

Get Ready to Read!

Identifying and Strengthening Fundamental Early Literacy Skills

by

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I want to thank Mrs. Laura Bush, Mrs. Patricia Kempthorne, the first lady of Idaho, and the first ladies of the Northwest region for hosting today's summit conference on early learning. No other issue in education rivals early learning in its importance and its lifelong impact on individuals, their families, and society. Today we are focusing on the right issue at the right time, in the right place, and with the right people. It's a pleasure to participate.

Early Learning and Early Literacy

We now see more clearly than ever before that early literacy—as a critical component of early learning—deserves increased attention in the preschool curriculum and the home. Reading is the gateway skill that leads to success in school and in life. Without robust literacy skills, a child today is essentially being denied a future tomorrow.

And that's what brings many of us here today. We know that our nation continues to experience a reading crisis among adults as well as children.

Currently, nearly 40 percent of fourth graders nationally cannot read at the basic level of literacy. In other words, they can't determine the meaning of a simple paragraph in a textbook. They may be able to decode the words on the page, but they can't read them fluently enough to comprehend their meaning.

The Link between Reading Difficulties and Learning Disabilities

Which children are hardest hit? Children of poverty—the data are clear. Another population that is hard hit: children with specific learning disabilities. Children with reading disabilities struggle to connect speech sounds to letters, to automatically recall the speech sounds when they see the letters, to decode the whole words that contain the letters, and to read fluently enough to understand the meaning of what they just read.

Reading disabilities affect more than 80 percent of children with LD—some 2 ½ million children of school age. It's the “word processor” in their brain that causes the problem. They have trouble processing information at a fast enough rate to keep up.

The fact is, children with learning disabilities are a significant part of the reading crisis.

That's why the National Center for Learning Disabilities has a special interest in helping children succeed in reading. We absolutely must improve the reading achievement of children with LD, or we will make no progress in helping them overcome the huge obstacles they face:

- ◆ Nearly 30 percent of children with a learning disability drop out of high school.
- ◆ Of those who do graduate, only 30 percent earn a diploma.

- ◆ Of those who earn a high school diploma, only 14 percent make the leap to college . . . compared with more than 50 percent of their peers without LD.

Children with LD must acquire the power to learn—earlier, more effectively, and with better and longer-lasting results.

There is now a body of reliable research in children’s reading that can provide teachers and parents with a compass—a way to ensure that we stay on track as we help all children, including those living in poverty and those with learning disabilities, acquire this gateway skill.

Based on these studies and a definitive report from the National Reading Panel, we not only know what to teach, but also how to teach children so that they learn to read.

Get Ready to Read!

Two years ago, NCLD asked leading researchers whether the scientific research could also allow us to determine the progress that very young children are making or not making in developing fundamental literacy skills. We asked:

- ◆ Is there an accurate way to determine the literacy skill development of four-year-olds?

- ◆ Can we develop a reliable and easy-to-use screening tool so that early childhood professionals and parents can take a quick “snapshot” of a preschooler’s reading readiness?
- ◆ If we can create such a screening tool, can a not-for-profit organization like NCLD make it available nationally so that all four-year-olds have the chance to be screened for literacy skill development before they enter Kindergarten?

The answers to those three questions were yes, yes, and yes. As a result, NCLD is implementing a national *Get Ready to Read!* screening initiative over the next five years. We are working with a wide range of partnering organizations. The Lee Pesky Learning Center in Boise is one of our key partners in bringing the screening program to the Northwest.

The *Get Ready to Read!* screening tool:

- ◆ Can be administered to children in the pre-kindergarten year by professionals and non-professionals
- ◆ Produces a score for individual children that can be linked empirically to the potential for reading success
- ◆ Tells a child’s progress in developing the fundamental early literacy skills needed to learn how to read and write.

The Screening Tool and the Program

The following slides illustrate the screening tool and the program that NCLD is implementing with our partners.



Goals & Objectives

- To ensure all young children become successful readers by:
 - Screening four-year-olds' emergent literacy skills to determine their familiarity with pre-reading concepts and encourage continued progress
 - Providing parents, early childhood professionals and caregivers with research-based information about how to build young children's pre-reading skills



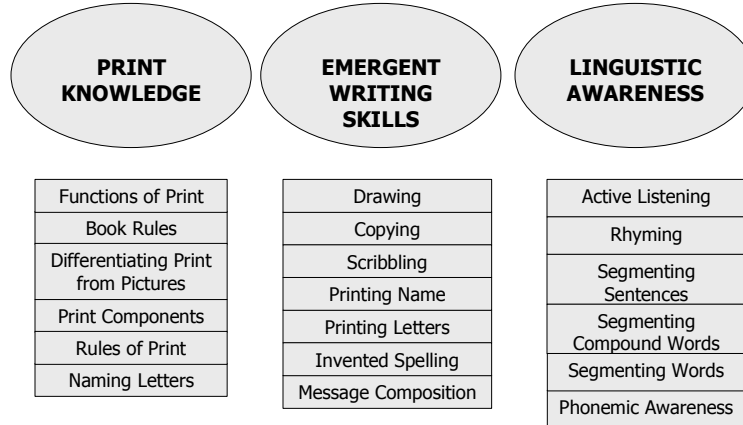
Rationale for Early Literacy Screening

- Helps parents and early childhood professionals understand each child's progress towards understanding literacy concepts and acquiring skills
- Helps assure that developmentally appropriate experiences and teaching will be used to support early literacy learning
- Provides direction towards links to appropriate activities, information & resources
- Alerts early childhood professionals and parents to seek additional advice if a child does not appear to be making appropriate progress





Three Domains of Learning to Read




National Center for Learning Disabilities
The power to hope, to learn, and to succeed
www.LD.org www.GetReadytoRead.org



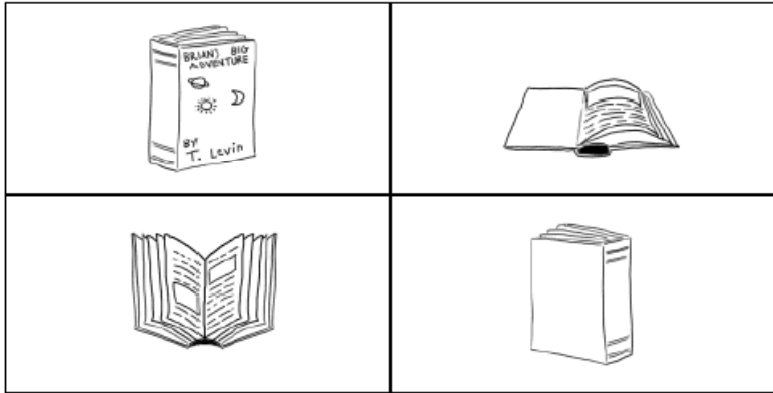
Basic Attributes of the Screening Tool

- 20 items measuring print knowledge, emergent writing, and linguistic awareness skills of 4-year-olds.
- Each item has four pictures and a question.
- Should be used by an adult working one-to-one with a child in a quiet environment.
- Adult should read the question out loud and the child is instructed to point to the picture they believe is the correct answer.
- The adult marks that same picture on the screening tool answer sheet.
- Screening takes an average of 10 to 15 minutes in length.


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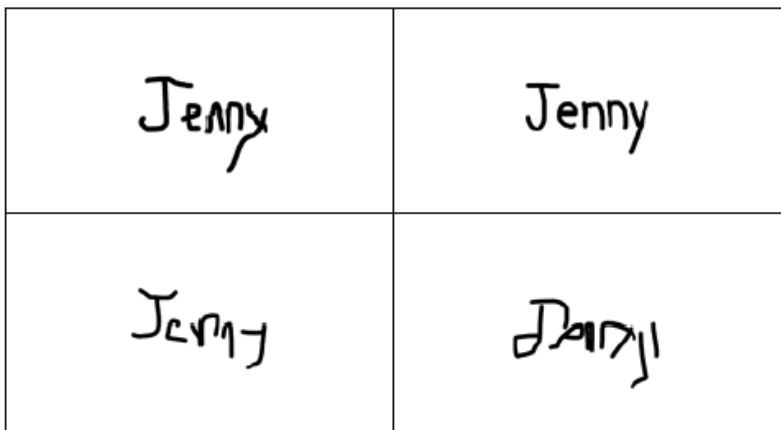
Print Awareness



These are pictures of a book. Find the one that shows the front of the book.



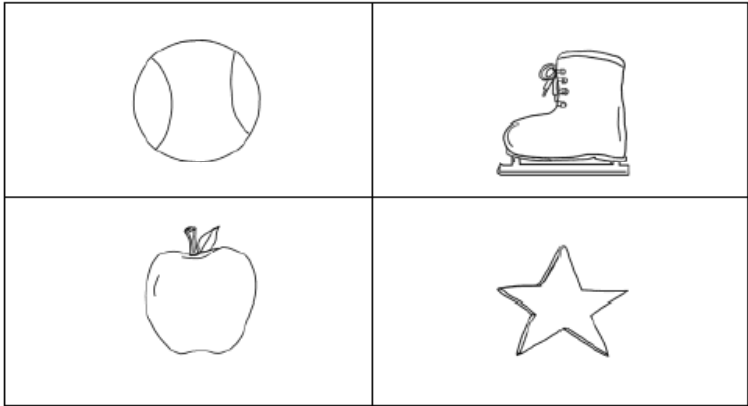
Emergent Writing



Some children wrote their name. Find the one that is written the best.



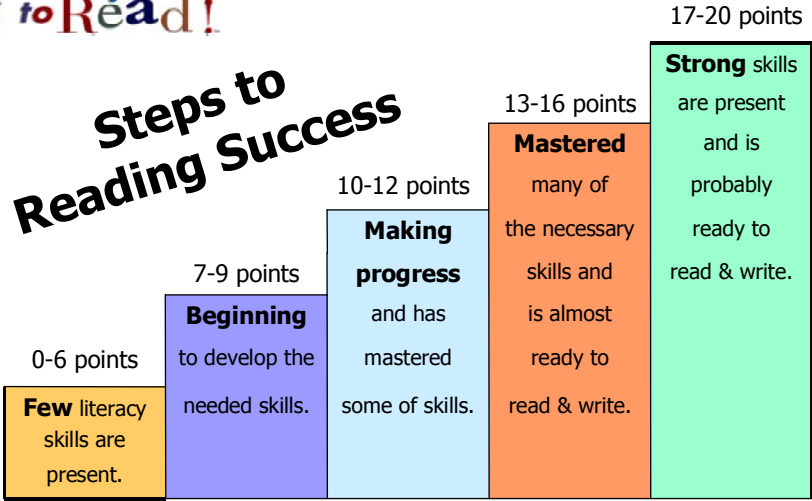
Linguistic Awareness



These pictures are ball, skate, apple and star.
 Find the one that starts with the *buh* sound.



Steps to Reading Success





How Should I Use the Score?

It tells a **child's progress** in developing emergent literacy skills needed to learn how to read and write.

Adapt the experiences and activities you do with a child to his or her level of development, based on screening score results. Start where a child is now, then increase the complexity as the child's skills grow stronger. **Build skills in all areas** of print knowledge, emergent writing, and linguistic awareness.

Look at pages 33-40 for ideas on how to **engage a child in a range of opportunities** that build knowledge of letters and sounds, books and print. Use and adapt these activities to your early childhood setting, community program, or home.



Going Forward Together NCLD National Partners

- Easter Seals
- Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPI)
- Learning Disabilities Association of America
- International Dyslexia Association
- International Reading Association
- LearningNetwork.com
- Lee Pesky Learning Center
- National Center for Family Literacy
- National Council of La Raza
- National Head Start Association
- Parent-Child Home Program
- Parents as Teachers
- Pearson Early Learning Group
- Public Library Association (ALA)
- Reach Out and Read
- Reading Is Fundamental
- Schwab Foundation for Learning
- WETA-TV: Reading Rockets/LD Online
- WGBH/Between the Lions
- Yale University Bush Center/21st Century Schools





Purpose of National Partnerships

- Disseminate the *Get Ready to Read!* Screening Tool, ensuring widespread reach to underserved populations
- Raise awareness of reading difficulties, LD, and the importance of early identification and intervention
- Create an informational network/learning community to provide research-based information to early childhood educators, parents, and health professionals
- Establish the *Get Ready to Read!* Screening Tool as standard practice in early childhood education



What Are We Learning?

- Easy to use by professionals and non-professionals.
- Immediate utility and value--empowers teachers and parents
- Closely aligned with federal, state and local interests
- NCLD and partners are providing needed training and TA



NCLD is currently conducting demonstration and dissemination projects in five states, with plans for at least three additional states to join the program next school year. From the data collected, we will learn even more about how best

to incorporate early literacy screening into a variety of early childhood programs, including Head Start, Even Start, public pre-kindergarten, parent-support programs, and family care.

The Promise of Early Literacy Screening

We believe that public policy needs to support the further development of literacy screening of preschool children. President Bush and the Congress have taken the lead by including a provision for early literacy screening in the Early Reading First section of the landmark *No Child Left Behind* Act. As a result, funds are now authorized to be used to screen preschool children with the kind of research-based tool in the *Get Ready to Read!* program.

We advocate that governors and state legislators include early literacy screening as a key component of their early learning state guidelines. Creating a scientific research-based “early warning system” makes sense for all children—so that those with reading difficulties or disabilities can be identified and served before they learn to fail.

With early intervention, children who show signs of reading problems have every opportunity to become successful readers.

What do we as parents, educators, and child advocates need to do? We must find ways that will help all children--regardless of economic background, disability, or language barriers—to learn. It is this mandate that undergirds *Get Ready to Read!* Looking around this room today, I know that you not only share this commitment to children’s learning, but are also ready to translate that commitment into action.