

How Reading Skills Develop
Clinic Information Sheet for Parents and Carers

The key message

Reading is not one single skill. It develops through the connection of oral language, sound awareness, phonics, decoding, word recognition, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Strong reading develops when these skills are taught, practised and gradually become automatic.

The building blocks of reading

1. Oral language Vocabulary, grammar, listening comprehension and knowledge of how sentences and stories work.	2. Phonological awareness Hearing and manipulating syllables, rhyme and individual speech sounds in words.	3. Alphabetic code Learning that letters and letter groups represent the sounds in spoken words.
4. Decoding and word recognition Blending sounds to read unfamiliar words and building accurate recognition of familiar words.	5. Fluency Reading accurately, smoothly and with appropriate pace and expression.	6. Vocabulary and comprehension Understanding word meanings, connecting ideas and making sense of sentences and whole texts.

A typical reading development pathway

1. Early foundations <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Develops oral language and vocabulary.· Notices rhyme, syllables and sounds.· Understands that print carries meaning.	2. Learning the code <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Learns letter-sound links.· Blends sounds to read simple words.· Segments sounds to spell words.	3. Building accuracy <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Reads longer and more complex words.· Learns digraphs, syllable patterns and spelling conventions.· Uses less guessing and more complete decoding.	4. Fluency and meaning <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Recognises many words automatically.· Reads connected text smoothly.· Uses vocabulary and background knowledge to comprehend.
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What this may look like over time

- A beginning reader slowly sounds out simple words and gradually begins to recognise taught patterns more quickly.
- As decoding becomes more accurate and automatic, reading becomes smoother and less tiring.
- Fluent word reading frees mental energy for vocabulary, inference and comprehension.
- Reading development continues well beyond the early years as students learn complex syllables, morphology and academic vocabulary.

Important: Reading development is cumulative. Gaps in early sound awareness, phonics or decoding can continue to affect fluency, spelling and comprehension unless they are explicitly addressed.

When reading development is difficult

Some students do not develop secure reading skills through classroom exposure and practice alone. They may require more explicit, systematic and cumulative teaching matched to their current point of need.

What families and teachers may notice

- Difficulty remembering letter-sound links.
- Slow or inaccurate sounding out of words.
- Guessing from the first letter, picture or context.
- Reading the same word differently across a page.
- Slow, choppy or tiring oral reading.
- Stronger listening comprehension than reading comprehension.
- Avoidance, frustration or reduced confidence.

What may be contributing

- Weak phonological awareness or phonological memory.
- Incomplete or insecure knowledge of the alphabetic code.
- Difficulty blending sounds and recognising word patterns.
- Slow retrieval and limited automatic word recognition.
- Insufficient practice at an appropriate level.
- Language, vocabulary, attention or working-memory demands.
- A specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia.

How the pathway may look different

Typical pathway	Pathway with difficulty	Teaching implication
Letter-sound links become secure with classroom teaching.	Recall remains slow or inconsistent.	Teach directly and revisit frequently until recall is automatic.
The student blends through the whole word.	The student guesses from part of the word.	Practise continuous blending and require full word analysis.
Word recognition becomes increasingly automatic.	Reading remains effortful, even for familiar patterns.	Use cumulative practice and controlled text to build accuracy and automaticity.
Fluency supports comprehension.	So much effort is used decoding that meaning is lost.	Strengthen word reading while also teaching vocabulary and comprehension explicitly.

How O-G Reading Clinic supports reading development

Targeted assessment

We identify established skills, gaps and the level at which teaching should begin.

Explicit instruction

We clearly teach sounds, letters, blending, word structure and reading strategies.

Structured sequence

Skills progress from simple to complex in a planned, logical order.

Cumulative review

Previously taught knowledge is continually revisited so it is retained and becomes automatic.

Reading and spelling together

Students read and spell the same patterns to strengthen knowledge in both directions.

Fluency and comprehension

Accurate word reading is practised in connected text while vocabulary and meaning are developed.

Key message for parents

Reading can be taught. When students receive explicit instruction at the right level, with enough supported and cumulative practice, they can develop stronger accuracy, fluency, understanding and confidence.



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