

Six Ways to Improve Reading Comprehension

Help your child retain what he reads — a crucial skill, especially as he gets older and needs to glean important information from textbooks.

1. **Have him read aloud.** This forces him to go slower, which gives him more time to process what he reads. Plus, he's not only seeing the words, he's hearing them, too. You can also take turns reading aloud.
2. **Provide the right kinds of books.** Make sure your child gets lots of practice reading books that aren't too hard. She should recognize at least 90 percent of the words without any help. Stopping any more often than that to figure out a word makes it tough for her to focus on the overall meaning of the story.
3. **Reread to build fluency.** To gain meaning from text, your child needs to read quickly and smoothly - a skill known as fluency. By the end of 2nd grade, for example, your child should be able to read 90 words a minute. Rereading familiar, simple books gives your child practice at decoding words quickly, so she'll become more fluent.
4. **Talk to the teacher.** If your child is struggling mightily with comprehension, he may need more help with his reading — for example, building his vocabulary or practicing phonics skills.
5. **Supplement class reading.** If your child's class is studying a particular theme, look for easy-to-read books or magazines on the topic. Some prior knowledge will help her make her way through tougher classroom texts.
6. **Talk about what he's reading.** This "verbal processing" helps him remember and think through the themes of the book. Ask questions before, during, and after a reading session. For example:

Before: "What are you interested in about this book? What doesn't interest you?"

During: "What's going on in the book? Is it turning out the way you thought it would? What do you think will happen next?"

After: "Can you summarize the book? What did you like about it? What other books does it remind you of?"

Eight Steps to Successful, Happy Read-Alouds

It's a thrill to hear your little one begin to sound out words and read stories — but it can be difficult to listen to his halting pronunciation, missed words, and other mistakes. How can you help him learn without stifling his confidence or turning reading time into a chore? It can be a tough call, but these guidelines will help.

1. **Bite your tongue — most of the time.** If your child is making it through most words, but doing it at a snail's pace, be patient and let her carry on. She needs the practice. Frequent interruptions can interfere with comprehension (and the pleasure of reading).
2. **Speak up for sense.** An exception to the stay-mum rule: Gently correct your child if he alters the meaning of a sentence by skipping or substituting an important word.
3. **Help with stumpers.** If your child encounters a new, difficult word that is key to understanding the sentence or passage he's reading, or that recurs frequently, step in to pronounce and define it for him.

4. **Answer appeals.** When she asks for help, give it. Encourage her to figure words out on her own, but if she's genuinely stumped, come to her aid so she doesn't get frustrated.
5. **Use pictures as helpers.** Reviewing the pictures in a storybook before reading it can give your child an idea of what the text will be about.
6. **Encore!** When he finishes a passage or a story, ask him to read it again. Your interest is a confidence-booster, and the extra practice with familiar text will also boost both his skills and his self-esteem.
7. **Be a drama queen.** When you're the one doing the reading, use lots of expression. Really put on a show! This will encourage your child to do the same when she reads. If she can, you'll know she's understanding the words she's reading, and not simply parroting them mindlessly.
8. **Notice patterns.** If your child repeats the same kinds of errors frequently, mention this to the teacher. A pattern of similar mistakes may be a sign of trouble. The teacher can help you diagnose it and get help quickly.

9.

Go Clubbing

Start a parent-child book group and reap benefits beyond reading.

By Martha Bayliss

With the proliferation of book clubs for adults – from neighborhood groups to Oprah's Book Club – it's no wonder that kids want to take part in the action. But with homework, sports and much more competing for your child's time (and yours), the idea of setting aside a couple of hours every month or two to discuss books can be daunting. Consider, though, that a parent-child book group can help you:

- get closer to your child
- share different aspects of his life
- expand your conversations beyond "How was school today?"
- provide insight into your child, her peers, and how they think

Best for kids in 3rd to 8th grade, a reading group can be a wonderful opportunity to see your child in a different light. Making the book club a priority will help make reading at home a priority as well.

To get started, follow these tips:

Compose the group: Invite kids in your child's grade or close to him in age. Look for members with similar interests and abilities — but not too similar, to keep the discussions interesting! How many? Aim for a group of 8 and 12 (including adults and children). If some are unable to attend, there will still be enough to have a lively discussion. Any larger and there won't be enough time for everyone to participate.

Appoint an organizer to keep the schedule, send out reminders, and be available to answer questions. If your group's kids are young, have a parent act as the organizer; but older kids will be able (and eager) to handle this responsibility themselves.

Set a schedule: Meeting monthly or even bi-monthly gives everyone time to read the selection without too much time pressure. Some groups meet only during the school year; others meet only in the summer. Find what works best for yours. "I found it best to choose dates at the beginning of the year rather than leaving it up to each host family to pick the date for its month – that way there were less likely to be conflicts," says one New York mom. Or plan a recurring date, such as the first Monday of every month.

Find a place: As a group, decide if you would rather meet at participants' homes or at a public spot, such as a bookstore, library, or coffee shop.

Select the books: Have the host of the first meeting choose the first book, then let the kids decide on the rest. Some groups select books months ahead of time; others choose only one or two in advance so they can see what is new or interesting.

Prompt discussion: Encourage each child to come prepared with at least one topic for discussion or question to ask the group. What happens when someone doesn't finish the book? Find out why, and don't exclude her from the conversation. She may have a compelling, interesting reason worth discussing, suggests Enola Romano, the director of the children's department at Montclair Public Library in New Jersey.

Focus on the kids: You and your fellow parent members are there to facilitate discussion, but mostly to listen. Let your child take the lead – you'll be amazed at what you'll learn.

Plan an activity to complement the book. You might plant seeds after reading a book about nature or try your hand at poetry after reading Robert Frost. My local librarian hosted a very successful reading group for the Angelina Ballerina books, accompanied by a tea party.

Set up a snack: Agree in advance: Will the host provide all the edibles, or will the responsibility be shared? Are there any foods that are off limits due to allergies or other sensitivities?

Keep it simple: Don't plan elaborate activities, themes, or meals, and make sure the books you choose are within the capabilities of the group. Thirty minutes to an hour for discussion and another half hour or so for any activity or snack afterwards is enough.

Stay flexible: Your group will naturally evolve as your kids grow and change. You may meet more or less frequently or choose different books to explore. What matters most: Keep the pages turning and the conversation flowing!