

Interactive Reading

What is Interactive Reading?

When you read interactively with children, you encourage them to participate in talking about what is happening in the book. By getting them involved in asking and answering questions about the contents of a book, and making predictions or inferences about characters and events, you help the children make bigger gains in early literacy skills than when you simply read the book aloud.¹ Interactive reading supports all of the early literacy components that children need for reading readiness. (See page 6 for more detail on the early literacy components.)

Children learn more through interactivity.

Interactive reading also makes reading together fun, both in library storytimes and when a parent or caregiver is reading with their children. It increases children's attention spans because they are actively engaged with what is going on in the book.

What it is NOT

- It is not a “test” for the child; there are not “wrong” answers to the prompts and interactions.
- It is not “skilling and drilling” children about a book.
- It is not forcing responses from children who would rather observe.



Photo: Monster Storytime, by [San Jose Public Library](#) on [Flickr](#) CC BY-SA 2.0

How to read interactively

There are many ways to move children from passively listening to a book read aloud to actively engaging with the content of the book, whether it's a fictional story or a factual book. Your techniques will vary depending on the book itself, the size of the group and the age of the children, as indicated by the age-level codes following each suggestion.

Age level codes

- **B** indicates babies, birth-18 months
- **T** indicates toddlers and twos, 18-36 months
- **P** indicates preschoolers 36 -60 months

First, try some general good practices for keeping children's attention.

- Share your enjoyment of the book (B, T, P)
- Read with expression (B, T, P)
 - Pause to allow time for children to understand, to allow them to join in
 - Vary your pace—fast, slow
 - Vary the pitch of your voice—high, low
 - Vary your volume—loud, soft
 - Use different voices for different characters
 - For babies, use “parentese” —a clear, high pitched voice with elongated vowels (B)
- Show how books work
 - Play with orientation of book—holding it upside-down or backwards (T, P)
 - Point to text and connect it to illustrations (B, T, P)
 - Talk about role of author and illustrator (P)



Now, introduce some interactivity.

The interactive reading experience may include the following features. Not all features will be used during every interaction.

- Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions. For babies and toddlers, you may be asking the question, waiting, and then answering for them.
 - What's this? (B, T)
 - What does it look like? (B, T)
 - What do you see on the cover/this page? (T,P)
 - What might this book be about? (P)
 - What do you think might happen next? (P)
 - What do you notice? (T,P)
 - What do you think? (P)
 - How do you think the character feels? (T,P)
 - How would you feel? (T,P)
 - What would you do? (T,P)
- Involve children in telling the story or talking about the topic of a factual book
 - Encourage children to join in with sounds or a repeated phrase (T,P)
 - Pause for children to fill in a word/phrase in a sequence, or complete a rhyme (T,P)
 - Add movements to the story (B,T,P)
 - Allow children to think about what is happening in the story, giving them time to think (P)
 - Encourage children to talk about information in factual book (T,P)
- Develop vocabulary and comprehension:
 - Point to picture of an item as you say the word for it (B, T, P)
 - Use gestures, facial expressions, or movements (B, T, P)
 - Give a brief explanation of a word (B, T, P)



- Talk about the feelings of characters, making connections to children’s feelings (T, P)
- Add new information and new words to those in the book (B,T,P)
- Make connections and/or encourage children to make connections to personal experiences (T,P)
- Extend the story
 - Extend children’s responses, add more description, information (B,T,P)
 - Offer writing activities based on the book (T,P)
 - Repeat all or part of a story to develop familiarity and participation (B,T,P)
 - Encourage roleplaying, retelling with flannel board, puppets, props (T,P)
 - Offer play opportunities with objects related to the story, pictures, or characters (T,P)

Resources on Dialogic and Interactive Reading

- Repeated Interactive Read-Alouds in Preschool and Kindergarten, by Lea McGee and Judith Schickedanz. Reading Rockets
<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/repeated-interactive-read-alouds-preschool-and-kindergarten>
- Dialogic Reading: An Effective Way to Read to Preschoolers by Grover Whitehurst. Reading Rockets.
<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/dialogic-reading-effective-way-read-preschoolers>
- How to Read Out Loud with Your Preschooler. (video) Scholastic. <https://youtu.be/sZSIUVrCJRo>



Types of Books for Interactive Reading

Virtually all children's books are appropriate for interactive reading. The best books have rich detailed pictures or are interesting to your child.

Look for these characteristics in a book:

- Clear storylines
- Predictable stories for young children
- More sophisticated stories for preschoolers
- Rhythmic language
- Song books
- Art that draws children into the story, supports interaction
- Clear illustrations that supplement text with additional details
- Factual books on topics of interest
- Interesting vocabulary
- Sensitive to diversity, offering characters, situations, topics, and stories that both reflect and expand on their world

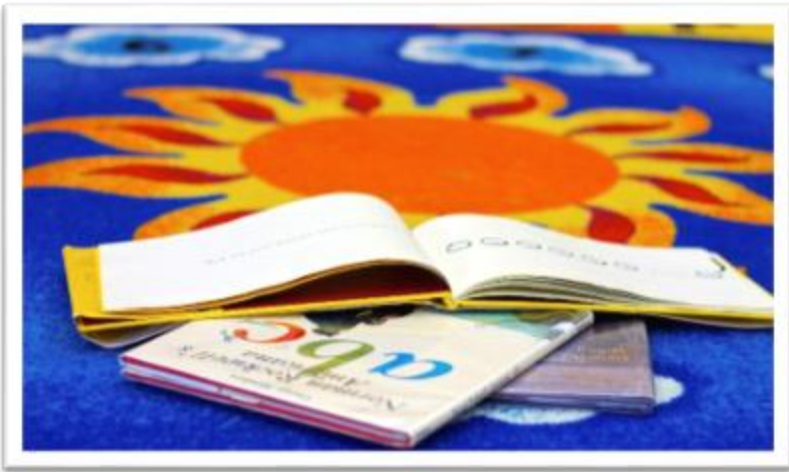


Photo: Children's Books by [Lydia Liu](#) on [Flickr CC BY 2.0](#)

Early Literacy Components

Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) defines six early literacy components, which embody the skills, knowledge, and aptitudes that children need to be ready to learn to read. These components are supported by any literacy structure, including Head Start child development outcomes, VIEWS2 early literacy skills, or your state’s early learning guidelines. (See the [ECRR-VPT Crosswalk](#) for details.)

Researchers have found that phonological awareness, print awareness, and letter knowledge most directly support decoding.ⁱⁱ A strong vocabulary also helps children be able to recognize words as they try to sound them out. Vocabulary and background knowledge most directly support comprehension, understanding what they are reading. From kindergarten through grade 2, reading instruction mostly focuses on decoding, learning to read. After grade 3, reading instruction mostly focuses on comprehension, reading to learn.

Children need ALL the early literacy components starting from birth to be good readers.

- **Oral language**—listening, speaking, communication skills; the foundation of all language and literacy
- **Phonological Awareness**—the ability to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words
- **Print Awareness/Conventions**—the knowledge that print has meaning, environmental print, how print works; knowing how to handle a book, how to follow words on a page
- **Letter Knowledge**—knowing that the same letter can look different, that letters have names and shapes, and represent sounds
- **Vocabulary**—recognizing words and knowing the meanings of words, including objects, actions, concepts, feelings, and ideas
- **Background Knowledge**—prior knowledge about the world, including content knowledge, book/story knowledge, and conceptual thinking

ⁱ Repeated Interactive Read-Alouds in Preschool and Kindergarten. Lea M. McGee, Judith Schickedanz.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/repeated-interactive-read-alouds-preschool-and-kindergarten> retrieved 2.2.2018

ⁱⁱ Every Child Ready to Read @ your library Manual, Section I page 6

