

Reading/Language Arts

In first grade, your child is becoming an independent reader. Your first-grader is learning strategies to decode unknown words. He typically has many opportunities to read - independently, in groups, with a partner - and listen to books being read aloud. He will also reread stories to increase his speed and understanding. He will learn that there are different purposes for reading: for pleasure, to get directions and to gather information.

Books and print

First-graders are exposed to many different kinds of texts - such as fiction, nonfiction, poetry and songs - to foster a love of reading, and experience the rhyme and rhythm of language. Your first-grader will learn to identify the title, author and illustrator of a book. She should be able to recognize the parts of a book, such as the cover, title page and table of contents. She will recognize that sentences begin with capital letters and end with punctuation.

The letter-sound relationship

Your first-grader is getting repeated practice working with letters and their sounds. He is learning how to decode new words by applying the letter-sound relationship for single letters, pairs of letters, such as *sh* or *er*, and short and long vowel patterns, such as the silent *e*. He may sort objects and pictures by the beginning sounds he has studied. He practices blending sounds together to make words, perhaps by playing a game to blend *s-a-t* to make the word *sat*. He practices breaking words into separate sounds such as breaking *hop* into *h-o-p*. He will replace sounds in words, such as substituting the *s* in *sat* with *c* to make *cat*. He will clap out the syllables in words. First-graders read books that include the letter-sound relationship they are learning as well as frequently used words that they have been taught.

Reading for meaning

Your first-grader is learning to derive meaning from what is read to her and what she reads. You can expect her to recognize the sequence of events in a story, and their cause and effect, as well as to anticipate the possible outcome. She is learning to retell familiar stories, summarizing the main ideas and plot, and identifying the characters and settings. She is able to use illustrations, text and her own prior knowledge to grasp the meaning of the story.

Your first-grader is likely to be using diagrams or pictures to organize and show understanding of the information she has read. She may fill in a diagram that sequences the main events from a story. A [Venn diagram](#), made up of two overlapping circles, may be used to compare similarities and differences in characters and stories.

Reading aloud

Listening to books read aloud gives first-graders models of fluent reading and helps them develop a positive attitude toward books. It also helps them understand vocabulary and language patterns in texts. Books read aloud are often discussed before, during and after the reading to increase involvement and understanding. Your child

should also have opportunities to read aloud in a group or with a partner to help build his reading fluency.

Shared reading experience

Your first-grader may take part in shared reading, an interactive reading experience. Your child joins in the reading of a big book, one with enlarged text that the whole class can see, guided by his teacher. During the reading, children are actively involved. The teacher may pause in the reading to introduce print conventions, teach vocabulary, introduce a reading skill, encourage the students to predict what comes next, and more. The book is typically read multiple times over several days.

Guided reading groups

In first grade your child may take part in guided reading, a practice in which the teacher interacts with small groups of students as they read books. The teacher introduces reading strategies, tailoring the instruction to the needs of the students. As students read, the teacher provides support as needed. "At all grade levels, teachers should use flexible grouping rather than fixed reading groups. This allows each child to progress when ready, in developmentally appropriate material," explains reading specialist, Jennifer Thompson.

By the end of first grade you can expect your child to be able to do the following:

1. Name and recognize all the letters of the alphabet in order
2. Identify beginning, middle and ending sounds
3. Use reading and writing strategies for various purposes on their own initiative such as rereading, predicting, questioning and making connections when comprehension breaks down
4. Read and retell familiar stories
5. Read orally with reasonable fluency
6. Use letter-sound associations, word parts and context to identify new words
7. Identify short vowel and long vowel sounds
8. Match consonant sounds to their appropriate letters
9. Recognize and produce rhyming words
10. Read simple one- and two-syllable words such as *cat*
11. Read high-frequency words such as *was* and *the*
12. Recognize that words are separated by spaces
13. Read aloud first-grade books with accuracy and understanding
14. Begin to read aloud with expression and pausing at appropriate spots in the text
15. Use two-letter consonant blends to decode and spell single-syllable words such as *sh* and *bl*
16. Use word patterns to decode unfamiliar words
17. Identify characters, setting and events of a story

What to Look for When You Visit

1. **Decodable books**, which have the phonics elements and high-frequency words that your child has been taught in class

2. **Leveled books**, which are books organized in levels of difficulty from the easy ones for a beginning reader to longer, more complex books for advanced readers. The leveling of texts allows teachers to match books with an individual student's reading ability.
3. **A reading area** with a class library of books and a place for students to sit comfortably and read
4. **A listening center** with a tape recorder, earphones, tapes of stories and multiple copies of the accompanying text. Listening to the tapes provides a model for fluent reading
5. **A word wall**, which is a list of words displayed in alphabetical order on a bulletin board, used for reference and to reinforce vocabulary words

What will my first-grader learn about writing?

First-graders write daily about different topics. Your child may write by himself, in small groups or with the whole class. He's likely to write creative stories, letters, poems and songs.

He learns that there are different reasons for writing, such as sharing information or persuading the reader. He may write a patterned book (in which the same words and phrases are used repeatedly) that is modeled after a book read in class, such as [*If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*](#) by Laura Joffe Numeroff. Or he may contribute a page to a book the class creates about a field trip.

First-graders typically write in a journal several times a week. This helps your child to build writing skills and develop ideas for stories. Children may write in their journals about any subject, such as a class science activity.

Nicola Salvatico, our consulting teacher and the 2005 Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year, notes: "Journal writing allows children to take risks where they do not need to worry about spelling, punctuation and other aspects. It is used to allow children to express themselves in a nonthreatening venue where they can also watch their growth through the process."

Your child is encouraged to connect her writing to her daily life and focus on things that are important to her. She may write about what she does after school - noting events in the order they occur - or about her pet.

Your child learns the mechanics of writing, such as spelling and handwriting, as he works. The teacher may model appropriate writing techniques and strategies such as how to use descriptive words or correct punctuation.

Your child learns the process of writing using these steps:

1. Prewriting
2. Drafting
3. Revising
4. Editing
5. Publishing
6. Sharing

This process helps your child with the organization and thinking required to write a story. Sharing pieces of literature is also a powerful technique to help children expand their writing. Discussing their ideas with partners during the prewriting stage can help children focus, improve the content and details in their stories and understand the writing process.

Salvatico explains: "First-grade writers share their experiences through their writing. By taking ownership of their topics, tremendous growth is seen in spelling, story content and conventions of writing. The student's voice begins to emerge, and writing for the reader becomes the focus. Authors are born!"

What will my first-grader learn about spelling?

In first grade your child learns the different sounds that letters and combinations of letters make. He begins to learn common spelling patterns and frequently used words in his reading. First-graders do activities in which they combine and manipulate letters to change words and spelling patterns.

Invented spelling

As she did in kindergarten, your first-grader probably writes words the way they sound, often called [invented or inventive spelling](#). For example, she may spell the word *have* by writing "hav." When children use invented spelling, they are demonstrating their knowledge of the sounds letters make. Research shows that letting children use invented spelling allows them to focus on the purpose of writing: communication. As they learn the rules of spelling, they begin to apply them and make the transition to conventional spelling.

Weekly spelling lists

Typically, first-graders bring home weekly spelling lists they will be tested on. These lists may be from a prescribed spelling program or chosen by the teacher. They may include word families, or groups of words that have a common feature or pattern. For example, *at*, *cat*, *hat* and *fat* are a family of words with the *at* sound and letter combination in common. First-graders typically do activities with the spelling words, such as writing a sentence using each word to understand its meaning and reading stories that contain the terms.

First-graders may have personal spelling dictionaries in which they enter words alphabetically that they are learning to spell. By the end of first grade, your child will have learned to spell:

1. Consonant-vowel-consonant words such as *hop*
2. Words with *r* after a vowel such as *turn*
3. Frequently used words (words) such as *red* and *was*
4. Words with a silent *e* such as *tape*
5. Consonant-vowel-consonant-consonant words such as *back*, *ring* and *mall*

What will my first-grader learn about handwriting?

In first grade, students gain increasing control of their penmanship. The teacher checks that they know how to correctly hold their pencils and shows them proper strokes and posture. The teacher explains and demonstrates how to write each upper- and lowercase letter of the alphabet. This is usually done in short daily lessons. First-graders often have handwriting workbooks in which they practice each letter daily.

What to Look for When You Visit

1. An alphabet chart prominently displayed in the classroom
2. Handwriting workbooks
3. An individual alphabet chart (perhaps taped to the child's desk or in a folder) for easy reference
4. "Word walls" - lists of words displayed in alphabetic order on a bulletin board that are used for reference and to reinforce vocabulary words and "sight words," or terms frequently used in reading and writing
5. Wide-ruled paper
6. Spelling games and puzzles
7. Journals
8. Examples of student writing displayed around the classroom
9. Students writing individually, with a partner and in groups
10. An array of writing tools such as markers, crayons, pens, charts, cards, fancy paper and stationery
11. An individual booklet that contains a list of common words in alphabetical order for children to consult as needed

Math

Patterns and shapes

First-graders learn to sort objects by color, shape, and function and to recognize patterns. Your first-grader should be able to sort a mixed group of blocks so that all the red blocks are in one group and all the blue ones are in another. If the blocks are placed on a table in a pattern — for example, red block, blue block, red block, blue block — your first-grader should be able to predict which color should come next as well as create another pattern with similar features.

First-graders learn to distinguish two- and three-dimensional geometric shapes such as triangles, squares, cones, and cylinders. They also identify the shapes of items in the classroom and at home.

Numbers

By the end of first grade, your child should be able to count to 100 by ones, twos, fives, and 10s and have a sense of how big the number 100 is. She should also be able to begin counting at any number you choose between 0 and 100 and write the words for the numbers one through 12.

Your child is introduced to the concepts of more and less and works with simple graphs through analyzing and creating.

Computation

Your first-grader learns addition and subtraction facts with numbers up to 20. First-graders start moving away from counting objects (or "math manipulatives," as they are called in school) to doing more mental math. Simple word problems are introduced such as "If I have three marbles and give one to my friend, how many do I have left?"

Money

First-graders learn about coins and their value. They learn how different combinations of coins can add up to the same amount. There may be a store set up in the classroom with a play cash register, play money, and objects with price tags so that your child can practice counting money and exchanging items for money.

Measurement

Standard measuring tools as well as units of measurement are topics for first-grade math. First-graders practice measuring using inches, cups, and quarts. They learn to read a clock face and tell time to the half-hour.

By the end of the year, you can expect your child to:

1. Work independently at her desk
2. Listen to longer sets of directions
3. Read directions off the board, although some children may still have difficulty with this
4. Complete homework and bring it back the next day
5. Sit in a chair for a longer period of time
6. Be able to see things from another person's point of view so you can reason with your child and teach her empathy
7. Relate experiences in greater detail and in a logical way
8. Problem-solve disagreements
9. Crave affection from parents and teachers
10. Have some minor difficulties with friendships and working out problems with peers
11. Distinguish left from right
12. Be able to plan ahead
13. Write words with letter-combination patterns such as those with a silent *e*
14. Read and write high-frequency words such as *where* and *every*
15. Write complete sentences with correct capitalization and punctuation
16. Read aloud first-grade books with accuracy and understanding
17. Count change
18. Tell time to the hour and half-hour
19. Quickly answer addition and subtraction facts for sums up to 20
20. Complete two-digit addition and subtraction problems without regrouping

What to look for when you visit

1. Simple bar and pictorial graphs on large pieces of paper on display
2. Students using "math manipulatives" — blocks, cards, and buttons for counting and sorting — and making the transition from counting and sorting objects to "mental math"
3. Calendars and clocks to help first-graders learn about time, days and months, and the concepts of before and after
4. Students measuring objects and amounts using rulers and measuring cups