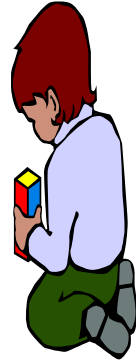


3. How You Can Help During Pre-Readiness

Adults and older children can do many things during the pre-readiness stage to help children progress. These activities, listed here, can be included in any child's pre-readiness period. If you have found the software is too difficult for the child, try these activities to encourage development:

- Point at the pictures in a reading book and name the objects.
- Call out the names of things seen while going down the road.
- Name parts of categories such as, body parts, kitchen utensils, animals, birds, etc.
- Associate printed and oral names and pictures in the manner of picture dictionaries.
- Draw objects, and name them.
- Play games like "who can name the most things in the room."



Painting, Drawing, and Motor Activity

In one dimension, early childhood is an egocentric world of play and motor activity. Broad and fine motor control, eye-hand coordination, and spatial and linear relationships form constructs as the child builds, paints, draws, and interacts with self, others, and the environment. All of these contribute to structures necessary to read and write. Attempts should not be made to short-circuit these early activities by rushing to early reading. If your child has difficulty with making letters, it is a sure sign that more effort should be directed toward these broad and fine motor activities:

- Build with wood blocks, Lego blocks, alphabet blocks, paste and paper, etc.
- Paint with large materials like clay, finger paint, and big brushes.
- Attempt large geometric figures: circles, squares, and triangles.
- Play target games with large balls and bean bags.
- Climb, curb walk, run, skip, hop, and jump.

Oral Language Activity and Syntax

By at least an average age of four years old, most children will have mastered the syntax of their native language. They will be able to use the elements of this syntax with great complexity. Nouns, verbs, gerunds, infinitives, clauses, and phrases—all of these and more—are in their linguistic arsenal. This power allows them to speak in complex ways at early ages. It also allows them at a very early age (an average of five years old) to construct thoughts using words, creating a facility with language-borne thought. Therefore, pre-readers can construct narratives, arguments, and descriptions as they use oral words and sentences in their everyday lives. Thoughts are formed with language and spoken from the inside out.

Drilling in the rudiments of grammar will be no help at all. In fact, it will hinder the natural acquisition of the syntax of the language as it is acquired in the context of those around the child making and using these natural formulations. Remember, your child is a language specific being.

As with the other aspects of the program, there are many things that can be done to encourage the development of oral language and the syntax that goes with it:

- Encourage interactive speaking with adults and children.
- Carry on conversations in an adult manner (no baby talk or infantile syntax).
- Playact episodes of stories or imagination.
- Give many occasions for children to explain themselves (What do you mean? What do you think?).
- Allow children to make up their own endings to stories.
- Do not label things: nouns, adjectives, etc.

Imaginary Writings

Very early in the process of learning to read and write, children often playact writing by scribbling or by striking a series of computer keys. They will place imaginary meaning to these writings. Sometimes, they will even pretend they are reading a lengthy story. Other times, it will be their names that they are writing. You should encourage such imaginary writings. It is through this play activity that children learn the purpose of writing and the general notion of how it is done. Once they “get the idea,” the rest will follow in due course.

Saying and Writing What Is Thought

Oral language is the basis for all reading and writing. Early on, as we have seen, the child has mastered the sounds of the language, an extensive oral and mental vocabulary, a complicated syntax that organizes the language, and the ability to construct thoughts with this language and express them. During the pre-readiness period, parents can do a great deal to encourage the transfer from expressing thoughts orally to writing them. These activities will help encourage saying and writing what is thought. What begins as oral activity easily transfers to written activity when children become ready:

Encourage playacting and imitations and, perhaps, help the child write a script. Make up stories and tell or write them. Write or say (record) letters and notes to family members.

Let the parent or coach take dictation for the child who cannot yet write. Sometimes a more mature child can help take dictation. Always have the student try to read back these written constructions.

Reading and Writing Is the End of Pre-readiness

When the pre-readiness period is over, children will read and write. Children will transfer into the ready stage at different times: some will be five years old; others, six; others, seven or even eight. Until they can pursue reading with comfort, continue the pre-readiness activity. Given the chance, all will succeed!

