Fluency: Bringing it all together

As your youngster learns to read, a main goal is for her to become fluent. Fluency happens when all the pieces click into place: recognizing many words instantly, reading smoothly and expressively, and understanding what she reads. Try these tips to help her read more fluently.

**Build word recognition**

The more words your child knows at first sight, the more fluently she’ll read. Ask her teacher for a list of sight words (frequently used words), and play games with them. She could write them in a hopscotch grid to read as she hops. Or play cooperative “Scrabble.” Place all the tiles faceup, and together, make a crossword of sight words.

**Use punctuation “clues”**

Encourage your child to think of punctuation marks as clues for reading with expression. Commas and periods tell her to pause slightly. For quotation marks, she might change her voice to show a character is speaking. Have her listen to an audiobook and follow along in the print version, noticing how the narrator uses the punctuation. Then, she can read the book to you.

**Practice with familiar books**

Fluent reading sounds like normal speech—not too fast or too slow, but just right. To practice, let your youngster read books she knows well. She won’t need to stop to figure out words, so she’ll be free to read at a comfortable pace and focus on the meaning of the story. Also, ask a librarian for books with a refrain—the same phrase repeats on each page.

**Tips for Reading Success**

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**Book Picks**

- **Read-aloud favorites**
  - *The Big Adventures of Tiny House* (Susan Schaefer Bernardo)
  - *LOOK I'm a Scientist* (DK Publishing)
  - *Calendar Mysteries: January Joker* (Ron Roy)
  - *Mapping Our World* (Sandy Phan)

- **Keystone Oaks School District**

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**My sylla-bug book**

- Dragonfly, caterpillar, bumblebee…many bugs have long names. Making this cute book lets your child spell big words by breaking them into syllables.
  1. Help your youngster list bug names (grasshopper, ladybug, centipede).
  2. Let him trace around a soup can to make circles on colored paper and cut them out. He can write each syllable on a separate circle. Tip: A dictionary will show him how to break a word.
  3. Mix them all up. Have your child glue the circles for each word back together onto separate sheets of paper. He could draw each bug and write about it. Now staple the pages into a book for him to read again and again.
Writing: Start with a plan

Before your youngster writes, making a kid-friendly graphic organizer helps him plan what he’ll say. And looking at his plan while he writes will remind him of facts or details to mention. Suggest these clever ideas.

Rays of sunshine. To plan a report or story, your child could draw a big sun. He can write a report topic (“Hamsters”) in the center and then a fact on each ray (“Sleeps all day,” “Stuffs cheeks with food,” “Runs on a wheel”). Or before he writes a story, he might put his main idea in a sun (“Visited relatives”) and a major plot event on each ray (“Rode a train,” “Played with cousins,” “Went to a fair”).

Rungs on a ladder. If your youngster needs to write instructions or explain a scientific process, have him draw a ladder with a rung for each step. “How to Pack a Suitcase” may include “Choose clothes,” “Fold clothes,” “Open suitcase,” and “Put clothes inside.” If he’s describing how a seed becomes a plant, his rungs could say “Seed is planted,” “Seed sprouts,” “Leaves grow,” and “Flowers bloom.” Let him refer to his ladder to write a thorough explanation.

Fun with Words
Spot the consonant combo

Here’s a portable activity that will help your child learn consonant combinations like bl and st—an important part of sounding out words.

First, have her look through a book and choose words that start with two consonants (dragon, twins). Suggest that she draw columns on a sheet of paper, write one of the words at the top of each, and circle the beginning consonants.

Now let her take her paper when you go out. Together, try to spot words on signs that begin with the same combinations, and she can write them in the correct columns. Under dragon, she might write drive, diligence, and drain.

At home, help her read unfamiliar words. Then, she could count to see which combination she saw the most.

Make your own felt board

My son Antoine loves the felt board at school. The kids use felt cutouts to retell stories, which the teacher said boosts reading comprehension. So I decided to make a felt board for Antoine to play with at home.

I stapled felt to a big piece of cardboard. Then I gave my son smaller pieces of felt, and he used them to make the characters from The Gingerbread Man. He drew them with a marker and I cut them out for him.

Antoine had fun moving the characters around on the board as he retold the story. I smiled when I heard him chanting, “Run, run, as fast as you can. You can’t catch me, I’m the gingerbread man!”

Now Antoine is eager to make more characters and retell other stories on his felt board.

Q & A
“Swap” to find new books

Q My daughter wants new books for her shelf, but we’re on a tight budget. Any suggestions?

A Luckily, you don’t need to spend money for your child to get new books.

Consider starting a book swap. Invite friends, relatives, and neighbors with older and younger children to gather at your home and trade books. Your daughter’s outgrown books can be passed on to a younger reader, and she could find ones that are just right for her now.

For another type of book swap, scout your area for Little Free Libraries. These cute mini-libraries let people exchange books for free. Check littlefreelibrary.org, and click on “Map” to find ones near you. When your daughter takes a book, it’s hers to keep. Just have her leave one in its place for someone else to enjoy!
Write to communicate

What do emails, newsletters, and thank-you notes have in common? They all give your child every day reasons to write. Show him how writing can be easy, fun — and useful.

A click away
Become email buddies with your youngster. You might write reminders ("Mom is picking you up Tuesday after school for your orthodontist appointment"), discuss plans ("What should we do on Saturday?") or ask about school ("What were on the vocabulary quiz?"). Your child will get practical writing experience as he responds.

Extra, extra!
Put your youngster in charge of writing a family newsletter, and he'll practice taking notes and writing nonfiction accounts. Give him a notebook to track things that happen (a trip to the zoo, birthday parties, books read). At the end of the month, he could use his notes to write a newsletter to send to relatives.

Thanks again
Make thank-you notes a part of daily life. Keep a stack of index cards handy so your child can write quick messages to family members. ("Thanks for helping me clean my room. The job went a lot faster.") Let him use cards to write longer notes when he gets gifts. He'll work on writing — and also learn to show appreciation to others.

Be an inventor

Does your youngster have an idea for an invention? Maybe she wants to walk dogs in the rain without anyone getting wet, or she wants to keep her markers from drying out. Encourage her to read about inventions and then write about her own:

- Together, look for nonfiction books on inventors (try The Kids' Invention Book by Arlene Erlbach or Brainstorm! by Tom Tucker). She'll read about clever ideas like an edible pet-food spoon invented by a six-year-old girl.
- Suggest that your child write about a product she'd like to invent. She can start with a problem (dogs and dog walkers getting wet in the rain). Then, she could draw and describe a gadget to help (mini doggy umbrellas and hands-free umbrella for the dog walker).
Learning with poetry

Poems can tickle your child's funny bone, stretch her imagination, and improve her reading comprehension. Find poems online or check out poetry books from the library, and enjoy these activities together.

1. Take turns reading verses of a rhyming poem that tells a story, such as "The Swing" by Robert Louis Stevenson. Poems that rhyme will help your youngster read smoothly and with expression. Tip: Try having her clap the rhythm as she reads ("How do you like to go up in a swing...").

**And the answer is...**

This Jeopardy-like game helps your child learn contractions.

Have him make a Jeopardy game board with five columns and four rows. In the top row, he should write 'n't, 'll, 's, 've, and 're. In the rows under each heading, he can write three contractions using that ending. For 'n't, he could write didn't, can't, and won't. Then, ask him to label sticky notes with point values (5, 10, 15) and put one over each contraction.

Players take turns selecting a category and a box. Example: Lift up the "5" note under 've and find 'we've. Answer with a question. ("What is we have?") If you're correct, score 5 points and continue. If not, the next person picks a new box.

Play until all the clues have been used, and tally the scores.

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**Q & A**

**Q** My son believes everything he reads online. How can I help him figure out what's really true?

**A** Recognizing inaccurate information online can be a challenge for anyone. Encourage your son to ask himself a few questions.

*How current is the information?* Remind him to look for the date an article was posted or updated. (It's often at the bottom of the main page.) In today's fast-paced world, the date should be pretty recent. If it "feels old," it probably is.

*Who published it?* Anyone can post online. Encourage your child to look for reliable sources, such as universities or government agencies on websites that end in .gov or .edu. Your child can search online for the writer's or the organization's name to find out more. If no author is listed, suggest that he look elsewhere.

*What do other sites say?* If three or more reputable sites contain the same fact, it's more likely to be true.

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**My own résumé**

When my husband was recently looking for a new job, our daughter Mary became curious about her résumé. We explained to her that a résumé is a summary of a person's job history and skills. Then, we challenged her to write her own.

Mary listed clubs, sports, and classroom projects she had been involved in as well as "jobs" she has held. She included the skills and new knowledge she had gained from each one. For instance, taking care of our neighbor's goldfish taught her responsibility for living things and keeping a schedule. As secretary of her school's student government, she learned to take minutes at meetings and give presentations.

When Mary finished her résumé, she was pleased with all her accomplishments. Plus, she had gotten some great writing practice!