

Reading Is Fundamental



Read-Aloud Guide

Reading with a child is an important part of developing reading skills.

Reading a book aloud, taking turns reading, acting out a book, and discussing a book are all critical elements to engage a child in the reading process. Reading together starts children on a path to obtain the necessary reading skills to become proficient, interested, and hopefully lifelong readers.

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General Read-Aloud Tips

Here are some tips to consider when reading a storybook with one child or many.

Prepare

- Select a book that is age-appropriate for the child (or children) you are reading aloud. If you are unsure, visit RIF's [Literacy Central](#) and search for books by grade-level.
- Choose a book that can be completed in one sitting. Children respond best when a reading is between 15-20 minutes (10 minutes for preschoolers).
- Before you read the book to the child, plan to read the book first to be familiar with the story and prepare open-ended questions you may ask that helps get the child engaged in the story.
- Think about the child or children you are reading to (ages, developmental levels, interests) and what you want them to get out of the story. This step will help you decide what questions you want to ask (or comments you want to make) and where (before, during, after the story).

Before You Read a Story

- Make sure everyone is comfortable.
- Show the cover and introduce the title, author, and illustrator. Look at the back cover and discuss the information the blurb gives.
- Ask the children what they think will happen in the book.
- Suggest things the children can look or listen for during the story.
- Ask some or all of the following questions:
 1. What do you think this book is about? Why?
 2. Where do you think the story takes place?
 3. Have you ever read anything like this book before?
 4. Flip through the pages and point out the illustrations to the children. Make predictions based on what you both see in the book. (Be careful not to give away the ending!)
 5. Discuss things that the children might have in common with the characters or the setting of the story.

During a Story

- To bring the story to life, try to give each character a different voice.
- You may also consider dressing up like one of the characters or bringing puppets or stuffed toys related to the story.
- Ask open-ended questions to engage the children such as “How do you think the character felt?”
- Clarify unknown words by asking the children what they think the word could mean.
- Ask children to make predictions about the plot, the characters, and the setting.
- Share your own thoughts about the story.
- Allow children to make connections and share comments as you read.
- Follow the cues of the children to respond to their age, background and any other individual characteristic or challenges.

After You Read the Story

- Ask questions about the story. For example, you might ask some of the following:
 1. What was your favorite part? Why?
 2. Who was the most important character? Why?
 3. What was the problem in the story? How was it solved?
 4. Does this book remind you of another book? Why?
 5. How did the story make you feel?
 6. Do you remember a time when you...? What happened?
- Ask children to describe one of the characters in the story, or how they might feel or act if they were one of the characters.
- Extend the story by having the children come up with an alternative ending.
- Follow the cues of the children to respond to their age, background and any other individual characteristic or challenges.

Source: Reading Is Fundamental and Gateways to Early Literacy

Tips for Reading Aloud With Babies

(Ages Birth - 2)

Why read aloud to babies?

- Research suggests that reading aloud to babies supports their development of:
 - Book awareness
 - Print awareness
 - Vocabulary
 - Fluency
 - Comprehension
- Prepares them to become readers and writers.
- Hear sounds, rhythms, and words.
- Use their senses—listening, seeing, touching.
- Make their own sounds—cooing, gurgling, babbling—which will eventually become talking.
- Point to pictures that you can name.
- Begin to understand that pictures represent objects.

Choose books that babies like:

Books for Babies Birth - 12 months	
Skills	Point to pictures and encourage babbling that imitates talking
Materials of Books	Thick cardboard or vinyl
Features	Real human faces and symmetrical shapes with primary or bright colors
Content	Daily activities, people, animals, food, and, imitating sounds
Language	Labeling objects and everyday sounds

Books for Babies 13 Months - 2 years

Skills	Point to pictures and name what is in the picture
Materials of Books	Cardboard books, books with textures, pop-up books
Features	1-2 focus pictures per page
Content	Books about topics such as families, farm animals, and daily routines
Language	Rhymes, repetitive phrases, songs, and predictable language

Try these read-aloud tips:

- Newborns can only see about 8-14 inches away. Hold the baby in your lap; make sure he or she can see the pictures.
- Play with words, sing, and make up rhymes; include the baby's name.
- For very young babies, do not feel pressured to read all the words. You may just point to the illustrations and talk about them.
- For babies over 10 months, begin to use your pointer finger to point to pictures and even words as you read.
- Expect babies to touch, grasp, and taste — that is how they learn.
- Offer the baby a toy to hold and chew while listening to you read.
- Read one or two pages at a time; gradually lengthen the number of pages.
- Let the baby turn the pages if he or she is more interested in the book than listening to you read. He or she will still be learning about books and enjoying your company.
- Point to, name, and talk about things in pictures. Describe what's happening.
- Ask the baby: "Where's the...?" "What's that...?" Wait for a response.
- Encourage a baby to join in — moo like a cow or finish a repetitive phrase.
- If a baby begins to lose eye contact with the book this means he or she is becoming uninterested. Put the book away and do something else when the baby loses interest.

Source: Reading Is Fundamental. Adapted from Dwyer, J., & Neuman, S. B. (2008). Selecting books for children birth through four: A developmental approach. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(6), 489-494.

Tips for Reading Aloud With Toddlers

(Ages 1 - 2)

Read aloud so toddlers can:

- Continue to associate reading with warm, pleasant feelings while learning about words and language.
- Expand their listening skills.
- Build their vocabulary with words they understand and can use.
- Link pictures and stories in books to the real world.
- Gain a sense of competence by learning repetitive rhymes and phrases.
- Begin understanding print concepts, such as, pictures and print as symbols for real things and that we read words, not pictures.

Choose books that toddlers like:

- Toddlers are learning to cope with feelings. Look for books with characters handling typical emotions and experiences.
- Toddlers feel competent when they can participate. Read books with rhymes and predictable words they can remember.
- Toddlers can pay attention if they are interested. Read picture storybooks with brief, simple plots and only a few words per page.
- Toddlers are curious. Read books about special interests and books about new people, places, and events.
- Toddlers are building their vocabulary and listening skills. Read books a few levels above their current vocabulary level that introduce new words and ideas. Also look for books with lots of pictures of things to name.
- Toddlers are beginning to make sense of concepts such as size, color, shape, and time. Read simple picture-concept books that reinforce their learning.
- Toddlers are learning self-help skills. Read books about daily routines such as using the toilet, washing hands, and taking a bath.
- Toddlers are active. Read books with flaps to lift and textures to feel.

Try these read-aloud tips:

- Read the same books again and again, if asked. A toddler will let you know when he or she has had enough of a book.
- Read slowly so the toddler can make sense of what's happening in a story.
- Offer a stuffed toy to occupy the toddler who finds it easier to listen when he or she is busy.
- Vary your voice to fit the characters and plot.
- Use puppets and other props related to the story.
- Repeat interesting words and phrases.
- Stop often to comment, ask questions, and look closely at the illustrations.
- Encourage a toddler to join in: turn pages, name things in pictures, make sounds, repeat rhymes and phrases, and think about what might happen next.
- Talk about the pictures and point out details a toddler might miss.
- Talk about the book and how it relates to a toddler's real-life experiences.



Source:
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Tips for Reading Aloud With Preschoolers

(Ages 3 - 5)

Read aloud so preschoolers can:

- Continue to associate reading with warm, pleasant feelings; learn about words and language; and expand listening skills.
- Pay attention to the language of books and begin to notice how it differs from spoken language.
- Listen to the sounds in words and notice how some are the same and some are different.
- Build their vocabulary.
- Gain background knowledge about a variety of topics.
- Talk about the characters, settings, and plot.
- Make connections between the book and their own lives.
- Learn concepts about print such as, print is spoken words written down, words are read from left to right, and written words are separated by spaces.

Choose books that preschoolers like:

- Preschoolers feel good about their growing skills and accomplishments. As they learn new concepts and self-help skills, read stories about young children who have similar experiences.
- Preschoolers have good memories. Read stories with simple plots children can retell in their own words (to themselves, a stuffed animal, or a friend) and pattern books with repetitive and predictable rhymes, phrases, and story lines that let children participate.
- Begin to read longer picture books.
- Preschoolers are curious. Read information books with facts, explanations, and new people, places, and things.
- Preschoolers know a lot about their own world. Read books that let them use their knowledge to understand books that introduce new topics, facts, and ideas.
- Preschoolers have vivid imaginations. Read folktales and books with animal characters that think and talk like humans.
- Preschoolers are learning about the sounds of letters and words. Read books with rhymes and alliteration.

Try these read-aloud tips:

- Introduce the book: read the title, author, and illustrator; look at the cover; talk about what the book might be about; suggest things to look and listen for.
- Run your finger under the text while reading.
- Answer questions related to the book and save other questions for later.
- Talk about the story during and after a read-aloud session.
- Use information and reference books to answer children’s questions.
- Ask children to look closely at the pictures to help them understand the story and make predictions about what might happen next.
- Repeat interesting words and rhymes while reading a book. Reinforce new words learned from the book during play.
- Pause and wait so children can say the word that ends a repetitive or predictable phrase.
- Stop to ask thinking questions: “What might happen next? Where did he go? Why did she do that?”
- Follow up on the story. Invite a child to talk; draw or paint; pretend to be one of the characters; and engage in book-related play.



Source:
Reading Is Fundamental

Tips for Reading Aloud With Elementary-School Children (Ages 5 - 9)

Read aloud so elementary-school children can:

- Continue to associate reading with warm, pleasant feelings; learn about words and language; build listening skills; expand vocabularies; talk about the characters, settings, and plot then relate them to their own lives; gain knowledge about a variety of topics.
- Gain exposure to a variety of writing styles and structures.
- Explore social and moral issues and behaviors.
- Become more skilled independent readers.
- Discover which authors and writing styles they enjoy.
- Be motivated to read on their own.

Choose books that elementary-school children like:

- Children are becoming independent readers. Read books with rich vocabulary that the children may not be able to read independently, but can comprehend.
- Children are expanding their language skills, vocabulary, and attention spans. Read chapter books with developed characters, plot twists, and descriptive language.
- Children are learning to monitor their own behavior. Read longer picture books and chapter books with messages about how to handle problems and cope with difficulties.
- Children are curious about the world beyond their immediate experiences. Read reference books that match their interests.
- Children sometimes identify with characters and situations. Read series books featuring the same characters engaged in new experiences.
- Children develop special interests, preferred types of books, and favorite authors. Read some books that match the child's preferences—mysteries, science fiction, adventure stories and some you love that will introduce something or someone new.

Try these read-aloud tips:

- Set the stage before you begin reading. Discuss what you read yesterday and what might happen next.
- Ask why questions throughout the story and encourage children to come up with their own questions to ask the group. If you get to a part with challenging vocabulary, phrases, or concepts, ask the children what they think the author means and construct an understanding together as a group.
- Relate a book you are reading to one read in the past. Talk about how they are alike and how they differ.
- Ask a child to imagine what he or she might do in a situation similar to that faced by a character.
- Provide materials and activities that let children expand their understanding of a character, historical event, or situation.
- Talk about what you have read. Books often evoke strong feelings that need to be shared. Offer your reactions and invite a child to do the same.
- Stop reading at a suspenseful point in the book. This encourages a child to be eager for tomorrow's read-aloud time.



Source:
Reading Is Fundamental

Tips for Reading Aloud With Preteens and Teens (Ages 9 - 12, 13+)

Read aloud so preteens and teens can:

- Continue to associate reading with warm, pleasant feelings; learn about words and language; build listening skills; expand vocabularies; talk about the characters, settings, and plot and relate them to their own lives; gain knowledge about a variety of topics; explore social and moral issues and behaviors; become more skilled independent readers; be motivated to read on their own; discover which authors and writing styles they like.
- Establish a lifelong commitment to reading.

Choose books that preteens and teens like:

- Preteens and teens want to feel that they have autonomy, consider suggesting several books but allow them to choose.
- Preteens and teens are increasingly interested in local, national, and international current events. Read editorials and articles from the newspaper and news magazines.
- Preteens and teens are defining what makes them unique individuals and learning how they fit in the world. Read novels, set in the past and in the present, with young characters who are experiencing and coping with the challenges of growing up.
- Select novels that are “coming of age” stories with themes such as relationships, family, crime, death, work, or travel.
- Preteens and teens question authority. Read classic and modern novels that deal with “big” issues such as when the needs of a community are more important than those of individuals.
- Preteens and teens are striving for independence, yet still want to be connected to their families. Read your favorite books and explain why they are important to you and read books that let you share laughter, a good mystery, an action-packed adventure, a science fiction journey.
- Preteens and teens are gradually learning to think abstractly and understand the reasons behind views that differ from their own. Read books that challenge them to think “out of the box” and see the world beyond their daily experiences.
- Preteens and teens are thinking about what they will do in their lives—college, careers, and more. Read books that introduce a wide range of opportunities and experiences.

Try these read-aloud tips:

- Continue to read at regular times and spontaneously: “I just read a great quote about last night’s game. Can I share it?”
- Respect preteens and teens by letting them keep their views to themselves when they wish. It’s perfectly normal for this age group to want to maintain privacy about some things.
- Vary the read-aloud menu from light, engaging items to longer, thought-provoking ones.
- Model thinking about what you read by stopping to discuss a key point. “I never thought of it that way. What do you think?”
- Stimulate discussion by asking open-ended questions that don’t have right or wrong answers, but instead invite thinking and learning: “How do you feel about...?” “What was your take on...?” “When did you realize she was going to...?”



Source:
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Read Aloud in Any Language

Many linguistically diverse families may ask themselves if it is beneficial to read aloud to their child in their native language since that is not the language their child will encounter in school. Research demonstrates that reading aloud in the home language is beneficial because:

- Developing a positive attitude towards reading in your native language transfers to your attitude towards reading in your second language.
- Children’s experiences with either language promotes the development of both languages.
- Language, knowledge, and skills developed in the home language can transfer to English.
- Learning a first language in the home provides a foundation for learning to read.
- Family literacy practices in the home language transfer into school outcomes in English.

Strategies that transfer:

- Engage in frequent and meaningful conversations even with young children. Use rich vocabulary when you talk with your children and encourage them to ask for the meaning of words.
- For young children under 4-years-old, sing songs and nursery rhymes to promote phonemic awareness. Clap out the syllables in words such as your name.
- Sit next to your child or if you have a younger child, have him/her sit on your lap, and open the books so you both can see.
- Look for books that will be repeatable and enjoyable for both you and your child. As you read, make connections between the story and your life and encourage your child to do the same.
- Allow your child to hold the book and turn the pages. Be a role model for handling a book and turning the pages with care. Point to the words as you read so that your child will learn that print is read from left to right.
- Introduce the title, author/illustrator, and ask your child to make predictions about what the story is going to be about.

- Change your voice as you read to match the character’s voice or the mood of the story.
- Ask your child questions as you read such as “who, what, when, where, why, how and what could happen next?” and encourage your child to ask his/her own questions.
- Use wordless books to tell stories to your child in your home language and encourage them to create their own stories as well.
- Develop meaningful writing tasks such as creating your own book by using photographs and/or drawings.
- Reinforce new vocabulary words that you read in the book by using them when you talk or play with your child.

Source: Written for RIF by Erin Bailey, MA using the following references:

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How to Read Aloud an Informational Text

What is an informational text and why is it important to read them?

- Also referred to as “nonfiction” book or text.
- Provides information such as facts and background knowledge often related to science, social studies, or the arts.
- Common Core State Standards (CCSS) shifted the emphasis onto informational texts to develop critical-thinking, analytical, and problem-solving skills needed for college and career readiness.
- More emphasis is placed on informational text reading in college and career; therefore, by fourth grade students should be reading 50% literature/50% informational, by eighth grade 45% literature/55% informational, and by twelfth grade 30% literature/70% informational.
- The CCSS identifies four types of informational texts:

Literary Nonfiction	Accurate information or real-life events, but told in a narrative format that typically includes a beginning, middle, and end. Example: <i>Martin’s Big Words</i> by Doreen Rappaport
Expository Texts	Include text features such as labeled and detailed diagrams, table of contents, index, and glossary. Example: <i>Cargo Ships</i> by James M. Flammang
Argument or Persuasive Texts	Give factual evidence with the intent of persuading. Example: <i>All the Water in the World</i> written by George Ella Lyon and illustrated by Katherine Tillotson or <i>Global Warming</i> by Robert Green
Procedural Texts	Give step-by-step guidelines on how to make or do something. Example: <i>The Flying Machine Book Build and Launch 35 Rockets, Gliders, Helicopters, Boomerangs, and More</i> written by Bobby Mercer and illustrated by Scott Rattray

- Even young children can learn both from and about informational texts when exposed to them.
- Research shows that reading aloud informational texts improves children’s ability to read and write informational texts on their own, bolsters their comprehension and vocabulary, builds their background knowledge, and motivates them to develop a love for reading.

Differences in Reading Informational Texts:

- Both content and structure differ between informational texts and literature.
- Within informational texts, structures differ depending on the discipline or content. For example, an informational text on physics and one on history differ in structure.
- Common organizational patterns in informational texts include: cause-effect, hierarchical, compare-contrast, definition-examples, and chronological sequencing.

Strategies for Reading Aloud an Informational Book:

Prepare

- Select a book with a topic that is interesting for the group you are reading to (e.g. dinosaurs, cars, space, sports)
- Informational books can be longer than storybooks and you often do not have to read the entire book in one sitting. If you select a book that cannot be completed in one sitting, pre-mark which pages or chapters you wish to cover.
- Pre-determine questions that you may want to ask before, during, and after the reading as well as vocabulary words you may want to investigate.

Before

- Introduce the topic of the book, the title, the author (and illustrator or photographer if possible).
- As you do a Picture Walk, acknowledge that the book is an informational book which means we will learn fun facts from the book. Notice the text features such as the table of contents, diagrams, glossary, and index.
- Discuss the purpose of the text such as to teach you something new (literary nonfiction and expository), convince you (argument/persuasive), or teach you how to do something (procedural).
- Read the table of contents and ask the children what they think they are going to learn from this book before you even begin to read. Developing questions that they believe will be answered by reading the book is an important skill for children.

During

- Read all parts of the page including the captions. Point out to the children that informational books often have photographs with **captions** or diagrams with **labels**.
- Invite the children to ask questions throughout your reading and make connections or share fun facts that they have learned.
- Stop and place emphasis on **bold** words. These are important vocabulary words. First, ask children what they think the word means to build their vocabulary development skills. Then, model turning to the glossary to learn what the word means.

After

- Ask questions about the book such as:
 - What was your favorite thing that you learned? Why?
 - What did you learn from the photographs (or diagrams) in the book?
 - Did this book remind you of another book you have read? How?
 - What was the author trying to convince you? How? (if applicable)
- Extension activities. For example, if you read a book about spiders you may go observe spiders or try to make a scientific drawing of a spider and label the parts.



Source:
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