

How Our Brains Learn to Read

Reading is an important and fun skill that nearly everyone can learn with time and practice. Our brains are naturally set up to learn to speak, but learning to read does not happen on its own. Scientists have found that we must develop certain parts of our brains and build connections between brain areas that were not connected before. The picture below shows **four different areas of our brains** that we use when we read.

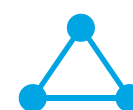
VISUAL CORTEX



This part of our brains helps us see things. We use this part when we look at and recognize written letters and words.

ROLE IN READING:
Orthographic Processing

ANGULAR GYRUS



This brain area helps us connect sounds with letters and letters with sounds. We use this part of our brains to read words aloud or to ourselves and to put words on a page.

ROLE IN READING:
Sound-Symbol Connections and Semantic Processing

AUDITORY CORTEX



This brain area allows us to hear and tell the difference between sounds in spoken language. When we read, we use this part of our brains to identify the sounds that make up words.

ROLE IN READING:
Phonological Processing

INFERIOR FRONTAL GYRUS



This part of our brains helps us make speech sounds, form words and sentences, and understand the meaning of what we listen to and read.

ROLE IN READING:
Speech Production, Fluency, and Comprehension



We Need to Teach Our Brains to **DECODE** to Become Good Readers

What we learn in school can help us build the brain connections that we need to read. The four decoding skills below help develop different parts of the brain. It is important that kindergarteners, first graders, and second graders spend a lot of time in the classroom learning and practicing these skills because they are the building blocks of reading.

At least 50% of our K-2 reading block time should focus on learning to decode. We must also build our vocabulary and comprehension skills, but learning to decode is a critical first step in becoming a lifelong reader.



Phonological Awareness

It is important that we can recognize all of the sounds in the English language to be able to read well. English has **44 different speech sounds**, which is more than many other languages.

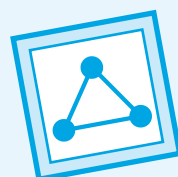
Sound walls in our classrooms can help us learn how to make these unique sounds.



Print Concepts

To become readers, we must also recognize the **letters of our alphabet**, the **basic parts of a book**, and the **special rules** that print must follow.

Pointing out the front and back of a book, capital letters, lowercase letters, and punctuation marks can help us understand how writing works.



Phonics & Word Recognition

Once we know our sounds and the alphabet, we can begin to put them together to read words.

We learn phonics when our teachers help us to **sound out words** and know **which letters and combinations of letters make which sounds**. When we become good at this skill, we can read and spell many words.



Fluency

Now that we've learned about the connections between sounds, letters, and words, we can put it all together by **reading sentences and books!**

The more we practice sounding out words, the easier it will become to recognize both new and familiar words on the page.