

A summary of how children learn to read and how best to teach them, based on current theory and scientific evidence on the processes underlying the acquisition of reading skills.

1. The purpose of reading is to gain meaning from written text.
2. Reading is not a natural process, like learning to speak, but rather a skill that needs to be taught.
3. A competent reader should be able to read and comprehend what they can talk about and understand.
4. The goal is to develop independent reading ability both for pleasure and for learning by the end of Year One (Grade 1 in the US and Canada).
5. English is an alphabetic language. The ability to convert written text to the spoken word is dependent upon understanding that written letters represent speech sounds.
6. Beginning readers have an oral/spoken vocabulary of ten thousand words or more. Comprehension of the written word depends on the ability to link the written word to the spoken word in their oral vocabulary.
7. Acquiring knowledge of the association between the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent is essential for ALL children.
8. Scientific evidence confirms that the most effective approach to teaching reading is direct, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, synthetic phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension.
9. Children should first be taught the 26 letters of the English alphabet, the 44 sounds these letters represent, and the multiple ways to spell them.
10. Foundational reading skills, including the letter/sound correspondences and decoding using decodable texts, should be mastered by the

end of Year One for most children (Grade 1 in the US and Canada).

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11. These reading skills should be followed by the use of increasingly more complex texts to add vocabulary, increase fluency, and improve comprehension skills.
12. Even children who have difficulty learning to read respond to this approach to reading instruction, and almost all of them will become proficient readers.
13. Teaching children to guess at words that they do not immediately recognize is never acceptable.
14. Children should never be asked to memorise lists of 'sight words' before they have received instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondences and blending and segmenting, and have at least started to apply decoding skills to convert written symbols to spoken sounds.
15. Children who need additional instruction in reading should be given an appropriate assessment, and the skills that are lacking should be taught.

This statement was prepared by Robert Sweet, President of the US National Right to Read Foundation, based on the article by Molly de Lemos on How children learn to read: A position statement, published in the LDA Bulletin, Volume 45, No. 2, September 2013. An earlier version of this summary statement was published in the Autumn 2015 Issue of the LDA Bulletin, Volume 47, No. 1.