

Sometimes my child brings home books to practice reading that they have already memorized! What should I do?

Question 3 from *Helping Your Child Become a Reader*
(Scanlon, Anderson, Barnes, Morse, & Yurkewecz-Stellato, 2024¹)

Children at the earliest phases of learning to read have a lot to learn about printed language. They need to learn concepts such as:

- Spoken language is composed of individual elements called “words.” In speech, individual words may not be evident. For example, the phrase “I want to” which is three words could be perceived as one “iwanna.” As they are learning about print, young readers need to learn to perceive these individual elements and where individual words begin and end.
- The letters in printed words stand for sounds in spoken words.
- In English, print goes from left to right, and, when there is more than one line of text, the reader moves back to the left for each new line of text.
- There are small spaces between letters within a word and larger spaces between words.

Teachers sometimes use very simple books to help children develop these basic understandings. These books sometimes follow a pattern, with many of the same words on each page (I see the mouse. I see the pig. etc.). The word that changes from page to page is signaled by the picture. These books allow children to focus their attention on learning and practicing some of these understandings without having to struggle to figure out how to pronounce every word.

When listening to children read memorized books, keep the purposes of these kinds of books in mind.

- Focus on helping children point to each word as it is said. This will help them to develop an understanding of what a printed word is and to understand that, for each word said, there is a corresponding printed word on the page. As needed, demonstrate how to point and say each of the words. (As an added benefit, having children point to the words may make it more likely that some of the most frequently occurring words in the book, such as *the*, *is*, *like*, and *see*, will become familiar to them. Over time, this may allow children to read those words in other contexts without relying on a repeating pattern.)
- If they have the needed knowledge, encourage children to use the first letter of the word that changes from one page to the next to help identify the word. For example, if the picture shows an animal that could be either a mouse or a rat, if a child knows the sound for the letter *M* and is looking at the word “mouse” in the book, it is useful to encourage the child to think about what the first sound in the word will be and then use the picture to help settle on the word.
- Occasionally ask children to count the number of words on a page or the number of letters in a word. This helps them learn the difference between letters and words. The difference between



letters and words can be confusing for beginning readers because some of the first words they learn (*I* and *a*) are single letters.

In addition, be sure to talk about what is happening in the books. For these types of books, it is necessary to pay attention to the pictures to understand what the book is about. From early on we want children to understand that the purpose of print is to communicate.

¹ The complete 23 question booklet can be accessed at: eltep.org/isa-parent-booklet
All individual questions and the complete booklet can be shared for non-commercial purposes.

What Not to Do

On occasion, caregivers report having covered the pictures in books with repeating patterns and/or asking children to start at the end of the book and read the book “backwards.” These practices can confuse children about the concepts such books are designed to help teach. Further, doing so can frustrate children and thereby interfere with their reading progress. The goal is for beginning readers to view reading as pleasurable and interesting activities.