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Tennessee State  
Improvement Grant

# Helping Your Child at Home: Reading Strategies Parents Can Use



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## ■ Five Important Areas of Reading Instruction

One goal of the Tennessee State Improvement Grant is increased literacy skills for children across the state. We are bringing this publication and the accompanying workshop to family members, because they are important influences on a child’s educational success. 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? What are the things your child needs to do to understand what he reads? Following are some skills necessary for good reading and some ways you can help.

| Skill  | What it is  | How you can help   |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Phonemic Awareness</b><br><i>Hearing Sounds</i> | Phonemic awareness refers to the <b>ability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words</b> . Acquiring phonemic awareness is important because it is the foundation for spelling and word recognition skills.  | Help child <b>hear the sounds</b> by asking her to think of a number of words that start with a specific sound, such as the “ssss...” sound.<br><br><b>Make up silly sentences</b> in which all the words start with the same sound. “Mom made me many meatballs.”<br><br>Ask your child to clap or stand up whenever he hears a word that starts with a specific sound “bbb...”, or “rrrr”, or a word that rhymes with a particular word, such as “cat”.<br><br><b>Reading and saying nursery rhymes</b> together is a great way to increase phonemic awareness.  |
| <b>Phonics</b><br><i>Decoding Words</i>            | The <b>ability to apply your knowledge of letter-sound relationships</b> , including knowledge of letter patterns, to correctly pronounce written words. Understanding these relationships gives children the ability to recognize familiar words quickly and to figure out words they haven’t seen before. | Help your young child <b>learn the letters and sounds of the alphabet</b> . Occasionally point to letters and letter combinations and ask your child to name them. A set of <b>magnetic letters</b> on the refrigerator can provide fun and learning during meal preparation.<br><br>Encourage your child to <b>write and spell notes, e-mails, and letters</b> .<br><br>Talk with your child about the <b>“irregular” words</b> ; such as, <i>said, are, and was</i> , that he needs to recognize “by sight.”<br><br>When your child mispronounces a word, remind him of the <b>rules for that word</b> . i.e., made — the e at the end is silent and makes the “a” a long vowel sound. |
| <b>Fluency</b>                                     | <b>Reading accurately and with expression — chunking words into phrases and using pauses appropriately.</b><br><br>Children who do not read fluently sound choppy when they read.   | In order to read fluently, we need a lot of <b>practice</b> with hearing how good reading sounds and with reading out loud. <b>Read aloud</b> often to your child; the more often she hears a story, the more familiar the words will become and the easier it will be for your child to read.<br><br><b>Ask your child to read to you</b> — she will get practice with reading and you will hear how she is progressing and where she may have trouble. If you don’t have time to listen to her read, ask her to read to a brother or sister, or to a pet or stuffed animal. <b>Practice</b> really does help us to improve.  |

| Skill                       | What it is  | How you can help  |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Fluency, cont.</b>       | Reading fluently is not the same as speed reading — it's not just reading fast; it's reading the way we should talk so that we can better understand what we are reading. Reading fluently is a bridge to comprehension.  | Ask your child to read into a tape recorder a number of times. The more times she reads, the better she'll sound, and she'll be able to hear the difference.  |
| <b>Expanding Vocabulary</b> | <p>Vocabulary refers to <b>the words we must understand to communicate effectively</b>.</p> <p>A reader cannot understand a text without knowing what most of the words mean. Students learn the meaning of most words indirectly, through everyday experiences with oral and written language.</p>   | <p>Learn the meaning of <b>new words</b>. The larger your child's vocabulary, the easier it is for him to understand the meaning of the text.</p> <p><b>Read to your child each day.</b> When the book contains a new or interesting word, pause and define the word for your child.</p> <p><b>Discuss the meanings of unknown words</b>, both those he reads and those he hears.</p> <p>Study <b>word parts</b>. 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. (unkind, kindness).</p> <p>Talk about the relationships between words. <b>Synonyms</b> are words with the same or similar meanings ("bucket/pail"), and <b>antonyms</b> 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.</p>   |
| <b>Comprehension</b>        | <p>Comprehension is the <b>understanding and interpretation</b> of what is read. To be able to accurately understand written material, children need to be able to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Decode what they read;</li> <li>2) Make connections between what they read and what they already know; and</li> <li>3) Think deeply about what they have read.</li> </ol> <p>Comprehension involves combining reading with thinking and reasoning.</p> | <p><b>Show your child how to be an active reader.</b> Discuss what your child has read. Ask your child probing questions about the book and <b>connect</b> the events to his or her own life.</p> <p>Help your child <b>go back to the text</b> to support his or her answers.</p> <p>Know and share the rules for putting words into meaningful sentences. Making a <b>statement into a question</b> requires changing the order of the subject and verb, such as "That was a good story." to "Was that a good story?"</p> <p>Help your child understand the <b>"unspoken" ideas</b> in what he has read; such as, <b>inferences, the main idea</b> of the story, and the differences between <b>facts and opinions</b>.</p> <p>Give your child many <b>background experiences</b>, such as visits to zoos and museums; and activities, such as cooking, shopping, and trips to other places, ordinary and not so ordinary. The more experiences a child has had, the more he can connect what he is reading to what he knows.</p> |

# ■ Helping Your Child Choose the Right Book for His Reading Level

These are general guidelines for finding the right level of book. However, don't underestimate a child's willingness to struggle with a difficult book if highly motivated by the topic or a friend's enthusiastic recommendation of the book. Encourage your child to read many types of books, including picture books that are more sophisticated, informational books, biographies and poetry. Just like adults, some children prefer informational books over fictional stories. The more they are exposed to, the better the chances are that they will find a genre that gives them pleasure and inspires them to go back for more.

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## FIVE FINGER RULE

Teach your child the five finger rule. Have him open the book to any page and begin to read.

- If he misses five or more words on a page, the book is a challenge for him right now.
- If he doesn't miss any words, the book is a breeze – the book may be too easy.
- If he misses three words, it is just right.

## THE "GOLDILOCKS" METHOD

Listen to your child read the book to find out if it is too easy, just right, or too hard for her.

### Too Easy:

- Does she know almost every word?
- Can she read it smoothly?
- Does she understand the story very well?

### Just Right:

- Are there just a few words per page she doesn't know?
- When she reads, are some places smooth and some choppy?
- Does she understand a lot of the book?

### Too Hard

- Are there more than 5 words on a page she doesn't know?
  - When she reads, does it sound too choppy?
  - Is she confused about what is happening in most of the book?
- 

# ■ Vocabulary Building Strategies

We want children to notice when they encounter new words and to want to learn them. There are many ways to draw children's attention to words and to interest them in the words they hear and see. Playing with words through games, songs, and humor can be powerful. Simply encouraging children to recognize when they have encountered new words, and to notice special characteristics of words, will also raise word consciousness.

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## THE ALPHABET GAME

The first level starts as early as age 3 with just reciting the alphabet, going back and forth between parent and child (this often is done while driving). Once this "level" of the word game gets too easy, its time to play the game with words and go back forth with... "Apple, Baker, Cat etc". You might play the game twice in succession and in the

second round, you could use new words that make it a tougher vocabulary game. For example, restrict the word to just one type such as foods: "Apple, Banana, Cheese," etc. Later, you can move on to verbs "attack, bark, copy..." and nouns, "artist, book, candle...", and to two syllable words, three syllable words, etc.

## WORD WIZARD

Children also need to know how words are formed — the root words, suffixes (a word part added to the end of a word), and prefixes (word part added before a word), and how the word is affected by added parts.

**Common prefixes are:** anti-, de-, dis-, en-, em-, fore-, in-, im-, il-, ir-, inter-, mid-, mis-, non-, over-, pre-, re-, semi-, sub-, super-, trans-, un-, under-, while **common suffixes are:** -able, -ible, -al, -ial, -ed, -en, -er, -er, -est, -ful, -ic, -ing, -ion, -tion, -ation, ition, -ity, -ty, -ive, -ative, -itive, -less, -ly, -ment, -ness, -ous, -eous, -ious, -s, -es, -y

Sometimes words that look “big” are really just easy root words that have prefixes and suffixes attached to them. As an example, let’s find the prefixes or suffixes in the following sentence. Underline the prefixes and circle the suffixes.

Her achievements were legendary because she had an uncommon ability to show compassion to others and help them reconsider giving up their goals of perfection just because they had inadequate training.

Can your children add root words to these suffixes and prefixes to make new words?

| Prefixes | Root Word | Root Word | Suffixes |
|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| un-      |           |           | -er      |
| pre-     |           |           | -est     |
| bi-      |           |           | -ful     |
| mis-     |           |           | -ness    |
| dis-     |           |           | -ing     |
| en-      |           |           | -ish     |
| im-      |           |           | -less    |
| ir-      |           |           | -er      |
| un-      |           |           | -est     |
| pre-     |           |           | -ful     |
| bi-      |           |           | -ness    |
| mis-     |           |           | -ing     |
| dis-     |           |           | -ish     |
| en-      |           |           | -less    |
| im-      |           |           | -er      |
| ir-      |           |           | -est     |
| un-      |           |           | -ful     |
| pre-     |           |           | -ness    |
| bi-      |           |           | -ing     |
| mis-     |           |           | -ish     |
| dis-     |           |           | -less    |
| en-      |           |           | -er      |

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## NIFTY THRIFTY FIFTY WORDS

Older students need to learn to decode larger (polysyllabic) words. Since English is very complex, students need to learn a core vocabulary that will help them figure out what unfamiliar words in text mean. The Nifty Thrifty Fifty words

contain common roots, prefixes and suffixes. Patricia Cunningham, author and respected educational lecturer, writes that for each Nifty Thrifty Fifty word a reader knows, she or he can read at least 7 more words.

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|                          |                           |                           |                       |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| antifreeze               | employ <del>ee</del>      | invas <del>ion</del>      | richest               |
| beautiful                | encourag <del>ement</del> | irrespons <del>ible</del> | semifinal             |
| class <del>ify</del>     | expens <del>ive</del>     | midnight                  | signat <del>ure</del> |
| communit <del>ies</del>  | forecast                  | misunderstand             | submarine             |
| community                | forgott <del>en</del>     | music <del>ian</del>      | supermarkets          |
| compos <del>er</del>     | govern <del>or</del>      | nonliving                 | swimming              |
| continu <del>ous</del>   | happ <del>iness</del>     | overpower                 | transportation        |
| conversat <del>ion</del> | hope <del>less</del>      | performance               | underweight           |
| deodor <del>ize</del>    | illegal                   | prehistoric               | unfinished            |
| differ <del>ent</del>    | impossible                | prettier                  | unfriendly            |
| discovery                | impress <del>ion</del>    | rearrange                 | unpleasant            |
| dishonest                | independ <del>ence</del>  | replacem <del>ent</del>   | valuable              |
| electricity              | international             |                           |                       |

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## ■ Reading Comprehension Strategies

There are many ideas a child needs to find in what he is reading. Three of these things are deciding what the author's main idea is, what is being inferred, and which statements are facts and which are the author's opinions. Help your child practice finding these items.

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### MAIN IDEA

**Good readers can separate the main idea in a passage, story, or book from supporting ideas.**

The frog sat on the side of the pond. He was very still. His green color made him hard to see. A bug flew near him. His tongue zipped out, and he gobbled it up. Then the frog was still again. He waited for the next bug.

The main idea in this passage is:

Frogs are green.

Frogs eat bugs.

Frogs do not move.

Frogs live in ponds.

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### INFERENCES

**Good readers can make inferences from what is written, even if the idea is not specifically stated. Help your children to practice finding the inferred ideas.**

The family dog hid behind the sofa as a storm roared outside, with lightning and thunder. The dog whimpered each time it heard the thunder. Dad tried to coax the dog out, but it wasn't going anywhere. You can guess that \_\_\_\_\_.

storms made the dog afraid

the dog was playing hide and seek

Dad was afraid of storms

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## FACT OR OPINION

Good readers need to be able to sort out the authors' opinion from real facts. Help your child practice figuring out the difference between facts and opinions. Which statements are facts and which are opinions?

- Sleeping in a tent is the best part of camping.
  - If the President dies in office, the Vice President becomes the President.
  - Country music is the best kind of music.
  - There are three stars in the Tennessee state flag.
- 

## THE FIVE WHYS

This strategy is simply a process of asking "Why?" four or five times in a row to discover the meaning of a particular problem or situation. This helps children to think through

a story or text. Graphic organizers such as the "five whys activity" allow students to trace cause and effect throughout an incident and to get to the root cause of a problem.

### Example

**Problem Statement:** You are on your way home from school and the car you are traveling in stops in the middle of the road.

1. **Why did your car stop?** Because it ran out of gas.
2. **Why did it run out of gas?** Because I didn't buy any gas on the way to school.
3. **Why didn't you buy any gas this morning?** Because I didn't have any money.
4. **Why didn't you have any money?** Because I left my wallet at home.
5. **Why did you leave your wallet at home?** Because the family was running late.

**Lesson:** If you don't ask the right questions, you don't get the right answers.

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## GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

A graphic organizer is usually a one-page form with blank areas for the student to fill in with related ideas and information. Some organizers are very specific; others can be used with many topics. For the most part, the information on a graphic organizer could just as easily be

filled in on a form or written as a list. The organizer gives the child another way to "see" the information. Some of the organizers allow for the information to be written or drawn, opening the activity up to younger grades.

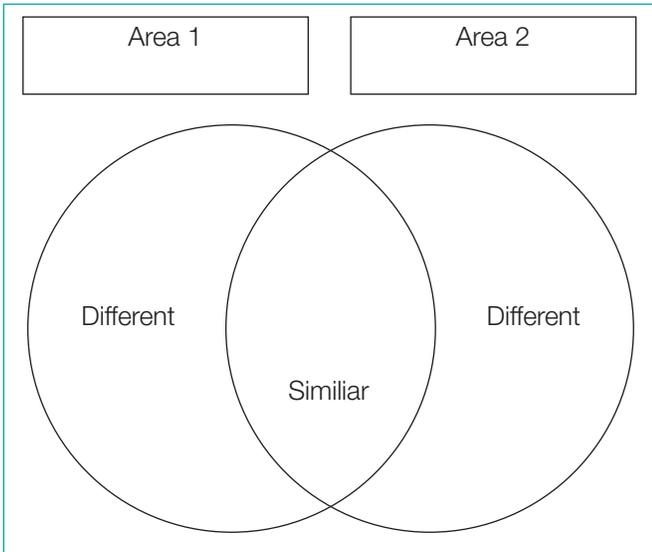
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## Word Chart

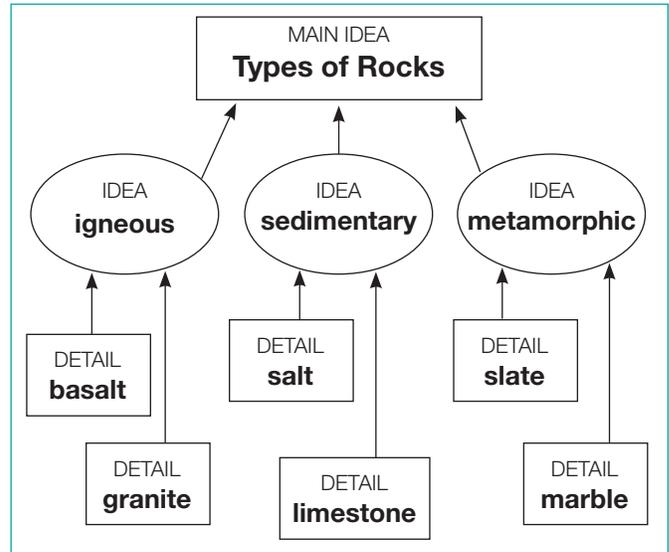
Use this graphic organizer to help you to discover new words.

|   |   |                 |                   |
|---|---|-----------------|-------------------|
|  | <b>Synonym</b> another word that means the same thing     | <b>New Word</b> | <b>Definition</b> |
|   | <b>Antonym</b> another word that means the opposite       |                 |                   |
|   | <b>Homonym</b> another word that sounds like the new word | <b>Picture</b>  |                   |

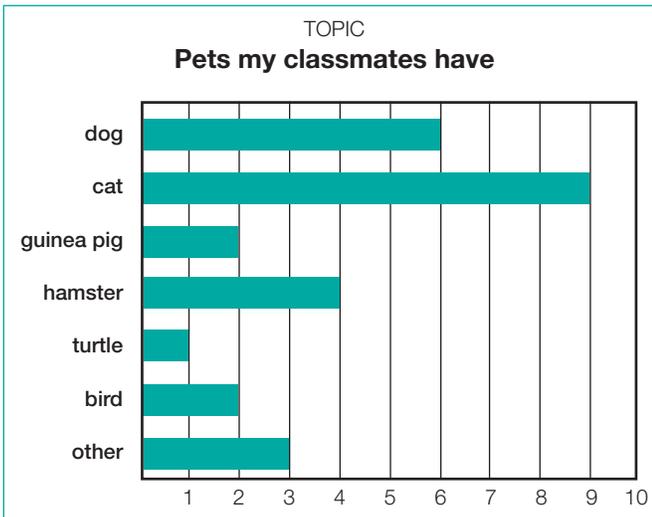
## Venn Diagram – Compare and Contrast



## Main Idea and Supporting Ideas



## Graphs



## KWL Charat

**K W L**  
(OGLE, 1984, 1986)

| What do you<br><b>Know?</b> | What do think<br>you <b>Will</b> learn? | What did you<br><b>Learn?</b> |
|-----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
|                             |   |                               |



### Tennessee State Improvement Grant

*Advancing the Skills of Tennessee Students*

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Cunningham, P, & Hall, D. (1998). Nifty Fifty Thrifty. *Month-by-Month PHONICS for Upper Grades*, Carson-Dellosa.

Ellis, E. (2002). *Word Castles. Makes Sense Literacy Strategies*. <http://www.graphicorganizers.com/>

<http://www.edhelper.com/> (graphic organizers)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk.skillswise/> (prefixes and suffixes worksheet)

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