

# When do kids learn to read? How do you know if your child is falling behind?

November 9 2023, by Tina Daniel and Signy Wegener

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Learning to read is one of the most important parts of early schooling. But there is ongoing and arguably increasing concern too many Australian children are falling behind in reading.

This year's NAPLAN results alarmingly show almost [1 in 3](#) Australian children don't meet the expected standard in Year 3.

What are the expectations around when children learn to read and how should their progress be monitored?

## **When do children start to learn to read?**

In Australia, school is where formal reading instruction begins. So most children start to learn to read at age 5 or 6.

In some countries children won't begin to learn to read until 7 because they start school later, while in other countries they might start at age 4.

There is no optimal age to start to learn to read and beginning the process before a child reaches school age [does not necessarily give them an advantage](#).

But once school begins, children should be taught about the sounds that letters typically make (for example, the letter t makes the "t" sound). After a few months of continuous instruction, they should be able to use the letter sounds they've been taught to read simple words that use these same letter sounds.

This doesn't mean your child should be reading fluently by the end of their first year, but they should be able to remember and use what they have practiced at school to read some simple words and text.

## **What should I do before they start school?**

Parents can help prepare their child to learn to read before they reach school age.

One of the most reliable predictors of learning to read well is a [strong spoken vocabulary](#), so explaining what words mean and discussing a

range of topics with your child is an excellent start.

Reading [with your child](#) is another way to boost their vocabulary. Learning to read relies on a foundation of children learning the connections between letters and sounds. So when [parents](#) teach children to [pay attention to letters and sounds in words](#), it helps them to learn to break the code.

Having books available to children to explore on their own (and with your help) may also increase their interest in learning to read.

## **Many kids take time to learn**

Even if you have lots of books at home and read together, there is natural variation in how quickly children learn to read. Some children learn the connections between letters and sounds quickly and form memories of written words after only a few attempts at reading them.

But many children take longer to learn and require more practice and support.

The reasons some children don't learn to read as well as others are often complex.

For example, one child may need more practice making the connections between letters and sounds than others. Another may have limited spoken [language skills](#) and need additional support to improve their sensitivity to the sounds of language or develop their understanding of what words mean.

It is important for parents to know that having difficulty with learning to read does not say anything about their child's intelligence. Reading difficulties can impact children with a [wide range](#) of intellectual abilities

and intelligence is not a criterion for diagnosing a reading difficulty.

## **How do I know if my child needs more help?**

Schools and teachers should routinely monitor children's reading progress. This is particularly important during the first three years of school but should continue throughout the primary school years.

There are [free and reliable tests](#) to [assess](#) reading skills.

If a consistent gap is identified within the first year at school, a child should be offered additional help and opportunities for practice both at [school](#) and at home. It's important to note gaps in reading achievement should be filled [when the gap is small](#), rather than taking a "wait and see" approach that allows the gap to widen and for the child to fall further behind.

If you are concerned your child is finding it difficult to learn to read even after several months of intensive additional support, an expert assessment by a reading clinician is an important step.

Parents can find professional help for learning difficulties in Australia by visiting [AUSPELD](#), which supports [children](#) and adults with learning difficulties.

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