

Print Awareness Activities



Print awareness is the understanding that spoken words can be written using letters and spaces and that we read text in the same order and direction. Use these activities to strengthen children's skills, whether they need more support and practice or are ready for a challenge. Activities are appropriate for children in grades K–2.

I. Developing Print Awareness When Reading Aloud

Purpose: *Understand how books are organized, text features, and text directionality*

Materials: *Literary and informational books to read aloud*

If children have little or no exposure to books, start the read-aloud session by discussing how to hold a book in an upright position and handle books carefully. Point out and name the basic parts of a book, such as the front and back covers, title, pages, and pictures. Point out the name(s) of the book's author and illustrator and explain their roles. Run your finger underneath words to show text directionality, explaining that in English, words are read one after another from left to right, sentence by sentence, from the top of the page to the bottom, from one page to the next, and from the front of the book to the back. (Be aware that text directionality varies for some languages, such as Arabic and Hebrew, which are written and read from right to left.) Repeat the information for the first few books you read in a school year or when children are handling books. Ask them to read or pretend to read a story to you. Have them run their fingers under the words they are reading.

When introducing subsequent read-aloud books, point out special features the book has, such as a table of contents, chapter numbers and headings, maps, diagrams, labels, captions, or a glossary. As you read, pause occasionally to discuss the relationship of text and pictures. Also, draw children's attention to words printed in a special way for emphasis. Use your finger to show how to navigate more complex text layouts, such as in informational books or magazines.

2. Developing Print Awareness with Environmental Print

Purpose: *Understand different kinds of text and recognize words and sentence boundaries*

Materials: *Signs, posters, calendars, and other texts in the classroom or school, (optional) pointer or laser light*

Point out different types of text displayed in the classroom or go on a “print walk” through the school with children. Read words written on signs, posters, calendars, lists, and so on. You can use a pointer or laser light to identify words as you say them. Point out the differences in spacing between letters, words, and sentences and any punctuation. Discuss the purpose of the text and have children tell what they notice about the writing. For example, the text might have one or two words or show complete sentences. It might have numbers or give instructions. It might be in uppercase letters or a mix of uppercase and lowercase letters. Letters might be in fancy or plain type. Some words might be longer than others. Have children identify letters or words they know. Ask them to point to the first or last word in a sentence or tell how many words or sentences the text has.

Variation Repeat the activity on a field trip, having children notice the types of street signs, shop signs, ads, posters, and other texts.

3. Developing Print Awareness with Writing

Purpose: *Understand the relationship between speech and written language*

Materials: *Chart paper or the board*

When modeling writing, read words as you write them. When done writing, reread the entire text, running a finger under the words as you read them. Point out that the words you wrote are the words you said and you write words in English the same way you read them in a book—from left to right, sentence by sentence, from top to bottom, and from one page to the next. Occasionally, make deliberate mistakes as you write by omitting important words, punctuation, or uppercase letters or using improper spacing between letters, words, or sentences. After reading and tracking the text with the mistake, ask children if those words sound and look right. Discuss the problems and then correct them.

