

# Raising Readers: Tips for Parents



## What is Reading Vocabulary?

Adapted from: Elish-Piper L. (2010). Information and Ideas for parents about fluency and vocabulary. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 38(2), 50-51.

Reading vocabulary refers to the words that a student can read and understand. When students know more words, they are more able to understand what they read. There is a strong connection between understanding the meaning of words and understanding a story, textbook or other reading materials.

Children learn new words in two main ways – indirectly and through instruction. Children learn words indirectly through reading, listening to others read to them and having conversations with others. Most words that children learn are learned through indirect methods. This means that it is very important to have your child read, listen to others read to them and participate in conversations since these indirect methods will help to build your child’s vocabulary. Children

also learn words through instruction at school and in other educational settings. Through a combination of indirect vocabulary encounters and vocabulary instruction, children can learn the words they need to succeed as readers.

### What Can Parents Do to Promote Vocabulary Development at Home?

Here are a collection of ideas to build children’s reading vocabulary at home using indirect and instructional strategies and activities.

1. Talk with your child and try to use new and interesting words. Exposing your child to new words is a great way to build your child’s interest in learning words.
2. Read to your child as often as possible. Choose books that are more difficult than your child can read independently. Point out and discuss interesting words in the book.
3. As you take your child to do errands and on family outings, talk about what you see. Introduce new words to your child as you visit the grocery store, doctor’s office and other locations.



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Jerry L. Johns Literacy Clinic**

College of Education

## What Can Parents Do to Promote Vocabulary Development at Home? (continued)

4. Play a word guessing game to help your child think about words. For example, you can say, “I’m thinking of a word that starts with ‘br’ and means that a person is not afraid” (brave). If your child doesn’t guess the word, provide examples or more information to help them figure out the word. Then, ask your child to give you a word and clue.
5. Encourage your child to read as often as possible. Children who read more have larger vocabularies and tend to do better in school.
6. Play oral word games to build your child’s vocabulary. For example, play the opposite game where you say a word such as “inside” and ask your child to say a word that has an opposite meaning (outside). Or, you can play the synonym game where you say a word such as “happy” and take turns with your child saying words that have similar meanings such as “glad,” “joyful” and “content.”
7. Word games such as Scrabble, Scrabble Jr., Upwords, Boggle, Boggle Jr. and Banagrams help children focus on words. These games are available at most discount and toy stores. They are also available at some libraries for check-out. In addition, your child may enjoy doing crossword puzzles which focus on connecting words and meanings.
8. Learning common prefixes can help your child learn many new words. For example, the prefixes “dis,” “re,” and “un” are the most common ones in the English language. If children can identify these prefixes, they can unlock the meaning of many new words. Have your child look for these prefixes when reading and listen for them in conversations. Work with your child to brainstorm as many words with each prefix as you can. Write these words and prefixes on a sheet of paper and post it on your refrigerator. As you find new words for each prefix, add them to your list. Review the list each week to see how many words you have for each prefix.

Prefix	Meaning	Sample Words
dis	not; opposite	disagree dislike disappear
re	again	return replace redo
un	not	unclear uncover unfinished

9. If your child has vocabulary words to learn for school, help your child make two cards for each word. On one card, your child should write the word. On the other card, they should write the word’s meaning. Spread the cards out on the table, face-down. Have your child play a “memory game” by turning over one card and then turning over a second card to try and match the word to its definition. If the cards don’t match, your child should put them back and begin again. Have your child continue the process until all words have been matched to the correct definition.
10. Try different methods of learning vocabulary words based on how your child learns best.
  - a. If your child learns best by listening, discuss new words and their meanings. Make rhymes or riddles to remember words and their meanings.
  - b. If your child learns best through doing, have your child act out new words to learn their meanings.
  - c. If your child learns best by seeing things, have your child do a drawing for each word to represent its meaning.

### We’re here to help

Jerry L. Johns Literacy Clinic: 3100 Sycamore Road, Suite 2003, DeKalb, IL 60115  
815-753-1416 — [literacyclinic@niu.edu](mailto:literacyclinic@niu.edu)