



## Reading at Home and on the Go

How families can support reading practice outside of school

Kids of all ages need daily reading practice to help build strong literacy skills and achieve college and career readiness, but there are only so many hours in a school day—and more than half of students aren't spending enough time reading.

This is where parents, guardians, and other adult family members can have a huge impact on a child's reading success. In fact, the majority of children say you're their #1 source of encouragement to read books for fun. This quick guide is designed to help you support your child's reading with effective, research-driven tips.



## Encourage choice

Kids love having agency. Being in charge, making choices, and deciding what to do—these are powerful motivators, especially when it comes to reading. Nearly nine out of ten children ages 6–17 say their favorite books are the ones they picked out themselves. A similar number say they are more likely to finish books they chose.



However, choice doesn't mean "everything." Allowing kids to choose from a limited number of options is a great way to boost reading motivation while keeping them on task. For example, you can set the expectation that your child will read for 15–30 minutes each night, but you could let them decide which book or article they read and where they do their reading.

## Support discovery

Families underestimate how hard it can be for some kids to find books they enjoy. Overall, only 29% of parents think their kids have trouble finding good books, but a full 41% of children report they have difficulty finding books they like. That number goes up as kids grow older, with children ages 15–17 having the hardest time finding enjoyable books.

Help your child discover their next great read. Take them to a local library or bookstore and give them plenty of time to browse the shelves. Ask your child's teacher for age-appropriate recommendations. Download the annual *What Kids Are Reading* report ([www.renaissance.com/wkar-report](http://www.renaissance.com/wkar-report)), which lists the most-read and highest-rated books by grade, for awesome kid-tested suggestions.





## Set a good example

While school might seem like the major focus of your child's life, the reality is that over the course of a calendar year, students spend only 14% of their time at school. The biggest block of their time—53%—is spent at home and in their community. What you do with that time has a huge impact on your child's academic success.

Show your child that you value reading. If you want to see your child read at home, then make sure your child sees you reading at home. This can include reading books, magazines, and newspapers for pleasure, but it can also be reading recipes aloud when you cook a meal or letters aloud when you sort mail, reading driving directions when on a trip or instructions when assembling furniture, or even reading long-form articles online.

## Read aloud

Did you know most families stop reading aloud to children after age 5, but the vast majority of kids enjoy hearing books read aloud well past that age? In fact, the majority of middle schoolers say listening to someone read aloud is one of their favorite reading activities!

If you think about it, even adults love hearing their favorite books read aloud; audio books are the fastest-growing segment in the digital publishing industry. Make reading aloud a frequent family activity, no matter how old your child is! If you have an older child, take turns, alternating between reading aloud to your child and listening to your child read aloud.



## Start a family book club

Reading doesn't have to be a solitary activity. Many children enjoy the social aspects of reading. Take talking about reading to the next level by starting a family book club. Depending on your child's age, you may want to gather for group discussions after each chapter, after finishing the entire book, or at other regular intervals. This is a great way to build reading skills and a sense of togetherness simultaneously!

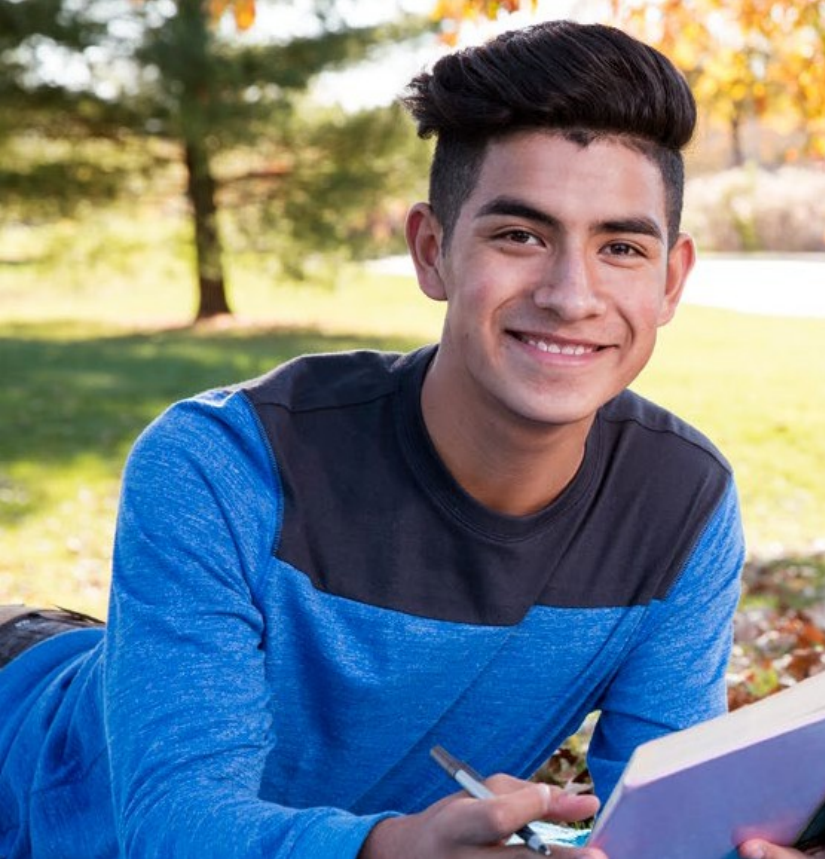
You may also want to grow your book club by inviting your child's friends, your extended family, or your neighbors to participate. You can even have book club discussions with participants who are far away—set up a private Facebook group, email thread, shared Google doc, or other collaborative medium. Helping your child craft responses to posts has the added benefit of strengthening their writing skills on top of their reading skills.



## Diversify reading materials

Did you know there are four different reader profiles—and those four profiles have very different levels of achievement? Students who are the “least diversified readers” (reading only one type of text with frequency) have the lowest reading literacy achievement, while students who are “diversified readers in long and complex texts” (who frequently read fiction and nonfiction books in addition to magazine and newspaper articles) have the highest reading literacy achievement.

Encourage your child to be a diversified reader—and make sure that diversity includes books. If your child loves comics or graphic novels, help them find books and short stories with similar topics or themes. Have a kid who can't get off social media? There are plenty of books about the founding of Facebook, guides to getting more followers on Twitters, and manuals about coding written just for kids, which are all great nonfiction options that will add lots of diversity.



## Keep full bookshelves

Multiple studies have found that access to books at home is critical for kids. The kids who read most frequently are also the ones who have the highest number of books in the home. Kids who have lots and lots of books in their home are also more likely to be diversified readers who explore a broad range of materials.

Remember that reading materials don't have to be new or expensive to be amazing! There are many ways to fill your home with reading materials without breaking the budget:

- Browse yard and garage sales, used book stores, public library book sales, and clearance events for books and magazines.
- See if your school or neighborhood has a community book exchange or book swap.
- Ask family and friends to consider gifting books and magazine subscriptions for birthdays or holidays.
- Check out books from your public library (just be sure to return them on time).
- Find out if any of your subscription services or memberships include free or discounted books or magazines.
- See if there are nonprofits in your area that supply free books for kids.

If you travel, be sure to take reading materials with you whenever possible so that your child always has an opportunity to read, no matter where they are.

## Get in the zone

Research shows that when students read in the “Zone of Proximal Development”—a term which refers to the range of text complexity that a student can read independently but not effortlessly—they achieve greater reading gains than when they read books that are easy for them to read and comprehend. Reading materials in the “zone” offer just enough challenge to help them build stronger reading skills, but not so much that they become frustrated and discouraged from further reading.

Ask the reading/language arts teacher what your child's reading level is and the associated zone of proximal development (some teachers call it the “instructional reading level” or the “independent reading range”). You want the majority of your child's reading to be in the zone, but occasionally reading above or below the zone is OK and should not be banned entirely. Even if your child's school doesn't use Renaissance Accelerated Reader®, you can use the Accelerated Reader Bookfinder™ ([www.arbookfind.com](http://www.arbookfind.com)) to find great book suggestions that are in your child's zone.



## Reward wisely

While it may be tempting to reward your child with money or gifts for earning good grades in reading/language arts classes, many educators believe this kind of motivation—called “extrinsic” motivation—is good only for short-term gains and may actually make your child less motivated to read in the long term. Plus, only 7% of kids say grades and rewards motivate them to read.



If your child is driven by extrinsic rewards, there are some key guidelines to follow to ensure your rewards have positive and not negative effects:

- First, the reward should be directly related to the activity—if you want to encourage more reading, then the reward should be something like a new book or a ticket to an author reading, and not money or a new video game.
- Second, the reward should be a surprise—instead of saying, “I’ll give you a reward if you read this book” before your child opens the book, try “I’m so proud of you for reading this book, I have a surprise reward for you” after your child has finished the book.
- Third, reward only inputs—actions that students can directly control. Time spent reading is an input; test scores and grades are outputs. It seems counterintuitive, but studies have shown rewards for inputs can raise achievement, while rewarding achievement isn’t very effective at raising achievement!

By following these guidelines, you’ll make sure the rewards you give set your child up for both short-term and long-term success.

## Consider format preferences

Paper or digital? For many kids, there’s a big difference. Overall, 65% of children say they will always want to read books on paper, even when eBooks are available. However, boys—especially older boys—differ quite a bit, with only 23% of boys ages 12–14 and a mere 13% of boys ages 15–17 feeling strongly about print reading materials. The trend reverses with girls, who feel more strongly about print as they grow older.

Find out if your child has a preference between print or digital, and try to supply reading materials in their preferred format. This may not always be an option, but your efforts will show your child that you want them to enjoy reading—and having materials in their preferred format will make them more likely to want to read.



## Stay curious

Just because school ends doesn't mean the learning ever does—and that goes for both you and your child! There are always new discoveries being made, new research being published, and new insights being shared. Browse around to find a few sources you find helpful and subscribe to your favorites. Don't hesitate to look at materials designed primarily for teachers, as many activities that can be done in the classroom can also be done at home.

If your child's teacher or school publishes a family newsletter or has a parent/guardian portal, be sure to check in frequently to stay up to date. Ask your child about their day at school, their homework, and what they've read and learned—whether it was at school or not. Talk to friends and family with school-aged children about what is and isn't working for them. Keep your mind wide open to new ideas; your willingness to learn can rub off on your child!



## Does your child use Renaissance solutions at school?

Be sure to visit [www.renaissance.com](http://www.renaissance.com) to learn more about Renaissance assessment and practice solutions.

Find resources for parents and guardians at:  
[www.renaissance.com/services/parent-resources](http://www.renaissance.com/services/parent-resources)

Stay up to date with the latest education news with the Renaissance blog:  
[www.renaissance.com/about-us/blog](http://www.renaissance.com/about-us/blog)

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