

Building Pre-K Reading Skills



In Pre-K, children learn about letters, expand their vocabulary, and learn how to properly pronounce words. The following are just some of the things you can do with your preschooler to help build their reading readiness skills.

Read aloud to your child

Reading books together expands vocabulary, stimulates the imagination, and teaches children to listen. It also nurtures a special bond between you and your child.

As you read, talk about the story and the pictures. Ask questions, such as:

"What do you think will happen next?"

"What would you do?"

"What was your favorite part?"

"How do you think the character felt?"

Connect your child's experiences to what's happening in the story. *"She has a dog just like we do. Do you think her dog is as big as our dog?"*

As you read, move your finger under the words to help your child learn that words go from top to bottom and left to right.

Look for words in everyday life

Increase your child's interest in reading by showing that words are all around us.

- ▶ When driving, look for familiar words on store fronts, street signs, and billboards.
- ▶ While watching TV, playing games, or running errands, point out words your child might know.



VIDEO

For more, watch this quick video!

Teach letters, sounds, and words

Learning about letters, sounds, and words will give your child the foundation that's needed for reading.

As you read together, point out the following:

- ▶ Upper case (capital) letters are different from lower case letters.
- ▶ Some words start with the same letter.
"Hey, *bat* and *ball* both start with the letter *b*."
- ▶ Some words rhyme. "*Cat* and *hat* rhyme. Can you think of another word that rhymes with *cat* and *hat*?"

Make practicing fun

Increase your child's interest in reading by showing that words are all around us, and by finding fun ways to practice letters and sounds.

- ▶ Have magnetic letters on your refrigerator and ask your child to find specific letters.
- ▶ Form letters with playdough, in shaving cream, or by putting salt on a cookie sheet. You can also write letters with sidewalk chalk.
- ▶ Sing the alphabet song together.
- ▶ Go on a letter hunt using old magazines. Cut out pictures and words that start with a specific letter, and make a collage. You can go one step further and put all of the collages together into one big alphabet book.
- ▶ Play "I spy." "I spy a lamp. Can you think of a word that starts with the same sound as *lamp*?" Take turns spying an object and coming up with a word that starts with the same letter sound.
- ▶ Read nursery rhymes and favorite books over and over to help your child better begin to recognize words in print.

Building Pre-K



Writing Skills

Children spend a good deal of time in Pre-K working on emerging writing skills—with a focus on learning how to properly hold a pencil and strengthening hand muscles.

Here are some things you can do to help your preschooler build his/her writing skills.

Stock up on supplies

Encourage your child to practice writing by having supplies readily available.

- ▶ Provide different kinds of paper, crayons, pencils, markers, and notepads for coloring and scribbling.
- ▶ Chalkboards and dry erase boards with various colors of chalk and markers provide a fun way for children to practice writing.

Develop hand muscles and motor skills

Young children need strong hand muscles to hold a pencil correctly, and fine motor skills to be able to use a pencil to write.

To strengthen hand muscles:

- ▶ provide playdough or clay to squeeze, pull, and manipulate into shapes.
- ▶ crumple up pieces of newspaper and throw them into a wastebasket.

To help develop fine motor skills:

- ▶ help your child put a puzzle together, string beads, and build with blocks.
- ▶ let your child cut up magazines using child-safe scissors.



VIDEO

For more, watch this quick video!

Teach writing basics

At this age, it is less about writing letters correctly and more about developing motor skills and learning the mechanics of writing. Help your child learn the “right” way to write.

- ▶ Demonstrate the proper way to grip a pencil and show your child how to steady the paper.
- ▶ Talk about how letters go from left to right and top to bottom.
- ▶ When ready, teach your child how to write his/her name with the first letter capitalized and the rest lowercase.

Make writing practice fun

Be creative. Look for fun and interesting ways to practice writing. Here are just a few ideas.

- ▶ Use sidewalk chalk to practice writing on the driveway or sidewalk. Write the letters and numbers yourself, and have your child trace over them in another color.
- ▶ Write letters on steamy windows.
- ▶ Put salt or sugar on a cookie sheet and practice writing letters with your fingers.

Practice everyday writing

Show your child that writing is an important part of our everyday lives—and that writing has a purpose.

- ▶ Hang a chalkboard in your home and encourage your child to write and draw on it.
- ▶ Once they are able to write their name, have your child sign birthday and greeting cards, and also sign and date artwork.
- ▶ Let your child dictate a letter to a loved one. As his/her skills develop, have your child write part of the letter.

Building Pre-K Math Skills



In Pre-K, children build math readiness skills—skills that will help them do more complicated math in the years to come.

Pre-K math activities

Here are some of the skills your child is likely to work on in Pre-K.

- ▶ counting (including understanding what “how many” means)
- ▶ sorting items by color or shape
- ▶ comparing objects using terms like *bigger*, *smaller*, *more*, and *less*
- ▶ identifying and creating shapes

Look for numbers in everyday life

Throughout the day, look for opportunities to count items, compare and sort objects, and use numbers.

- ▶ As you drive around town, point out the numbers you see on buildings, billboards, street signs, and houses.
- ▶ When you see a number, ask what number comes next. “*We’re reading page 11. What number comes after 11?*”
- ▶ Talk about the numbers you see on items such as calendars, cereal boxes, and clocks.
- ▶ Have your child count the carrots on his/her plate, the coins in your wallet, or the socks coming out of the dryer. Before eating a bag of M&Ms, count how many there are of each color.



VIDEO

For more, watch this quick video!

Compare and sort

Comparing and sorting items helps children identify relationships—a skill that’s necessary for more complex math learning.

- ▶ To help your child understand descriptive terms such as *more, less, bigger, smaller, taller, shorter, same, and different*, look for opportunities to compare objects by size, shape, and weight, such as “Which tree is taller?” or “Which glass has more juice?”
- ▶ Sort household items, such as socks, by size and/or color.
- ▶ Take change and sort the coins into groups of pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters.
- ▶ Sort Legos or blocks by size and color.

Play math games

Playing games that involve counting and numbers is a great way to learn math, and it’s fun for everyone.

- ▶ Play card games such as “Go Fish,” or board games that require counting spaces as you move.
- ▶ Play games that involve scorekeeping, such as throwing wads of paper into a basket.

Talk about numbers that matter

Relating numbers to important things in your child’s life makes numbers more meaningful.

- ▶ Use the bathroom scale to measure your child’s weight. “Let’s see how much you weigh.”
- ▶ Make a chart showing your child’s height. “You’ve grown two inches this year!”
- ▶ Use a calendar to count the days until a special event. “Let’s count how many days there are until it’s your birthday.”

Building Pre-K Social Skills



Pre-K is an important time for helping your child develop the social skills needed to make friends, communicate their wants and needs, and adapt to different social situations. Below are some quick and easy tips for helping your child build valuable social skills.

Build basic skills

While children have varying levels of social skills, the following are some basic skills for you to work on with your child.

- ▶ Listen when others are talking.
- ▶ Show interest in what others are doing.
- ▶ Begin to take turns with peers.
- ▶ Initiate interactions with others.
- ▶ Begin to share toys with others.
- ▶ Remember classmates' names.
- ▶ Use good manners.
- ▶ Feel empathy for children who are sad or upset.

Create and monitor social opportunities

Provide opportunities for your child to play and interact with others. Start with short periods of time, and provide adult supervision.

- ▶ Set up play dates with classmates, and look for social opportunities with family and friends.
- ▶ Try to let children settle their own differences, but stay within earshot so that you can model problem-solving behavior if needed.



VIDEO

For more, watch this quick video!

Help develop speaking and listening skills

In order to have good social skills one must be able to communicate well with others. Communication involves both speaking and listening—two skills that you can help develop.

- ▶ Ask your child to tell you about what he/she did that day. Ask specific questions and listen attentively. *“Who did you play with at recess?”*
- ▶ Visit new places and talk about what you see and do. Make every outing an opportunity to have conversations—and an opportunity for your child to learn new vocabulary.
- ▶ When you’re reading stories to your child, ask questions to help sharpen his/her listening skills. *“What do you think will happen next?”*
- ▶ Play games that require following directions, such as *“Simon Says.”*
- ▶ Give your child two- or three-step directions to follow, and ask him/her to repeat them back to you. *“Wash your face, brush your teeth, and choose a book for us to read.”*

Teach positive social behavior

Help your child learn and practice positive social behaviors.

- ▶ Play games. Games help children learn how to take turns—and how to win and lose.
- ▶ Be a good role model. When children see their parents being friendly and treating others with respect, they are likely to do the same.
- ▶ Praise your child when you see him/her using good social skills.
- ▶ Teach your child how to express his/her sad and angry feelings with words.

Building Pre-K Life Skills



By teaching your child some basic life skills, you can help your little one be more confident and independent, and more successful in the years ahead.

Teach self-care skills

It might be easier and quicker for you to put your child's jacket on yourself, but taking a few extra minutes to teach self-help skills will encourage independence and build self confidence.

Take some time to help your child learn how to do the following:

- ▶ use the restroom
- ▶ wash his/her hands
- ▶ use eating utensils
- ▶ drink from a cup or juice box
- ▶ put on a coat and hat
- ▶ button, snap, and zip
- ▶ cover his/her mouth when sneezing or coughing
- ▶ take shoes off and put them back on

Give your child choices

Making choices at home will help your child be able to make good choices and decisions at school and on the playground. As part of your daily routine, ask questions like these:

"Do you want to wear your blue or your green shirt?"

"Should we have grilled cheese or tacos for lunch?"

"What game do you want to play?"



VIDEO

For more, watch this quick video!

Teach your child responsibility

Giving your child age-appropriate chores will help teach responsibility.

- ▶ Give your child the opportunity to do simple household tasks such as feeding the dog, helping set the table, watering the plants, or helping carry in groceries.
- ▶ Make your little one responsible for daily chores such as picking up toys, making his/her bed, and putting dirty clothes in the laundry hamper.
- ▶ When you give your child a task, make sure that it's completed. It's important for children to learn to finish what they start.
- ▶ Praise your child for a job well done, and also for good effort. Make the praise as specific as you can. *"I like how neatly you put the books on the shelf."*

Develop routines

Routines for sleep, meals, chores, and play can provide stability for young learners.

What might seem like a simple routine to you may be a source of comfort and accomplishment for your child.

Having routines helps the day run more smoothly for everyone. It also makes it easier for your child to follow routines at school.

- ▶ Establish a morning and nighttime routine and make sure your child gets to bed early enough to get 10–11 hours of sleep.
- ▶ Make picking out clothes for the next day part of your child's bedtime routine. It will give your child a sense of control and accomplishment—and make getting ready for school in the morning easier.

Building Pre-K



Motor Skills

Developing motor skills will help your child be more confident and successful, both in and out of the classroom.

Gross motor skills

Gross motor skills involve movement of the muscles in the arms, legs, and torso. Gross motor skills are used on the playground, in sports, and in other physical activities.

By the age of 4–5 years, your child should be able to do the following:

- ▶ run, jump, and climb well
- ▶ balance and hop on one foot
- ▶ skip with alternating feet
- ▶ walk forward and backward on a balance beam
- ▶ throw a ball, and catch with two hands
- ▶ maintain momentum on a swing

Building gross motor skills

Here are some ways you can help develop your child's gross motor skills.

- ▶ Play catch in the back yard, or kick a soccer ball back and forth.
- ▶ Take your child to the park to run, swing, and climb on the playground equipment.
- ▶ Draw a hopscotch course to practice hopping and standing on one foot.
- ▶ Hike trails that involve climbing over and around obstacles.



VIDEO

For more, watch this quick video!

Fine motor skills

Fine motor skills involve movement of the muscles in the hands and fingers. Fine motor skills are needed to perform tasks such as drawing, cutting, coloring, and writing.

By the age of 4–5 years, your child should be able to do the following:

- ▶ color mostly within the lines
- ▶ build structures with blocks
- ▶ cut with scissors in a straight line
- ▶ grip and use writing and coloring utensils correctly
- ▶ trace lines and basic shapes
- ▶ use a spoon without spilling
- ▶ string beads together

Building fine motor skills

Here are some ways you can help develop your child's fine motor skills.

- ▶ Provide playdough and clay to help strengthen hand muscles.
- ▶ Always have paper, pencils, markers, and crayons available for writing and scribbling.
- ▶ Provide safety scissors and old magazines for your child to cut up.
- ▶ Draw simple shapes and have your child try to trace over them.
- ▶ Provide simple puzzles for your child to put together.
- ▶ Practice zipping and unzipping a jacket, and buttoning and unbuttoning a shirt.
- ▶ Have your child help with household chores such as folding napkins, brushing a pet, or measuring recipe ingredients.