

Literacy and communication

Literacy is the skills of **reading, writing** and **spelling**.

Literacy is important for everyday activities like learning, working and communicating.

Reading is essential for children and adults to participate fully in life, education and learning.

Preschool literacy:

Literacy begins before children start primary school.

Children develop literacy skills in the preschool period.

Learning language and communication skills in preschool is important.

Literacy skills in preschool get children ready to learn to read when they start school.

This includes:

- knowing about the structure of words (syllables and sounds)
- knowing how books work and the different features (front cover, words, title)
- alphabet and sound knowledge.

School-age literacy:

Children learn to read, write and spell when they begin primary school.

Learning to read helps children to **recognise** words (decode) and **understand** what they are reading (comprehend).

Research shows children need explicit teaching to learn:

- that letters represent different sounds and letter-sound patterns. This is known as phonics
- how to identify sounds in words (the first sound in 'dog' is /d/), join sounds together ('d-o-g' spells 'dog'), separate words into individual sounds ('jump' is spelled 'j-u-m-p'), and manipulate sounds in words (you can change 'bed' to 'bad'). This is known as phonemic awareness
- how to read accurately and fluently
- how to use a wide range of words
- grammar use and sentences
- understanding and interpreting what they read
- background knowledge about a topic.

Why literacy is important

People need to know how to read and write to participate fully in everyday life. There are far-reaching advantages in being literate.

Literacy is important for:

- academic performance – reading is essential for accessing the school curriculum and participating in educational tasks
- employment – literacy increases access and opportunity in the workplace
- peer relationships and socialising – reading and writing play an important role in communicating among friends through text messages and social media
- independence and safety – reading is essential for everyday activities such as reading menus, street signs, maps and food labels.

What to do if you are concerned about a child's literacy progress:

It is best to get help early for literacy difficulties.

Research shows that early intervention for literacy can improve outcomes for children in the early years of school.

If you have concerns about your child's literacy progress:

- speak with the preschool or classroom teacher. The teacher will be able to provide information about the child's communication and literacy skills in an educational context
- consult a speech pathologist for assessment of the child's language and literacy skills.

How speech pathologists help with literacy

Speech pathologists have specialised knowledge about communication and language.

A speech pathologist can:

- assess a student's language and literacy skills to see if intervention is necessary
- provide interventions that target a child's oral language, reading, writing or spelling skills
- work with the child's family, preschool, or school and recommend strategies for ongoing support.

Literacy and communication are important life skills.

Being able to read and write ensures people can make the most of their opportunities.