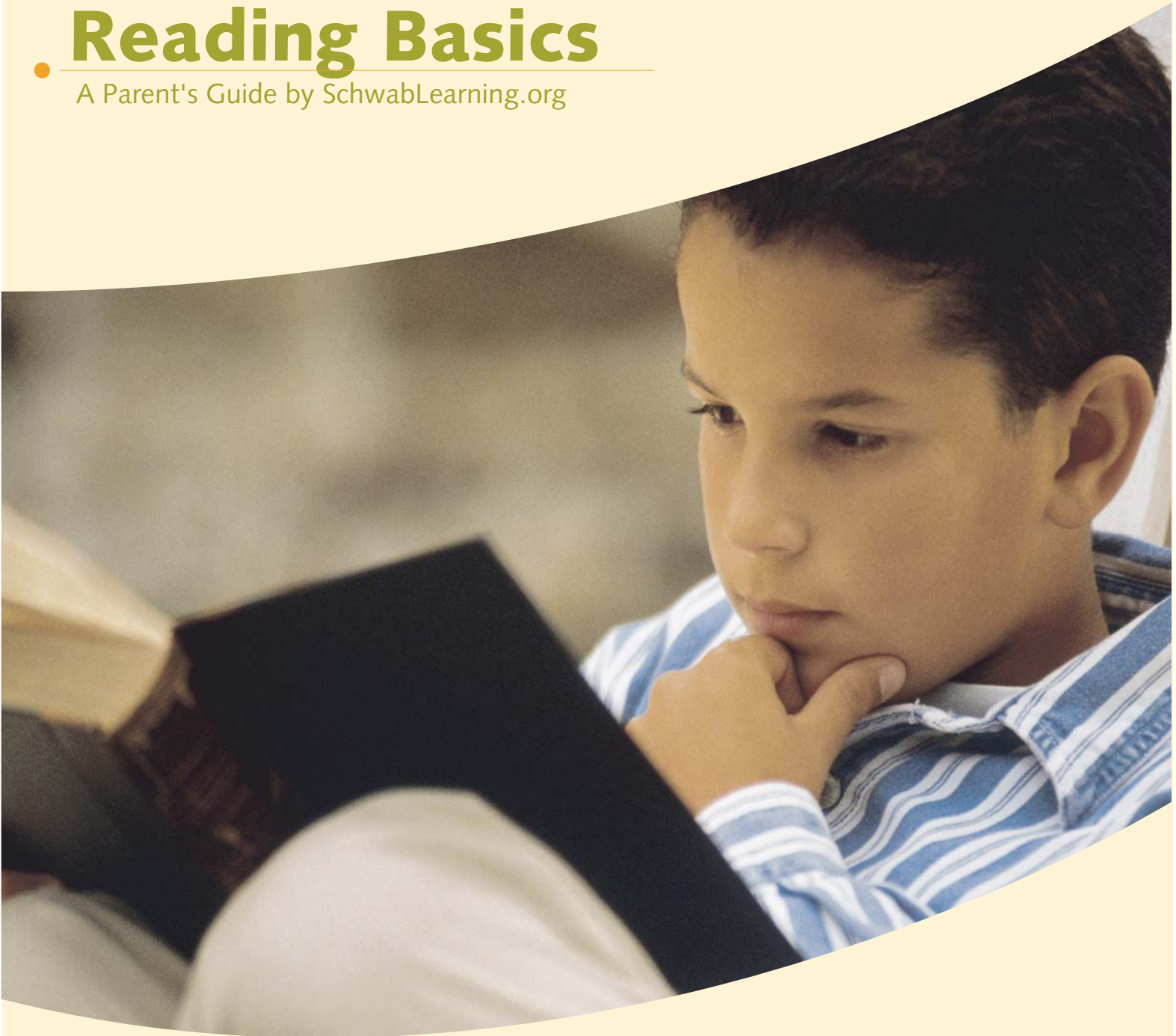


# Reading Basics

A Parent's Guide by SchwabLearning.org



## **Reading Basics:** **A Parent's Guide by Schwablearning.org**

Whether you and your child are just starting out on the LD Journey, or you've hit a new roadblock, our *E-ssential Guide to Reading Basics* puts you on the fast-track to information on reading. This collection includes articles and expert interviews written especially for SchwabLearning.org, along with suggested resources on this topic.

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## A Parent's Guide to Reading Basics

### Learning to Read — Research Informs Us

Most kids learn to read no matter what method of instruction is used. But 20 percent of school age kids are poor readers and remain that way through their lifetime. You may have heard that letter reversals are an early indicator of reading problems. Actually, many young kids exhibit some reversals as they're learning to form letters and sequence from left to right. The scientific, independent research results tell us that reading is a language-based skill. This means that delays in early language development are better predictors of reading problems.

#### What Should I Look For?

The best way to tell how kids in kindergarten and first grade will develop reading skills is to look at their ability to break up spoken words into the individual sounds, or phonemes. They have to be able to isolate sounds and manipulate them in words.

- Can your child tell you if two sounds are the same or different, for example, /p/ and /b/?
- Does he enjoy stories that rhyme? Does he play with rhyming?
- Can he name words that begin with the same sound?
- Can he hear that the words "ash," "so," and "it" each have two phonemes?

Our language is based on the alphabetic principle. Written words are made up of letters that represent sounds. Kids need to learn that certain sounds go with certain letters.

- Can your child say the alphabet?
- Can he tell you the names of letters?
- Can he match a letter sound with the symbol?

Reading comprehension depends on quick and automatic reading of single words. If kids read slowly and struggle with words that should be familiar, they won't remember or understand what they've read.

- Does he remember words he's read before?
- Can he sound out new words quickly?
- Does he decode new words correctly?
- Can he tell you what he has just read?

If his problems with reading have existed over a period of time, he has average or above average intelligence, has received basic instruction in reading, and has no physical or emotional disabilities that might affect learning, he may have a reading disability. Talk to his teacher, and make sure that he's receiving effective, research-based instruction. If necessary, consider having him assessed.

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## Learning to Read — Research Informs Us

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### What Is Effective Instruction?

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)<sup>1</sup> recognized that poor reading is not only an educational problem but also a public health issue. So they began a large-scale program to review research on the causes of reading failure and methods of teaching. From the research, we've learned that effective reading instruction for all children should include all of the following:

#### Phonemic Awareness

Phonemes are the smallest units of spoken language and are different from the letters that represent them when writing words. Kids need to focus on and manipulate the sounds in spoken syllables and words without any letters. Phonemic awareness shouldn't be confused with auditory discrimination, the ability to recognize whether two spoken words are the same or different.

#### Phonics

Instruction in phonics has been helpful to kids who struggle with reading. They're taught that sounds are represented by letters of the alphabet which can be blended together to form words. Sounds are linked to the individual letters and letter combinations and the symbols that stand for them. Kids with reading difficulties need to be taught explicitly to change letters into sounds and then blend the sounds to make words.

Skills must be taught systematically, in a carefully planned order. Reading material should be decodable. That means that it should contain sounds and words that already have been taught and avoid sounds and sight words that haven't been introduced.

Because kids vary in reading ability and the skills they bring to the classroom, no single phonics program is recommended for everyone. There are different approaches to teaching phonics. Instruction needs to be designed to meet the needs of particular kids or groups of students in a classroom.

#### Guided Oral Reading

Guided oral reading practice is necessary to develop efficiency and ease in reading. To become a more fluent reader, your child needs lots of opportunity to practice what he just learned. He should read out loud to you, the teacher, or other students and have mistakes corrected. If necessary, skills should be re-taught.

#### Vocabulary Comprehension

For kids who are fluent readers, strategies to increase vocabulary should be taught. New words can be learned as they are read in the text or introduced before an assignment. Being able to use a dictionary or thesaurus is an important skill. Computer technology, such as hypertext that links highlighted words to definitions, may be helpful, too.

#### Text Comprehension

It's important for your child to be aware of whether he understands what he's reading. Strategies to improve comprehension include using graphic and semantic organizers (including

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## Learning to Read — Research Informs Us

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story maps), answering oral or written questions, asking himself questions about the story, and being able to summarize the story. Integrating new ideas and generalizing from what he's read are the ultimate goals.

### What Can You Do?

If your child has reading problems, he'll need more instructional time and practice. It's really important for you to listen to him read at home every day for about 15 minutes. Remind him that to develop any special skill requires practice. Just ask someone who participated in the Olympics, plays a musical instrument, or is learning to drive a car!

Be sure that what he's reading out loud to you is at a level below his classroom instruction. This gives him the chance to reinforce skills and make them automatic. If he makes more than 5 errors on a page, there's a good chance that the text is too hard for him to practice on. Ask his teacher to supply the books that he should be reading at home.

Spend some time reading a book aloud to him. By reading a book that he can't read independently but is interested in, you'll help him increase his vocabulary. By asking questions about what you've read or having him retell the story to a family member, you can check on his level of understanding. There may even be an added benefit of developing a desire to improve reading skills to find out more information for himself.

1. National Institute for Literacy: *Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read* (pdf)  
<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/partnershipforreading/publications/PFRbrochure.pdf>

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### About the Author

**Jan Baumel, M.S.**, Licensed Educational Psychologist, spent 35 years in education as a teacher, school psychologist, and special education administrator before joining Schwab Learning. She currently serves as a consultant to local school districts and university field supervisor for student teachers.

## A Parent's Guide to Reading Basics

### Reading Comprehension — Research Informs Us

The goals of reading are to understand written text, integrate new ideas, and generalize from what is read. As a parent, what should you know about reading comprehension to help your child improve his skills and achieve those goals?

#### Develop Decoding Skills

Your child can't understand what he's read unless he has a way to figure the words out. Research has shown that poor readers "guess," an inefficient way to approach new text. Good readers, however, use decoding skills.

Phonemic awareness precedes learning to read print. Your young child needs to be able to hear speech sounds of the language and tell them apart, isolate sounds, and break words up into separate sounds.

In order to build decoding skills, your child needs to be able to match those sounds to letters of the alphabet and blend the sounds to make words. This is phonics instruction.

#### Increase Fluency

If your child struggles as he sounds out each word, he'll have trouble remembering what he's read by the time he comes to the end of the sentence or paragraph. So once he's learned how to decode words, he needs to read quickly and fluently to remember and understand what he's read.

In order to achieve this goal, he requires many opportunities to read out loud. Research has shown that practice in oral reading, not silent reading, makes the process of reading effortless. So take time to listen to him read aloud and help him through the difficult words.

#### Expand Oral Language

For most kids, listening comprehension develops at a faster speed and remains at a higher level than reading comprehension. Your child can't understand what he's read unless he understands the material when it's read aloud to him. In order to decide whether reading makes sense, your child needs well-developed oral language skills, including:

- **Learning the meaning of new words.** The larger his vocabulary becomes, the easier it will be for him to relate words to the context of the sentence, paragraph, or story. His vocabulary continually increases in complexity as he converses and reads. You can help by introducing new words and explaining the words he doesn't know.
- **Studying word parts and changes in the inflection of words.** If your child knows the meaning of a root word ("kind"), then he'll know what the new word means when the prefix ("un"/not) or suffix ("ness"/state of being) is added. He also needs to see that

“Reading comprehension depends on several interrelated skills ... significant difficulty in any one of them can cause a breakdown in the whole process of reading.”

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## Reading Comprehension — Research Informs Us

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meaning changes when word pronunciation changes, for example, “I took a birthday present to the party, and I will present it before the cake is served.”

- **Understanding meanings and relationships between words.** Synonyms are words with the same or similar meanings (“bucket/pail”), and antonyms are opposites (“good/bad”). Your child may need help learning figures of speech, such as, “It’s raining cats and dogs,” in order to understand what he’s reading.
- **Knowing the rules for putting words into meaningful sentences.** Different languages follow different rules. For example, in English, the adjective precedes the noun (blue water), whereas in Spanish the adjective follows the noun (water blue). In a sentence, subject and verb need to agree. Making a statement into a question requires changing the order of the subject and verb, such as, “That was a good story.” “Was that a good story?”
- **Having background knowledge.** Your child needs some idea of the subject he’s talking or reading about, or he won’t be able to gain meaning from it. For example, if you’re talking about the beach, has he been there? Seen pictures of one? Watched a program about it on TV?

### Promote Strategies for Comprehension

Your child requires lots of options to talk and write about what he reads to make sure he understands it. As you and he discuss books, newspaper articles, or school reading assignments, try using some of these prompts to broaden reading comprehension skills. Choose the strategies best suited to his level of development.

- What was the main idea? Tell me 3 to 5 important details from the story.
- Did you like the story? Why or why not? Who was your favorite character and why?
- Retell the story in your own words. Draw a picture illustrating the story. Write a short paragraph to summarize the story.
- What do you think might happen in the next section or chapter?
- Make up 5 “wh-” questions about the story — “Who? What? When? Where? Why?”
- Make a graphic organizer to tell about the story.
- Was any part of the story confusing to you?
- Did this remind you of any other story you’ve read? Which one and why?
- What did you learn from the story that you didn’t know before?

If your child doesn’t respond to your request, explain what you’re asking and give an example. Help him decide when and why each strategy might be helpful, depending on whether he’s reading specific subject matter for a class, information about a favorite topic or person, fiction, poetry, or step-by-step procedures for fixing his bike. He’ll need to stay motivated to apply these strategies as he reads new material.

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## Reading Comprehension — Research Informs Us

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### Balance Skill Building

Reading comprehension depends on several interrelated skills: understanding oral language, decoding the printed word, reading fluently, and using strategies to increase comprehension. No matter what your child's age, it's important his skills develop in all areas because significant difficulty in any one of them can cause a breakdown in the whole process of reading.

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### About the Author

**Jan Baumel, M.S.**, Licensed Educational Psychologist, spent 35 years in education as a teacher, school psychologist, and special education administrator before joining Schwab Learning. She currently serves as a consultant to local school districts and university field supervisor for student teachers.



## A Parent's Guide to Reading Basics

### What are the Early Warning Signs of Reading Difficulty?

*In 2002, SchwabLearning.org featured a series of interviews with reading expert Susan Hall about reading difficulties in early childhood. The following is an excerpt from that series.*

#### SchwabLearning.org asks:

What are the early warning signs of a reading difficulty?

#### Susan Hall answers:

A parent may be the first person in a child's life to recognize a reading problem. A parent's observation is critical because some of the earliest signs that foreshadow a reading difficulty can be seen during preschool and kindergarten years.

**Difficulty manipulating sounds in words is one of the hallmark characteristics of reading difficulties and can be seen at a young age.** Your child might struggle with rhyming, word games, or recognizing words that start with the same sound.

Often children who had repeated ear infections or speech delays during their early years eventually have trouble learning to read. Children who have articulation problems or are late to talk, as compared to peers, should not only receive a speech and hearing screening during the preschool years but should be monitored for possible reading difficulty.

Let's turn to some stories from parents of children who later had trouble reading. What were some warning signs they saw as early as the preschool years?

- One parent first noticed her daughter couldn't learn letter and number symbols when she was a preschooler. Despite the mother's extensive efforts to teach her daughter the alphabet, her child entered kindergarten knowing only 2 of the 26 letters.
- Another mother noticed just before her son's third birthday that he wasn't speaking at the level of his peers. He had experienced repeated ear infections and later had tubes inserted; his speech improved somewhat, but he eventually had reading problems.
- Another parent first began to suspect a problem when her preschool son disliked nursery rhymes. She would leave off the last word to see if he could fill in the blank of the rhyme. Despite having heard the same rhyme many times, he couldn't do it. He just didn't seem to recognize the pattern of similar sounding words that is characteristic of rhyming.

Sometimes parents notice difficulties during first grade because a child who's just beginning to learn to read may have **trouble making associations between sounds and letters**. Problems include not being able to detect differences in speech sounds and to perform tasks that require this skill, such as:

- Pronouncing new words and remembering them
- Breaking words apart into sounds

“A parent's observation is critical because some of the earliest signs that foreshadow a reading difficulty can be seen during preschool and kindergarten years.”

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## What are the Early Warning Signs of Reading Difficulty?

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- Blending sounds together to make words
- Remembering the names and sounds of the letters

A child with weak phonological skills often prefers to guess at unknown words while reading because he is not very good at figuring out the sounds or blending them together. Being able to sound out unknown words is an important skill your child needs in order to read text. Beyond third grade, the text contains more difficult words that often cannot be predicted from context clues or limited pictures.

If you ask your first grader to read aloud to you and he resists doing so, this may be a warning that there's a problem. Children who struggle often find reading is such a belabored process they avoid it.

By the middle of first grade your child should be able to read at least 100 common words, such as *the*, *and*, and *is*, and know the letter-sound associations well enough to read words in simple books. Watch for these warning signs as you listen to your child read aloud:

- Doesn't know the sounds associated with all of the letters
- Skips words in a sentence and doesn't stop to self-correct
- Can't remember words; sounds out the same word every time it occurs on the page
- Frequently guesses at unknown words rather than sounding them out

**You can also look at your child's writing for clues about a reading difficulty.** By the end of kindergarten a child should be writing words that contain most of the consonant sounds in a word, even though the vowels will often be missing or inaccurate until later.

These warning signs can be helpful to parents who suspect learning to read isn't progressing smoothly. However, just because your child is struggling doesn't necessarily mean there is a serious problem. Learning to read is a complex process that doesn't occur overnight for most children; it takes time and plenty of direct, systematic instruction.

It's important not to panic if you see some of these warning signs in your child. Lists of early warning signs can help you be on the lookout; however, there is no precise list of surefire signs of a reading difficulty. Each child is unique and may exhibit only some of the signs. Knowing what to look for can help you decide whether you need to investigate further. Calm and reasoned reactions are the most effective for your child.

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### About the Author

**Susan Hall** is co-author, with **Louisa C. Moats, Ed.D.**, of *Straight Talk About Reading and Parenting A Struggling Reader*. She has served as a member of the Illinois Reading and Literacy Partnership Council and currently serves on the IDA National Board of Directors. Susan is currently working on her doctorate in education. She has two children, one of whom is dyslexic.

## A Parent's Guide to Reading Basics

### What Kind of Assessment Helps Struggling Young Readers?

*In 2002, SchwabLearning.org featured a series of interviews with reading expert Susan Hall about reading difficulties in early childhood. The following is an excerpt from that series.*

#### **SchwabLearning.org asks:**

Are there ways to assess a young child's reading difficulty without going through a full evaluation? What type of assessment is the most effective in determining appropriate instruction?

#### **Susan Hall answers:**

Often parents who are concerned about their child's reading difficulties jump to a full evaluation. While a complete assessment is the right step for some children, there are other less expensive alternatives that provide needed information. There are many different levels of assessment — from an informal screening to full psycho-educational or neuropsychological testing. Knowing which level to choose requires clarity about **why** parents are having their child tested — what they want to know, and what they plan to do with the information.

**“Only after a child has received explicit and systematic instruction, and is still not successful, is it possible to conclude that the child should be tested for a learning disability.”**

**Before parents decide what type of evaluation is right for their child, they need to know what kinds of screening or testing their child may already have had at school.** New assessment tools that help kindergarten through second grade teachers evaluate reading readiness and early reading skills are now used in many schools. These tools differ from those used to test children for potential learning problems. The purpose of these new tools is to screen all students to identify children who are “at risk” for reading difficulties. Then specialized instruction can be delivered to those whose skills are weak.

**Screening tools enable teachers to predict which children are at risk of reading difficulty before they even begin learning to read.** These screenings usually take less than 15 minutes to administer and typically are given three times a year, starting no later than mid-kindergarten. Kindergarteners are screened for knowledge of letter names and sounds, language comprehension, familiarity with the way books are read, and, most importantly, phonemic awareness. In first grade, other skills are assessed, including a child's ability to recognize common words, sound out unknown words, and understand text.

Phonemic awareness, which is critical to being able to read, is the ability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in words. There are 40-44 phonemes in the English language, depending on the classification system used. Some sounds are represented by two letters, such as *sh* and *ng*. A child who can recognize that the word “cat” has 3 speech sounds, or who can change the /m/ sound at the beginning of “man” to the /r/ sound and know the word is now “ran,” is demonstrating phonemic awareness. The ability to hear separate sounds in a word is an auditory skill that underlies the ability to use an alphabet to read and write.

Schools have been screening children for letter knowledge for a long time, but this addition of screening for phonemic awareness is important. Recently, researchers who study reading concluded the two best predictors of how well a child will learn to read in first grade are phonemic awareness and letter knowledge.

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## What kind of assessment helps struggling readers?

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With appropriate, early, explicit instruction, most children will learn to read. Only those who have severe reading disabilities may need more specialized help. For most children, phonemic awareness can be developed with a limited amount of instruction in kindergarten or first grade using activities and games that call the child's attention to the sounds in words. This preventive model, rather than the "wait to fail" model, is strongly advocated by The National Institutes of Health and leading reading researchers.

In addition to determining if the school has performed adequate screening, it is important to know what method of reading instruction is being used. Many children simply need a more explicit and systematic approach to recognizing the sounds in words, the correspondence of letters to sounds, and how to blend sounds in words. Frequently, once a child receives appropriate instruction, he catches up quickly. Only after a child has received explicit and systematic instruction, and is still not successful, is it possible to conclude that the child should be tested for a learning disability.

Some parents choose to have their child evaluated privately. It's important that parents determine what they want from the evaluation before deciding who will conduct it. If parents simply want an independent opinion about whether their child is reading on grade level, hiring a knowledgeable reading tutor to assess the child's skills will generally accomplish this. The key is to find a tutor who is trained and experienced in reading instruction.

Another resource for a private evaluation is a specialized reading clinic that typically works with children with reading problems. This type of clinic is not the same as a commercial learning center that provides after-school tutoring but is uninformed about reading disabilities.

If parents find their child is behind grade level despite appropriate instruction, they may want a full psycho-educational evaluation to identify whether problems are due to a learning disability. If parents have their child tested privately for reading difficulties, it is important to choose a psychologist who is knowledgeable about all aspects of reading. Parents should interview the evaluator to determine his qualifications and experience and find out if a written report with specific recommendations for appropriate instructional approaches will be provided. It is well worth spending some extra time up front to find the right person to assess your child.

Parents who feel their child has a disability and is not receiving educational benefit can request an assessment through the public school. Rights and responsibilities for evaluation are defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

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### About the Author

**Susan Hall** is co-author, with **Louisa C. Moats, Ed.D.**, of *Straight Talk About Reading and Parenting A Struggling Reader*. She is a member of the Illinois Reading and Literacy Partnership Council and currently serves on the IDA National Board of Directors. Susan is currently working on her doctorate in education. She has two children, one of whom is dyslexic.

## A Parent's Guide to Reading Basics

### Does My Child Have a Reading Disorder or Developmental Lag?

*In 2002, SchwabLearning.org featured a series of interviews with reading expert Susan Hall about reading difficulties in early childhood. The following is an excerpt from that series.*

#### **SchwabLearning.org asks:**

How do parents know if their child's reading delay is a real problem or simply a "developmental lag?" How long should parents wait before seeking help if their child is struggling with reading?

#### **Susan Hall answers:**

As I travel across the country speaking to groups of parents about reading difficulties, I often say "beware of the developmental lag excuse." I have several reasons for saying this. First, I have listened to parent after parent tell me about feeling there was a problem early on, yet being persuaded to discount their intuition and wait to seek help for their child. Later, when they learned time was of the essence in developing reading skills, the parents regretted the lost months or years. Second, **research shows that the crucial window of opportunity to deliver help is during the first couple of years of school.** So if your child is having trouble learning to read, the best approach is to take immediate action.

Knowing how soon to act can be easy if you are informed about important conclusions from recent research. Reading researchers tell us the ideal window of opportunity for addressing reading difficulties is during kindergarten and first grade. The National Institutes of Health state that 95 percent of poor readers can be brought up to grade level if they receive effective help early. **While it is still possible to help an older child with reading, those beyond third grade require much more intensive help.** The longer you wait to get help for a child with reading difficulties, the harder it will be for the child to catch up.

The three key research conclusions that support seeking help early are:

- 90 percent of children with reading difficulties will achieve grade level in reading if they receive help by the first grade.
- 75 percent of children whose help is delayed to age nine or later continue to struggle throughout their school careers.
- If help is given in fourth grade, rather than in late kindergarten, it takes four times as long to improve the same skills by the same amount.

Parents who understand these research conclusions realize they cannot afford to waste valuable time trying to figure out if there really is a problem or waiting for the problem to cure itself.

These research conclusions make it imperative for schools to implement screening tools that emphasize phonemic awareness skills. As discussed in the earlier Q & A on Assessment Issues, the best plan is to begin screening children in mid-kindergarten and continue screening at least three times a year until the end of second grade.

“These research conclusions make it imperative for schools to implement screening tools that emphasize phonemic awareness skills”

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## Does My Child Have a Reading Disorder or Developmental Lag?

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Reading researchers who designed these screening tools recommend identifying and providing additional assistance to the lowest 20 percent of children. The rationale is that it is better to slightly over-identify the number of children who may be “at risk” of reading difficulty than to miss some who may need help. The worst outcome of over-identification is that a child who would eventually have caught on receives some additional help. Parents should follow this strategy and act early because the worst that can happen is their child will get a little extra help she really didn't need.

Yet identification is only the beginning. Effective and intense intervention must be offered immediately. Students who lag behind their peers must be given extra help, preferably in groups of three or fewer students, by a well-trained educator who knows how to deliver effective instruction. Assignment to these groups can be fluid, with children joining whenever the teacher determines skills are lagging and others moving out as they master skills.

**Early signs of difficulty should not be attributed to immaturity.** When a kindergarten child confuses letters, associates the wrong sound with a letter, or cannot distinguish a rhyme, it usually has nothing to do with social maturity. These warning signs do not necessarily mean the child has a reading disability; these signs may indicate the child had insufficient preschool preparation. If a child has not been exposed to letters and letter sounds, she usually catches on quickly once exposed. It is only after effective instruction has been provided and the child is still struggling that one can conclude there may be a more serious problem.

Why do parents wait to seek help? In a recent Roper Starch poll, parents' attitudes about their child's learning problems and the public's general awareness of learning disabilities were explored. **The poll showed many parents waited far too long to seek help for their child because they worried their child might be stigmatized if found to have a learning problem.** Nearly half (48 percent) of parents felt having their child labeled as “learning disabled” was more harmful than struggling privately with an unidentified problem. Of the parents who expressed some concerns their child may be having trouble, 44 percent said that they waited a year or more before seeking help.

Parents who understand the risks of delay in getting help for their child's reading problems are motivated not to wait. Children can be brought up to grade level much more successfully and with less effort if effective intervention is offered early on. Once parents understand the risks of waiting, hopefully it will be easier to overcome concerns and get help immediately.

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### About the Author

**Susan Hall** is co-author, with **Louisa C. Moats, Ed.D.**, of *Straight Talk About Reading and Parenting A Struggling Reader*. She is a member of the Illinois Reading and Literacy Partnership Council and currently serves on the IDA National Board of Directors. Susan is currently working on her doctorate in education. She has two children, one of whom is dyslexic.

## A Parent's Guide to Reading Basics

### Management Strategies — Reading

*In 2002, SchwabLearning.org featured a series of interviews with reading expert Susan Hall about reading difficulties in early childhood. The following is an excerpt from that series.*

Some kids with weak reading skills struggle to recognize and say the sounds in words. Others have trouble grasping the meaning of words. Skilled readers also need to be able to recognize and remember words automatically. So lots of practice is important.

If your child has a reading disability, she'll need direct, explicit instruction in a code-based reading approach (phonics). Her teacher or another trained professional should be doing the teaching, but there are many ways you can help her at home.

**“If your child has a reading disability, ... her teacher ... should be doing the teaching, but there are many ways you can help her at home.”**

#### General Tips

- Depending on your child's age and communication skills, talk to her about the difficulties you've noticed. Ask her how she feels about reading and what she needs help with. Assure her you're going to help her find new ways to improve her reading skills.
- Maintain a positive and hopeful outlook to support your child's belief in herself and her motivation to learn.
- Your child doesn't want to disappoint you. Be patient with her. In every way, support her efforts to succeed, but don't use false praise because most kids see right through it.

#### Support at Home

- Kids need daily exposure to literature and reading materials. You and your child can take turns reading to each other.
- If you let your child choose books that interest her, she will probably want to read more.
- Check out “high interest,” lower reading level books from your local public library. The children's librarian can help you choose the right books for your child.
- Show her how reading is all around us — street signs, stores, and billboards. Associate a word or sign with meaning. When riding in the car, point out all the words and letters that you pass every day. Make it a game to name the letters in a street sign or car license plate. Doing this may also improve her attention and concentration skills.
- For young children, other fun ideas are included in SchwabLearning.org's *25 Fun Ways to Encourage Reading* located at <http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=434>
- What she reads out loud to you should be at a level below her classroom instruction. This reinforces skills and makes them automatic. If she struggles through the page and makes

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## Management Strategies — Reading

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more than 5 errors, it's probably too hard. Ask her teacher to supply the books she's learned to read at school.

- Skim the story or book ahead of time and ask her what's going to happen next — “What do you think this story is about?” or “How do you think this story will turn out?”
- As you read, ask her to name the “Who, What, Where, When, and Why?” to check for memory and comprehension.
- Use highlighting tape or post-it notes in a book to identify key points to remember and review. (You can use highlighter pens on books you own, but don't use them in school or library books.)
- Books on Tape are a way for your child to “read” material above her skill level. Encourage her to read the book along with the tape. Ask questions to check for understanding.

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### About the Author

**Brian Inglesby, M.A.**, Licensed Educational Psychologist, has worked in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1988 serving economically, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students and families. In addition to writing articles for Schwab Learning, he enjoys the areas of learning, assessment, educational planning, and guiding parents through the IEP process.



## A Parent's Guide to Reading Basics

### How Do We Improve Teen's Reading Speed & Comprehension?

*In 2002, SchwabLearning.org featured a series of interviews with reading expert Dr. Kevin Feldman about reading difficulties in older kids. The following is an excerpt from that series.*

#### **SchwabLearning.org asks:**

What can be done to improve reading speed and comprehension skills?

#### **Kevin Feldman answers:**

It is not done simply — like most complicated things in life. The recent report of the National Reading Panel had a whole chapter on reading fluency. And that's really what we're talking about is reading fluency and automaticity, which are directly linked to comprehension.

When you think about it, in order to comprehend, one must have all one's attention focused on the meaning. If you're reading slowly and struggling with individual words, sounding them out, even if you're sounding them out correctly, all of your mental attention is wrapped up in the actual decoding. So you're not paying attention to the point of reading, which is obviously the meaning. We find that fluency and automaticity are a very big deal.

“Reading fluency and automaticity ... are directly linked to comprehension.”

#### **SchwabLearning.org: How do we help increase their reading fluency?**

You could sum it up in a phrase, and that is “**guided oral repeated reading**.” There's a notion of guided, meaning you're either reading with a prerecorded cassette, as in programs like *Read Naturally*, which you can visit at <http://www.readnaturally.com> and find out about, or you're working with a tutor, with programs like *Great Leaps*. You can visit <http://www.greatleaps.com> and find out about that. Or, you're just informally working with a partner, with a parent, with an older sibling. What's important is the notion that it's not just practice.

It's the old adage of Madeline Hunter's that “practice doesn't make perfect, practice makes permanent.” It's good practice [that's needed]; that's why this guided practice issue, but it's the repeated reading. We find that we have to engage students in reading text that they can read accurately. But they have to read it oftentimes three, four, five, six times to be actually fluent. And what happens is, if they engage in that guided oral repeated reading regularly with short, say 150- to 200-word passages, over time that generalizes and their overall rate does increase.

That doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen with just one session. But we find it is effective to use programs, for example, like the ones I mentioned, *Read Naturally*, *Great Leaps*, another program from Sopris West, called *REWARDS*, which is at <http://www.sopriswest.com>. We have good examples of research validated programs that engage students in this guided oral repeated reading which indeed improves their fluency, which then improves their comprehension. There are no short cuts, but it absolutely can be done and is being done in classrooms and clinics across the country.

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## How Do We Improve Reading Speed & Comprehension?

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**SchwabLearning.org: How do we get a middle school or high school kid to read out loud to us?**

In silent reading we never know, Is it actual reading? Is it skimming? Is it spacing out? Who knows what's going on? And, on the issue about how to [approach it], there are a couple of things. One is reading materials that are actually of interest to the students. So what makes programs like *Read Naturally* or *REWARDS* so effective is that they carefully select short but coherent passages that stand alone, that actually communicate interesting information. For example, they'll read about the woman who invented the potato chip. Now that won't help them pass their SAT exams, but it is interesting. And it is legitimate information.

One element is reading short, coherent passages about information that is of interest to an adolescent, and the second is make it a game, much like a computer game. Have you ever wondered why students or young people or people of any age will play the same game over and over? And you ask them, "Gosh, why are you doing this?" And they say, "Oh, Mom — oh, Dad, I got to get to the next level," right? It's this issue of having a specific goal. Say I want to be able to read at 80 words a minute. And my first time through I'm at 45. Part of it is having something worth reading. The other part of it is making it a game, where we have a daily goal that we want to reach. And it engages students in making it a bit more playful.

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### About the Author

**Dr. Kevin Feldman** is the Director of Reading and Early Intervention with the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE), where he develops, organizes, and monitors programs related to K-12 literacy and prevention of reading difficulties. He also serves as a Leadership Team Consultant to the California Reading and Literature Project and assists in the development and implementation of PreK-12 programs throughout California. His career in education spans 32 years.

## A Parent's Guide to Reading Basics

### Resources

#### Learning to Read: Research and Reports

##### Books

*Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*

Spiral bound copies may be ordered from National Institute for Literacy at ED Pubs.,  
PO Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398. Phone: 1-800-228-8813; Fax: 301-430-1244; Email:  
EdPubOrders@aspensys.com

##### On the Web

Brain Research and Reading

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=35&g=1>

Council for Educational Development and Research (CEDaR): Checkpoints in Reading  
[www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/curr009.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr009.shtml)

Measuring Progress in Public & Parental Understanding of Learning Disabilities: Highlights of the  
Roper Starch 1999 Poll

<http://aboutld.org/factsheet.html>

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development: Teaching Children to Read

<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/findings.htm>

National Reading Panel: Report Summary: Teaching Children to Read

<http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/summary.htm>

The NICHD Research Program in Reading Development, Reading Disorders and Reading  
Instruction

[http://ld.org/research/keys99\\_nichd.cfm](http://ld.org/research/keys99_nichd.cfm)

#### The Building Blocks of Reading

##### Books

Beginning to Read

by Marilyn Jager Adams

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0262510766/schwabfoundation/>

##### On The Web

Comprehension Instruction: What Makes Sense Now, What Might Make Sense Soon  
from Handbook of Reading Research: Volume III by Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, and Barr

<http://www.readingonline.org/articles/handbook/pressley/>

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## Resources

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### The Building Blocks of Reading (*continued*)

Decoding and the Jabberwocky's Song  
by Sebastian Wren, Ph.D.  
<http://www.sedl.org/reading/topics/whatisreading.html>

Developing Reading Skills in Young Children  
<http://www.schwablearning.org/Articles.asp?r=37>

The Phive Phones of Reading  
by Sebastian Wren, Ph.D.  
<http://www.sedl.org/reading/topics/phon.html>

Phonics Rules  
by Sebastian Wren, Ph.D.  
<http://www.sedl.org/reading/topics/phonicsrules.html>

Regular and Exception Words  
by Sebastian Wren, Ph.D.  
<http://www.sedl.org/reading/topics/exception.html>

### Resources for Parents

#### Books for Parents

Games for Reading: Playful Ways to Help Your Child Read  
By Peggy Kaye  
[www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0394721497/schwabfoundation/](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0394721497/schwabfoundation/)

Parenting A Struggling Reader  
by Susan Hall and Louisa Moats  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0767907760/schwabfoundation/>

Straight Talk About Reading: How Parents Can Make a Difference During the Early Years  
by Susan L. Hall and Louisa C. Moats, Ed.D.  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0809228572/schwabfoundation/>

#### Books for Kids

How Dyslexic Benny Became a Star  
by Joe Griffith  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0965937909/schwabfoundation/>

Keeping a Head in School  
by Mel Levine  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0838820697/schwabfoundation/>

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## Resources

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### Resources for Parents (*continued*)

#### On the Web

25 Fun Ways to Encourage Reading

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?g=4&r=434>

All Kinds of Minds

by Mel Levine

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0838820905/schwabfoundation/>

ProactiveParent.com — Susan Hall's website

<http://www.proactiveparent.com>

Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read

(Parent Guide for Preschool through Grade 3)

<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/partnershipforreading/publications/PFRbrochure.pdf>

Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic

<http://www.rfbd.org/>

Reading Rockets

<http://readingrockets.org/>

PBS: "Between the Lions" Literacy Tips

<http://pbskids.org/lions/tips/index.html>

Susan Hall on Reading and Parental Involvement

[http://www.schwablearning.org/pdfs/expert\\_hall.pdf](http://www.schwablearning.org/pdfs/expert_hall.pdf)

U.S. Dept. of Education: Helping Your Child Become a Reader

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Reader/>

### Assessment of Reading Problems

#### Books

The "T" Book — Testing: Critical Components in the Clinical Identification of Dyslexia

by Jane Fell Greene & Louisa Cook Moats

<http://www.interdys.org/servlet/bookstore?section=OrtonEmeritusSeries>

#### On the Web

How to Catch Children Before They Fail at Reading

<http://aboutld.org/Howtocatch.html>

An Overview of Dyslexia

<http://www.schwablearning.org/Articles.asp?r=43>

Resources for Testing Kindergarten through Second Grade Students

<http://www.proactiveparent.com/specialnews.htm#Assessment%20Tools%20k%20-%202012>

## Visit Schwab Learning's Online Resources

 SchwabLearning.org is a parent's guide to helping kids with learning difficulties.

We'll help you understand how to:

- **Identify** your child's problem by working with teachers, doctors, and other professionals.
- **Manage** your child's challenges at school and home by collaborating with teachers to obtain educational and behavioral support, and by using effective parenting strategies.
- **Connect** with other parents who know what you are going through. You'll find support and inspiration in their personal stories and on our Parent-to-Parent message boards.
- Locate **resources** including Schwab Learning publications, plus additional books and websites.

**SchwabLearning.org—free and reliable information at your fingertips, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.**



**Sparktop.org™** is a one-of-a-kind website created expressly for kids ages 8-12 with learning difficulties including learning disabilities (LD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). Through games, activities, and creativity tools, kids at SparkTop.org can:

- Find information about how their brain works, and get tips on how to succeed in school and life.
- Showcase their creativity and be recognized for their strengths.
- Safely connect with other kids who know what they are going through.

**SparkTop.org is free, carries no advertising, and is fully compliant with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA).**

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