

Reading for Success

Help your child attack new words

Once your child has learned the sounds that letters make (for example, the letter *b* matches the *b* sound in the word *bat*), it's time to move to the next step—decoding, or figuring out written words. And you can help your child attack new words at home.

What is decoding?

Decoding involves the ability to understand the relationship between letters and sounds, recognize letter patterns, and apply pronunciation rules to written words. Decoding is similar to “sounding out.” For example, when the letters *a-n-t* are blended together, they make the word *ant*.



But decoding also requires your child to have a deeper understanding of letter-sound relationships in letter combinations. For example, your child should know that, when used together, *p* and *h* make the /ff/ sound in *phone* and *o* and *u* make the /ow/ sound in *our*. Or that the *gh* is silent in the word *through*.

Practice at home

After learning how to correctly sound out words, your child will need lots of practice. To help your child practice decoding skills:

- **Play word games.** Write words on index cards. Take turns selecting a card and decoding the word. Make a sentence using the word.
- **Ask your child to sound out** the words on your grocery list.
- **Place food boxes and cans on your table.** See if your child can sound out words on the labels: *f-l-o-u-r*, *p-e-a-s*, etc.
- **Have a treasure hunt.** Hide words written on slips of paper throughout your house. Then have your child find the slips and decode the words.
- **Make time for rhyme.** Rhyming is a great way for your child to discover that changing a word's beginning sound creates an entirely new word.

Use other strategies

- **Context clues.** Your child can also use context clues to figure out an unknown word. Here's how you can help:
 1. **Cover an unknown word** in a sentence. “The (*rabbit*) hopped into the garden.”
 2. **Have your child read** the sentence again, skipping over the covered word.
 3. **Ask your child which word** would make sense in this context.
 4. **Help by revealing** the first (or ending and middle) letter sounds.
- **Sight words** are words that your child sees often and can recognize quickly. To help your child:
 1. **Put up** a simple bulletin board.
 2. **Start with one-syllable words**—*and*, *but*, *now*.
 3. **Write**, pronounce and post each word.
 4. **Review** old words as new ones are added.

