

Reading and Writing in Content Areas

When you think of classes where your child needs strong reading and writing skills, you probably think of English or language arts. But reading and writing are crucial for learning science, social studies, math, and other subjects, too. Share these ideas with your youngster.



READING STRATEGIES

Help your child gain more knowledge when she reads with these tips for before, during, and after reading.

Before reading...

● Scan for main ideas

What will a textbook chapter cover? Before your middle grader starts to read, suggest that she notice the title, scan the headings, and look through the review questions at the end. These sections will let her know what main ideas (the most important things the author has to say about a topic) will be covered. Reading with a purpose in mind will improve her comprehension.

● Make a "KWL" chart

Encourage your child to create a chart that contains details about the subject. Have her divide a sheet of paper into three columns: "Know," "Want to know," and "Learned." She can list facts she already knows in



the first column (there are three branches of the federal government) and add things she wants to know in the second column (what the judicial branch does). Then, when she reads, she can write new information she learns in the last column and check on facts she wrote in the first one.

During reading...

● Ask questions

Readers who make up questions to answer as they read understand the material better. Your youngster can think about the main ideas and then ask himself questions that will help him read for supporting details. For instance, if a main idea is "Renewable energy comes in many forms," he might ask, "What are different forms of renewable energy?" Then, he can read for the details (geothermal, hydropower, solar, wind).

● Get the picture

Visualizing information may boost your middle grader's understanding. He might make a time line to track historical dates (inventions of the 19th century, the presidency of Abraham Lincoln). Or he could sketch out a word problem in math class. For example, to find the total square feet of carpet needed for two rooms, he could draw a rectangle for each room and label the length and width. Then, he can use it to

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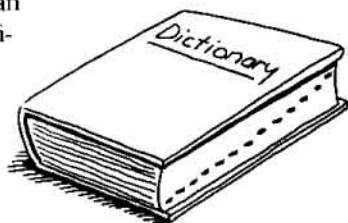
What's that word?

Tackling new information is easier when your child understands the words he's reading. Boost his vocabulary with these ideas:

- Pay attention to new words. They may appear in bold or italic type or in a separate box on the page.
- Learn definitions. Sometimes the meaning of a word is right in the same sentence. ("The least common denominator, or the smallest number that can be used as the denominator for both fractions, of $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ is 6.") Other times,

reading the whole passage can make the meaning clear. Definitions may also be in a separate box on the page or in the book's glossary.

- Make a list. Write down new words and their definitions as you come across them. Keep the list on hand for easy reference.



Middle Years

write an equation. By multiplying the length and width of each one and adding the two results together, he'll discover how much carpet he will need for both rooms.

After reading...

● **Retell**

Have your child talk about what she read and learned. Let her lead the conversation by telling you the most interesting facts she discovered. Then, pose questions that will encourage her to give you details. For example, if she said, "Instrumental music was very popular during the Renaissance," you might ask her to name a few of the instruments. Discussing the information will help her remember more of what she learned.

● **Read it again**

Is there a section that confused her? Has she forgotten an explanation? Suggest that she reread. The extra practice will reinforce new vocabulary, provide an opportunity to find things she missed, and help her make sense of things she might not have understood the first time around.



WRITING TO LEARN

Writing is a hands-on way for your middle schooler to learn and remember information in every class. Try these creative ideas that make it fun to put ideas into writing.

● **Illustrated notes**

A picture might be worth a thousand words, especially if it's part of your child's notes. In science class, she might draw and label a flow chart to show how the water cycle works. In English, she could create comic strips and use vocabulary words in the dialogue bubbles. Adding an image to her words gives her one more way to connect with what she is learning.

● **Letter writing**

Putting information into a new format encourages your middle grader to think about main ideas, pull out important details, and explain them in his own words. All are great ways to make the facts stick in his memory. For example, he could turn what he has learned into a letter. Say he's studying Brazil in geography. He might imagine that he's a tourist visiting the country and write a letter to a grandparent about his trip. He could describe the monkeys, birds, and trees he saw when he walked through a rain forest, for example.



● **Study guides**

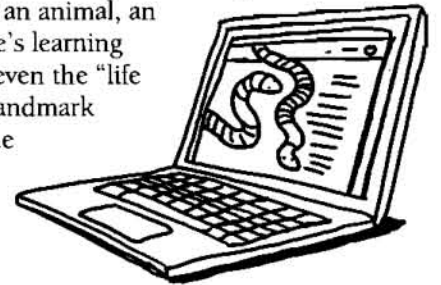
Making a study guide is a great way to prepare for a test. Suggest that your child create study guides as she reads textbook chapters. For instance, for a chapter on World War II, she can divide a sheet of paper into four sections ("causes," "major battles," "key people," and "outcomes"). Then, as she reads, she should hunt for details and write them in the correct section. Suggest that she use a different-colored pen for each topic and keep her notes brief (lists with three or four bullets work well).

● **Scrapbook of knowledge**

What did your middle grader learn this week? Have him make a scrapbook of the material, and he'll be more likely to understand—and enjoy—it. He could clip newspaper articles of current events his social studies class has discussed and write his own captions for them. If he's reading about nutritious foods in health class, he could create menus for healthy meals. He might also include step-by-step directions for his science fair project along with a photo of the finished project.

● **Unlikely biographies**

Your middle grader has probably read a biography of a historical figure—but anything can have a life story. Encourage her to write a short biography of a character from a novel she's reading in literature class (*Jane Eyre*). *Idea:* She could bring a 21st-century twist to her work by creating an imaginary Facebook page for Jane Eyre, with entries Jane might have written about her job as a governess or her wedding day and comments from other characters. Or your child could write a biography of an animal, an insect, or a plant she's learning about in science or even the "life story" of a famous landmark (Statue of Liberty, the Sphinx) that she's studying in social studies.



Middle Years