

How Children Learn Sight Words

There have been some key research findings (for example: Browder & Xin, 1998) into how children best acquire sight word reading skills. Sight words are learned most effectively when:

1. Sets of 2-12 words are used at a time.
2. Feedback is direct and immediate.
3. Children are given the chance (and encouraged) to self-correct their own attempts after feedback is received.
4. A variety of activities and task types are used (e.g. time delay, demonstration and imitation).
5. Generalization opportunities are provided. For example practicing sight words found in school and other books, on signs in the community or product packaging in the home.

Like learning any other skill, children need opportunities to practice sight words repeatedly in a motivating way. This needs to be practicing the correct word though, not just guessing or practicing errors. This is best stated by the famous quote by Vince Lombardi, "Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect."

Children also need alternatives to contrast the correct form against in order to find patterns. Use sets of words and help your child find the target word from the sets.

Therefore "home-play" for sight words needs to involve multiple repetitions of the correct word, contrasts with other words and examples of the word in different contexts.



GROUND RULES FOR HOME-PLAY ACTIVITIES

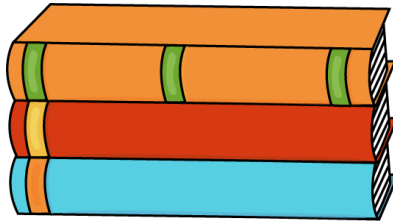
1. **Keep it playful** – if your child is getting frustrated or upset reassure them and change the activity to make it easier and more enjoyable. Taking turns with your child helps to avoid “testing” mode and also provides additional inputs for your child’s learning. Occasionally slip in a “mixed-up” one and see if your child picks up your mistake then fix it up and try again – kids love to be better at something than Mum or Dad!
2. **Keep it real** – use everyday materials you already have at home. You shouldn’t have to go on a special shopping trip just to do homework. Some of the intensive game ideas may involve more set up and pack up than other ideas. Look for chances to practice sight words without flashcards such as finding them on product packaging, signs or advertising material.
3. **Ensure multiple inputs** – to optimize how quickly and efficiently we learn involve as many different body systems into the activity as possible. For example if a child just looks at a word they are only using one sensory system. When they listen to, touch, say aloud, trace with a finger, write and move, or otherwise interact with the words, they are involving more and more of their learning systems and this will increase how quickly they learn and how well they retain new information.
4. **Praise** – be specific about what you are praising eg “I liked the way you used the /s/ sound to figure ‘said’ out.” Don’t forget to also praise close attempts and effort eg “Nearly! Great try! That word says ‘big’”.
5. **Correct** – try as much as possible to focus on and repeat the correct word and not the error eg “Well done guessing that one, that word says ‘there’”. This is preferable to “well done guessing ‘the’, it’s not ‘the’ it’s actually ‘there’”. Repeat the correct word a few times to lay down neural pathways that correctly associate the spoken word with the written word rather than an error.
6. **Make it meaningful** – to maximize your child’s learning it is important to make sight words meaningful not just random pieces of information to memorize. Try and use the words in a meaningful way for example: say the word in a sentence; find it in a book; talk about how we use the word; and give multiple examples of different sentences containing that word.



USING THIS GUIDE

There are three sections found in this guide:

1. **General Games:** The aim of these is to try to get as many repetitions of target words as possible for words that are rapidly acquiring. Use 3-12 sight words in each of these games. They should require minimal set up and clean up. You can also play standard card games such as bingo, snap, go fish and memory.
2. **Intensive Games:** These more intensive and high interest activities should be reserved for words that are specifically challenging for your child. Use only 2-5 words in each of these activities.
3. **Generalization:** This section provides numerous ideas for encouraging the spontaneous use and real-life application of your child's new-found sight word knowledge.




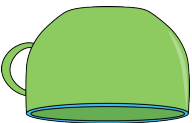
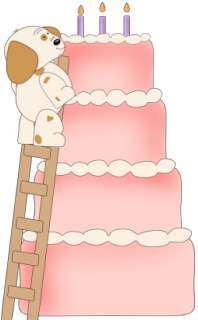
Modifications for Children with Special Needs

If your child has specific learning needs then the games may need modification in different ways. Consult your child's specialist/s and teacher/s for more specific advice. Here are some common modifications:

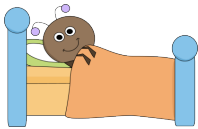


- Use a smaller set of words (eg 2-4 words).
- Use light blue or light green paper for flashcards to help reduce the stark contrast of black print on white paper.
- Use more repetitions - repeat the word a number of times before you try to get them to attempt it in imitation.
- Say the word together.
- Use different colors to provide extra visual cues.
- Color code words with a border or print on different paper.



IDEA SECTION 1: GENERAL GAMES

Game Name	Materials	Description
Bathroom Targets	Water pistol or spray bottle filled with water Bath or shower Flashcards 	Laminated cards stick well to tiles and mirrors when they are damp! Stick the chosen cards up on the tiles, then take turns saying which word you are aiming for and taking a shot at it. If you miss then it is the next person's turn. If you hit the word you can continue to shoot it until you either miss or the card falls off the wall. You can even keep "score" of how many you shoot down with tally marks in the fog on the bathroom mirror if you like!
Cup Game	3 x cups Flashcards Small toy/item 	Place a flashcard in front of each cup. Take turns hiding the object under one of the upside-down cups and then moving them around. Read aloud each of the 3 words then have your child choose which word (and corresponding cup) they think the object is under. Then swap roles and change the words throughout the game.
Stamp-a-Roo	Flashcards Kangaroo picture* (maybe get your child to draw one!) Scrap Paper Reward stamp *Substitute for a rabbit or a frog	Spread the flashcards out (3-5 is a good number) and move the kangaroo jumping on each card and saying it aloud. Then get your child to have a go and however many cards he/she can say correctly, stamp that many times on the spare paper. If your child gets them all correct then increase the number and/or change the word set.
Sight word ladder	Ruler or stick Flashcards Bluetak or sticky tape 	Choose words together and then say them as you stick them on to the ruler like rungs on a ladder. Say the full set each time you add an extra word on. When your "ladder" is complete lean it against different toys, books, objects and then "climb" up the ladder walking your fingers up and saying each word as you climb it. Change the order of the words and play again. Try building a tower of blocks and then "rescue" someone using the ladder!

IDEAS SECTION 2: INTENSIVE GAMES

Game Name	Materials	Description
Bedtime Spotlight	Flashcards Bluetak Flashlight (torch) 	Stick the flashcards to the ceiling or if your child sleeps on a bottom bunk then stick them to the underside of the top bunk. Every night before bed turn the lights out and while your child is lying in bed have them shine the light at the words and read them together.
Magic painting	Plain wax candle Water soluble paint or water & food coloring Paper Paintbrushes or cotton tips	Help your child to write the target sight word with the candle in large writing on a piece of paper (while repeating the word). Using thinned out paint cover the word and then read the word that appears through the painting.
Circles and crosses	Paper Pencils/crayons 	Write each of the target words multiple times randomly over a piece of paper. Say each word aloud as you write them. Then ask your child to do circles or crosses on every copy of a particular word. Repeat until all words are covered.
Find a Word	Children's book/s 	Select a book that has the target sight word a few times. As you read the book together encourage your child to look actively for that word and read it every time they see it. This is an essential activity as it provides not only sight word recognition but assists your child in starting to understand what sort of sentence context that word occurs in which will increase their reading fluency. Free printable early readers that focus on specific sight words can be found at: www.themeasuredmom.com
Dough/string/pipe cleaner Writing	Modelling dough, clay or salt dough (or substitute with string/wool or pipe cleaners) Flashcards	Choose a flashcard and read it, shape the word out of dough (or string or pipe cleaners) and say it a few times while doing this. Read it again when you finish then squash (or undo) it and start the next word.