

## READY TO READ?

The ability to read and write is a wonderful gift. There are many processes and skills that lay the foundation for reading. We can think of learning to read and write like building a 'literacy wall'. Each brick needs to be firmly cemented in place to support the wall. Our children need a well-developed set of skills before they can start to read and write their first words. This development of skills continues as our children learn, with our expectations of their abilities gradually increasing. Many children can appear to have a reasonable literacy foundation, but, at some point, they fail to continue to progress in line with their peers. This can be frustrating for both children and parents. Reviewing the foundational skills for reading, therefore, is vital to pinpoint where the 'wobbly bricks' in the literacy wall are.

*Take our free [Reading Readiness checklist](#) to find out how strong your child's reading foundation skills are.*

## THE READING JOURNEY

Language-learning starts at birth. Babies start to learn to communicate through cries and facial expressions. This progresses to babbling, as they learn to have a greater level of control over their oral movements. Speech develops as babies listen to others around them and they begin to copy words. These early words are stored in their vocabulary system. The more frequently a child hears and uses a word, the stronger and more accurate their memory for the word becomes.

As children start to learn that words have meaning, their growing knowledge is stored in their memory. For example, 'car' may initially refer only to the blue family car. Soon afterwards, a child will learn that cars come in other colours and sizes and belong to other people, like grandma and family friends. A bit further along, they work out that cars have specific parts such as wheels and doors, and that they drive on the road. As a child's understanding of the word 'car' enlarges, they are able to work out that other words such as 'bus', 'motorbike' and 'truck' are closely linked, and that all these items have similar features which group them together into an understanding of 'transport'. At this point, the foundation for reading comprehension is developing. All readers need to have a strong understanding of the words they are reading, and how these words are connected to other words.

The next stage involves being able to think specifically about the structure of the word. This develops throughout the early learning years. It involves understanding concepts such as syllables, sounds, parts of speech, synonyms, antonyms and letter shapes and patterns.

Reading is far more than simply figuring out words on a page. Successful readers can decode words (that is, pull apart words to match letters with sounds) and quickly and efficiently retrieve the meaning of the word from their vocabulary storage system. Successful readers also activate their own personal knowledge and memories, and use these to help them interpret the meaning behind texts. Reading is just another step on the language-learning journey.

## THE ORAL – LITERATE CONTINUUM

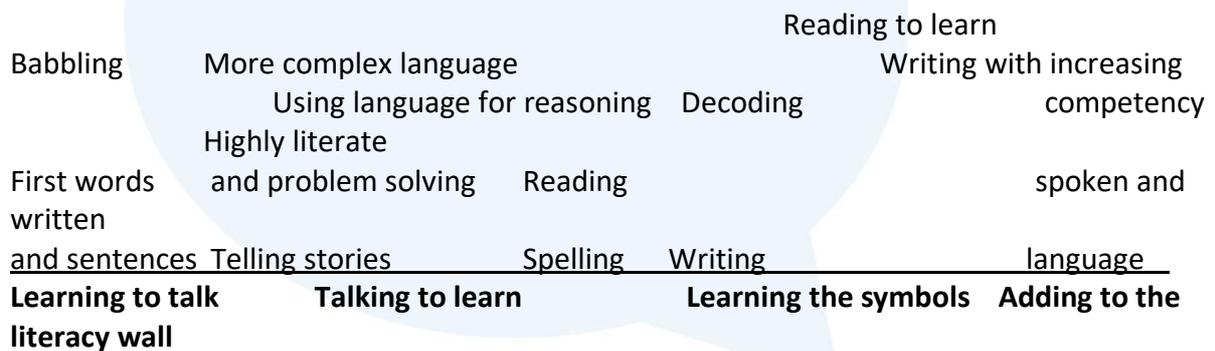
Hopefully you are beginning to see that reading is not simply a new, isolated skill that we teach children once they start school. Reading requires many years of learning the foundational, pre-literacy skills.

When taking a long-term view of reading, it is helpful to consider the concept of the Oral-Literate Continuum. Imagine a straight line representing your child’s language development. One end represents their first words and early years of ‘learning to talk’. From here you can start to plot their oral language development in terms of first babbling sounds, first words, two-word phrases, short sentences, more complex sentences, and verbal story telling.

As our children prepare for school, we can expect their language to become more adult-like, and that they can use their oral language to talk about more abstract ideas and concepts. They will be able to talk *about* language, and they will begin to recognise letters. This sets them on the path towards more formal reading.

In the first year of schooling, children will learn to read and write short sentences and use these to tell stories. Progressing through the school years, they will start to read cartoons, novels, workbooks, and other texts. Their writing will become more complex and they will be able to write reviews, reflections, creative and persuasive pieces. Their progress in writing will usually coincide with their developing spoken language skills.

Moving on to more academic pursuits, a young person’s language will grow to accommodate more subject-specific vocabulary. There will be a greater sophistication in their writing, and they will be reading higher academic material.



Becoming a fluent reader is the top row of bricks in the literacy wall. The wall is built higher and higher as we become more competent readers. The height of our literacy wall depends on our immersion in the literate world. We build an additional course of bricks as we learn new words, read a wider variety of literature, and pursue further knowledge in academia.

### **WHERE DO I START?**

'Synthetic phonics' is the process of systematically teaching phonological awareness, and is the proven strategy to get started with reading. Learning phonics includes matching sounds with letters, deconstructing words into letters, and blending sounds together to form words. Synthetic phonics are taught through direct instruction, and begins with helping children understand the individual parts of words, and the letters that match the sounds in the words. Why not try our [free online assessment](#) to find out if your child is ready for formal reading instruction?

### **MY CHILD IS NOT READY. WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

Keep working on those foundational skills. Our team of [Speech Pathologists can assess your child](#) and provide you with face-to-face intervention through our online service. Our assessment will identify the areas where your child is experiencing a breakdown in acquiring literacy. We'll work with you to develop a personalised plan to support their reading, spelling, story telling and vocabulary skills. You can book a free initial consultation to find out how we at Speech Online can become part of your home education team.