



Tips for Teaching Someone to Read

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First Steps

Here are the essential skills for a reader to know first.

Know the Alphabet

- Letter names
- Letter sounds
- Alphabetical order

Learn Phonics

- Digraphs: ch, sh, th, oi...
- Blends: cr, str, bl...
- Short vowel vs. long vowel example:
 - short I sound = fish.
 - Long I sound = kite.
- Silent E examples:
 - pine, cake, note, rhyme...

Memorize Sight Words

Sight words are words to learn “by sight,” or memorize, because they are often hard to sound out.

Sight words get more difficult per grade level.

- Kindergarten sight words: was, from, are, she...
- First grade sight words: open, every, just, know....
- Second grade sight words: always, because, would, which....

After learning the alphabet, a reader can combine phonics tools with a foundation of memorized sight words. Then they can ultimately sound out new words.

Decoding is essential!

Decoding equals “sounding out” words.



Real Word Decoding Example

A reader is studying **phonics** and learns about the digraph “oi.” The reader is also working on recognizing **sight words**, and she learns the sight word “coin.”

She sees that “oi” is inside “coin,” and she connects that vowel combination (**digraph**) with the new sight word.

Later, the learner comes across a new word: “rejoin.” At this point, she understands how to **decode** this new word! She can sound out “re”, and “j”, and she already knows “oi,” as in “coin”... so now, “rejoin” is possible for her to sound out.

Combining alphabet, phonics, and sight words creates **decoding**.

Memorization vs. Phonics

Without the decoding skill, people can read *only* words they have memorized in the past. Not knowing how to decode new words results in a “lower reading level” due to limited memorized vocabulary.

Moreover, it is often the case that people with lower reading levels do not know their phonics. Sometimes, they do not know the entire alphabet either.

In Sum

If someone reads at a lower level, they may have gaps in their alphabet, phonics, and sight words, *even if* they appear to be reading some big words... words they have memorized. They may struggle to decode new words well.

The good news is: **it’s never too late to fill in the gaps** and learn essential reading skills. No matter someone’s age, a reader can always go back and keep learning. They can always go back to the letter names and sounds, as well as phonics and sight words.

With a foundation of these literacy skills in place, a reader is ready to sound out new words, read longer sentences, and enjoy the life-changing confidence that comes from improved literacy skills.