



Building Strong Foundations: Engaging Families in the 5 Early Literacy Skills Essential for Kindergarten Success

Dr. Samantha Fecich
and Ave Pushchak
Slippery Rock University
2025 KSLA Conference
Undergraduate
Roundtable



Why is it Important for Students to Develop Early Literacy Skills Before Entering Kindergarten?

- Children's emergent literacy skills are essential for the development of later literacy abilities and school success (Puranik et al., 2024).
- In a study of 724 preschool aged children, language gains predicted kindergarten readiness with an effect size of 0.24 standard deviations (Logan et al., 2024).



5 Foundational Early Literacy Skills

1. Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

- Phonological awareness is the ability to hear, recognize, and play with the sounds in spoken language. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, recognize, and play with the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.

2. Phonics and Decoding

- Phonics is the understanding of letters of the alphabet and the sounds they make. Decoding is the process of combining these sounds to sound out words.

3. Fluency

- Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately, at a good pace, and with proper expression and comprehension.

4. Vocabulary

- Vocabulary is the knowledge of the meaning and pronunciation of words.

5. Comprehension

- Comprehension is the ability to read text, process it, and understand its meaning.

- (Reading Rockets, 2025)



The Importance of Combining Digital and Hands-On Learning for Children

- Young children need both digital and nondigital experiences to develop the full range of emergent literacy skills (Dong & Newman, 2023).



Screen Time Guidelines for Little Learners

- For children (2-5 years old) encourage healthy habits and limit non-educational screen time to about 1 hour per weekday and 3 hours on the weekends (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry [AACAP], 2025).



Productive Screentime vs. Doomscrolling

- High-quality content can enhance social and language skills for all children aged two years and older, particularly for those who are living in poverty or facing other disadvantages (Muppalla et al., 2023).



- However, studies have shown that excessive screen time and media multitasking can negatively affect executive functioning, sensorimotor development, and academic outcomes (Muppalla et al., 2023).



Example Activity: Syllable Shopping



Hands-On Version of the Activity

Instructions:

- While at the grocery store, have the child pick up different fruits and vegetables.
- The child can then say the words of the names of the fruits and vegetables out loud, holding up a finger for each of the syllables.
- Example: eggplant (egg-plant) and pineapple (pine-ap-ple).
- This turns the mundane task of grocery shopping into a natural learning opportunity.
- (Reading Rockets, 2025)



Digital Version of the Activity

Instructions:

- Download the app *Fruits and Vegetables for Kids* by Cleverbit on the child's device or on a parent's device that the child is using.
- Open the app and click on the fruit or vegetable option.
- When the child clicks on the image of a fruit or vegetable, the app says the name of the food out loud.
- The child can then count the number of syllables in the word after listening to it.
- This app is an interactive literacy activity that children can do independently.



Conclusion

- It is essential for students to have knowledge of the 5 foundational early literacy skills before entering kindergarten.
- Proficiency in these skills predicts future academic success.
- It is important for students' screentime to be productive, interactive, and educational.
- Syllable shopping is an activity that parents can do with their children to teach phonological awareness.
- Please see the handout for more activities and resources that parents can use to teach early literacy skills to their young children.





Questions?

References

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [AACAP]. (2025). *Children and watching TV* (Fact Sheet No. 54). https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And_Watching-TV-054.aspx
- Dong, C., & Newman, L. (2023). Digital play and emergent literacy in early childhood education: Balancing innovation and tradition. *Early Education and Development*, *34*(3), 457–475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2022.2068823>
- Logan, J. A. R., Piasta, S. B., Purtell, K. M., Nichols, R., & Schachter, R. E. (2024). Early childhood language gains, kindergarten readiness, and Grade 3 reading achievement. *Child Development*, *95*(2), 609–624. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.14019>
- Muppalla, S. K., Vuppalapati, S., Pulliahgaru, A., & Sreenivasulu, H. (2023). Effects of excessive screen time on child development: An updated review and strategies for management. *Cureus*, *15*(6), e40608. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.40608>
- Puranik, C., Valcárcel Jiménez, M., Yumus, M., Schiele, T., Mues, A., & Niklas, F. (2024). Preschool emergent literacy skills as predictors of reading and spelling in Grade 2 and the role of migration background in Germany. *Reading and Writing*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-024-10518-7>
- Reading Rockets. (2025). *Phonological and phonemic awareness: Activities for your kindergartener*. Reading Rockets. <https://www.readingrockets.org/literacy-home/reading-101-guide-parents/your-kindergartener/phonological-and-phonemic-awareness>
- Reading Rockets. (2025). *Reading 101 for Parents: Your Kindergartener*. <https://www.readingrockets.org/literacy-home/reading-101-guide-parents/your-kindergarter>

Thank you!

