

# Stages of Children's Reading Development



## Stage One: Learning to Read

This stage begins when a child starts to learn letters. For most of this stage, a focus will be placed on learning to decode; learning the alphabet and the sounds that letters make, learning to distinguish these sounds in speech and learning to sound words out. As their fluency develops they will begin to move towards understanding the meaning of the stories they are reading.

During this stage, children must be supported with the regular experience of hearing stories read aloud. This allows them to absorb themselves in a story and to identify with characters, something they will not be able to do themselves until they achieve a high level of fluency and automatic word recognition.

## Stage Two: Developing Independent Reading Skills

Some children will enter Stage Two having already made the transition from oral to silent reading while others will make this transition later as their fluency and vocabulary continue to develop. Stage Two is completed when children achieve fluency in children's novels and chapter books, usually between the ages of eight and ten.

At this stage, the central focus will be on extensive reading in books at the appropriate level of difficulty. Chapter books will feature heavily here; these are longer and involve more demanding language. Reading practice is focused here on fluency development. Children will be learning how to decode longer words; words of three syllables or more.

As fluency continues to develop through practice, comprehension will also improve. As children become more and more fluent in reading increasing complex chapter books, the reading skill level and the reading content must be sufficient to support the reading experience.





### **Stage Three: Reading with Absorption**

This stage begins when children become independent in their reading and can read children's novels more fluently. At this stage, reading development involves a significant amount of reading in children's novels at increasing levels of difficulty. This allows the child to develop greater levels of fluency and comprehension.

When children read with identification and absorption, they engage with the text on a deeper and more meaningful level. They actively participate in the story they are reading. The development of high levels of fluency and comprehension allows the maturing reader to read for pleasure and for information.

### **Stage Four: Critical Reading**

At this stage, children are not only evolving as readers, they are making many other developments as individuals. These emotional, social and physical changes often stimulate a new cognitive capability that continues to develop as they move through the education system. They develop the ability to reflect on their own experiences, to think critically, objectively and analytically.

Children with strong reading backgrounds and experiences and who read with fluency will often have a relatively automatic and accurate flow of understanding when engaging with a new text.

In this stage of reading, children take control of their reading in terms of purpose, direction and their own responses to the text. They begin to recognise how material is organised, how to evaluate and synthesise ideas, how to read meaningfully. This will greatly aid their educational progression.