

# Reading skills at different ages

By Amanda Morin

*We partner with [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org) to provide educators and families with expert-vetted, evidence-based resources about learning differences.*

Even as babies, kids build reading skills that set the foundation for learning to read. Here's a list of reading milestones by age. Keep in mind that kids develop reading skills at their own pace, so they may not be on this exact timetable.

## Babies (ages 0–12 months)

- Begin to reach for soft-covered books or board books
- Look at and touch the pictures in books
- Respond to a storybook by cooing or making sounds
- Help turn pages

## Toddlers (ages 1–2 years)

- Look at pictures and name familiar items, like dog, cup, and baby
- Answer questions about what they see in books
- Recognize the covers of favorite books
- Recite the words to favorite books
- Start pretending to read by turning pages and making up stories

## Preschoolers (ages 3–4 years)

- Know the correct way to hold and handle a book
- Understand that words are read from left to right and pages are read from top to bottom

- Start noticing words that **rhyme**
- Retell stories
- **Recognize about half the letters of the alphabet**
- Start matching letter sounds to letters (like knowing b makes a /b/ sound)
- May start to recognize their name in print and other often-seen words, like those on signs and logos

## Kindergartners (age 5 years)

- Match each letter to the sound it represents
- Identify the beginning, middle, and ending sounds in spoken words like dog or sit
- Say new words by changing the beginning sound, like changing rat to sat
- Start matching words they hear to words they see on the page
- Sound out simple words
- Start to recognize some words by sight without having to sound them out
- Ask and answer who, what, where, when, why, and how questions about a story
- Retell a story in order, using words or pictures
- Predict what happens next in a story
- Start reading or asking to be read books for information and for fun
- Use story language during playtime or conversation (like “I can fly!” the dragon said. “I can fly!”)

## Younger grade-schoolers (ages 6–7 years)

- Learn **spelling** rules
- Keep increasing the number of words they recognize by sight
- Improve **reading speed and fluency**
- Use context clues to sound out and understand unfamiliar words
- Go back and re-read a word or sentence that doesn’t make sense (self-monitoring)
- Connect what they’re reading to personal experiences, other books they’ve read, and world events

## Older grade-schoolers (ages 8–10 years)

- In third grade, move from learning to read to reading to learn
- Accurately read words with more than one syllable
- Learn about prefixes, suffixes, and root words, like those in *helpful*, *helpless*, and *unhelpful*

- Read for different purposes (for enjoyment, to learn something new, to figure out directions, etc.)
- Explore different genres
- Describe the setting, characters, problem/solution, and plot of a story
- Identify and summarize the sequence of events in a story
- Identify the main theme and may start to identify minor themes
- Make inferences (“read between the lines”) by using clues from the text and prior knowledge
- Compare and contrast information from different texts
- Refer to evidence from the text when answering questions about it
- Understand similes, metaphors, and other descriptive devices

## Middle-schoolers and high-schoolers

- Keep expanding vocabulary and reading more complex texts
- Analyze how characters develop, interact with each other, and advance the plot
- Determine themes and analyze how they develop over the course of the text
- Use evidence from the text to support analysis of the text
- Identify imagery and symbolism in the text
- Analyze, synthesize, and evaluate ideas from the text
- Understand satire, sarcasm, irony, and understatement

Keep in mind that some schools focus on different skills in different grades. So, look at how a child reacts to reading, too. For example, kids who have trouble reading might **get anxious when they have to read**.

If you’re concerned about reading skills, find out **why some kids struggle with reading**.

### Author

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