

Reading for Success

Understand the jargon



As your child starts to develop reading skills, you may hear teachers talk about the various components of reading. What does it all mean? If reading terms have you confused, you're not alone. Here is a list of some of the terminology you may encounter in your child's reading process:

- **Age- or grade-equivalent reading score.** Scoring that takes into account the average age of students who receive the same reading score as an individual child.
- **Alliteration.** The repetition of a beginning letter sound—often found in tongue-twisters (Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers).
- **Basal reader.** A book used to teach reading. Typically, the same words are used over and over in each succeeding book, with new words being added regularly.
- **Blending.** Combining individual sounds to form a word. For instance, /p/ /e/ /t/ can be blended to make the word *pet*.
- **Cloze exercises.** Fill-in-the-blank sentences or stories that require using clues from the text to figure out missing words. (Jacob knew not to touch the stove because it was ____.) Cloze assessments evaluate reading comprehension and vocabulary.
- **Comprehension.** The understanding of text or grasping the big picture. Good comprehension is the goal of reading. Many strategies can be used to help with comprehension, such as pre-reading, looking at pictures, checking for bold words, headings and notes in margins, or taking notes.
- **Consonant cluster.** A sequence within a syllable of two or more consonants and the sounds they make—for example, /kr/ and /bz/ in *crabs*
- **Context clues.** Using hints from the whole of a reading to understand confusing words or sections. (What makes sense with the rest of the sentence?)
- **Decoding.** Using the spelling-sound relationships and pronunciation rules to figure out how to pronounce written words. Decoding is similar to “sounding out,” but it requires a child to have a deeper understanding of the letter-sound relationship (such as knowing that, when used together, *p* and *h* make the /f/ sound in *phone*).
- **Diphthong.** A sound that starts with one vowel and gradually changes to another vowel in the same syllable, such as /oi/ in *coin*.
- **Fluency.** The ability to read effortlessly by stringing words together smoothly into understandable phrases.



- **Metaphor.** A way of describing one thing in terms of something else without being literal. (She's a breath of fresh air.)
- **Phoneme.** The smallest unit of speech. Replacing it in a word results in a change of meaning. For example, /d/ and // are phonemes (*dog* becomes *log*) and /b/ and /s/ are phonemes (*bit* becomes *sit*).
- **Phonemic awareness.** Understanding that spoken words are made up of a sequence of individual sounds. Blending these sounds forms different words.
- **Phonics.** The study of the sounds that letters make. Understanding the sound-letter relationship to form words. (The letter *c* has the /k/ sound in the word *cat*. The letters *tion* have the /shun/ sound in the word *nation*.)
This type of reading instruction emphasizes the sounds letters make and how these sounds are put together to form words.
- **Print awareness.** Understanding that the printed word has meaning and that text is read from left to right. Knowing the parts of a book—for example, cover, author, illustrator, copyright date, table of contents, chapters and index.



- **Reading assessment.** A gathering of data to determine a student's overall reading performance.
- **Sight words (also known as The Dolch List).** These are words a child sees often and can recognize quickly. Many of them can't be sounded out and need to be learned by "sight." (You might ask your child's teacher to direct you to The Dolch Word List—220 of the most frequently-used words in the English language.)
- **Simile.** A way of comparing two unlike things using the words "like" or "as." (She swims *like* a fish. He is *as* strong as an ox.)
- **Struggling reader.** Any student who hasn't grasped the reading skills or fluency deemed necessary for a child of that age or grade.
- **Syntax.** The rules for putting words together into meaningful sentences.
- **Vocabulary.** The words a reader learns and knows. Recognizing that many words have a prefix (*enjoyable*), a root (*enjoyable*) and suffix (*enjoyable*), and also that words have synonyms (similar meanings) and antonyms (opposite meanings) helps a child learn and build a large vocabulary.
- **Whole Language.** A type of reading instruction that emphasizes the recognition of whole words rather than letter-sound relationships (or phonics).

