

# Literacy

**Learning to read and write is a crucial part of a child's development. Reading and writing (literacy) are essential skills for adults. Being literate means that people can understand and follow written instructions, find out information online or in books, write letters and emails, and send text messages. It also means that a child or adult is able to participate fully in their education and learning.**

## How do children learn to read and write?

How children learn to read and write and the best way to teach literacy is a hotly debated topic. Research has found that some of the essential skills that children need to be able to learn to read and write are:

- An understanding that the words we say are made up of sounds and to be able to hear these sounds e.g. cat has three sounds c-a-t. This is known as phonological awareness.
- An understanding that letters represent sounds, and that these sounds are the sounds we use in English. Children need to be able to remember the sound of each letter quickly and easily. This is known as phonics.
- Knowledge that written words can be understood, and that writing them in a particular order can make different meanings.

## Why do some children have difficulties with literacy?

About 10% of school children have problems with reading and writing.

Some children may have difficulties learning to read and write because they are acquiring English as an additional language or dialect whilst they are learning to read and write. These children are likely to catch up with their literacy skills as they become more skilled in English.

Some children may have difficulties with literacy development because they have had interrupted schooling.

Some children may have difficulties with literacy development due to medical difficulties such as hearing problems caused by chronic ear infections.

Some children may have difficulties with literacy development due to a disability such as a learning disability or intellectual disability.

Some children have difficulties with literacy due to underlying speech and or language difficulties – for more information refer to the **The Sound of Speech: 0 to 3 years** and **The Sound of Speech: preschool and school aged children** fact sheets.

## Why is it important to intervene early?

At school, children with reading difficulties may also have problems with:

- Academic performance
- Peer relationships
- Self esteem

When literacy difficulties persist there is often a significant impact on the person's life.

Not being able to read and write at adequate levels means that the young person is at risk of having limited opportunities in life or being unemployed. Research has also shown they may be at risk of social issues such as being imprisoned for breaking the law.



## How do speech pathologists help with literacy?

As the experts in supporting children with communication difficulties, speech pathologists are a useful part of any literacy team. Speech pathologists can:

- Assess speech and language skills to determine if there are any difficulties and provide intervention and strategies to support oral language development.
- Support oral language development in areas that are relevant to literacy, in preschools and schools.
- Work with preschools, schools and families for example, providing strategies in order to support children's oral language development.
- Use their specialist knowledge of the sound system of English to help children who are having difficulty with letter-sound relationships.
- Help children to use strategies for understanding what they read.

## When should I get help for literacy problems?

Research has shown that getting help for literacy problems early can prevent those problems becoming more severe.

Some children may show signs of potential difficulties before they reach school. Seeking help before your child starts school may reduce or eliminate those problems. These signs may include:

- being very late to start talking
- using pronunciation patterns that are not typical 'baby talk' and that make the child difficult to understand
- having difficulty learning and remembering new words
- not being able to provide simple information clearly
- needing very simple instructions

- showing poor awareness of sounds in speech
- not learning to recognise alphabet letters
- not showing an interest in listening to stories
- Any of these difficulties with a family history of literacy learning difficulties.

## When your child is at school some of the signs may include:

- Not developing confidence with letters and sounds; not 'having a go' at spelling.
- Mispronouncing several longer words (e.g. 'congratulations'; 'computer').
- Persisting with immature grammar (e.g. 'Her broked her glasses').
- Not developing the ability to tell stories and give explanations.

## As your child moves through the school you may notice that your child is:

- Not reading grade-level texts fluently and accurately.
- Not using a strong range of spelling strategies.
- Not able to make inferences as they read, getting the main idea and reading 'between the lines'.

If your child is showing any of these potential problems, it would be useful to get some help from a speech pathologist.

## Can speech pathologists help children with dyslexia?

Dyslexia means difficulties with learning to read. It is important that a speech pathologist is part of the team working with a child with dyslexia to help support their literacy development.

## How do I become a speech pathologist?

Speech pathology is an accredited undergraduate or entry level masters degree.

To find out more go to [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/education-and-careers/university-courses](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/education-and-careers/university-courses)

## How do I find a speech pathologist in my area?

Go to [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au) and click on "Find a Speech Pathologist".

## For further information contact **Speech Pathology Australia**

– the national peak body representing speech pathologists, the professionals who work with and advocate for people who have a communication disability and all Australian consumers of speech pathology services.