



## **First Grade Literacy Expectations: Reading and Writing**

By Linda Balsiger, M.S., CCC-SLP

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By the end of kindergarten, children have acquired the key foundational skills for literacy and are poised to become independent readers and writers. Reading and writing skills increase dramatically in first grade. What literacy skills should a beginning first grader have? How will their literacy skills develop during the first grade?

### **Phonological Processing Skills**

Phonological processing skills are crucial for reading and spelling success. Before first grade, a child should be able to identify initial and final sounds of words, blend three spoken sounds to form simple words, and segment 3-letter spoken words into their distinct sounds. They are also able to “delete” sounds from spoken 3-letter words (e.g. *bit* without the /b/ is *it*). In first grade, a child gains competence with consonant blends (*bl*, *tr*, *st*). They can blend 4 spoken sounds to form words, and segment 4-letter spoken words into their separate parts (e.g. *stop* = /s/ /t/ /o/ /p/). They can also manipulate sounds in 4-letter words, by substituting or deleting sounds. For example, *play* without the /l/ is *pay*, and changing the /l/ in *play* to an /r/ results in *pray*. The ability to manipulate sounds in words is a critical indicator of phonological awareness, and children who struggle with this skill are at significant risk for a reading disorder.

### **Basic Reading Skills**

Before a child begins first grade, he or she should know both the name and sound of each alphabet letter, be able to read simple 3-letter words (*bat*, *lid*, *dog*), and recognize some common sight words (*a*, *I*, *my*, *you*, *is*, *are*, *the*). A first-grader extends their knowledge of sound patterns to fluently and accurately read words with consonant blends (e.g. *frog*, *bump*, *glass*), long vowel digraphs (*oa* in *boat*, *ai* in *rain*), silent ‘e’ long-vowel words (*cake*, *bite*), and r-controlled vowels (*ir*, *ur*, *er*, *ar*, *or*). They are also able to read compound words (*rainbow*, *pigpen*, *cupcake*), contractions (*can’t*, *won’t*, *didn’t*), and words with common endings (e.g. *-s*, *-ed*, *-ing*). The first grader expands their sight word repertoire significantly, and can easily and accurately read a large number of common sight words (e.g. *have*, *said*, *come*, *give*, *of*, *for*, *from*, *were*, *want*, *does*, *could*, *people*). Oral reading becomes more fluent, sentences are read in phrases rather than word-by-word, and punctuation is “read” through intonation and pausing. By the end of first grade, a child should be able to read an unfamiliar grade-level passage aloud at 40-60 correct words per minute. They should also be able to comprehend what they read, and identify the main idea in expository text, or the characters, plot, and setting in narrative text.

### **Basic Writing Skills**

Upon entering first grade, a child should be able to write all the upper and lowercase alphabet letters, their first name, and most of their last name. They are also able to write some simple 3-letter words (*man*, *hat*). In first grade, handwriting becomes more legible, and letter size and spacing between letters and words becomes more consistent. Letter reversals (such as b/d confusion) should disappear by the end of the year. Spelling



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improves and children can spell many simple words. Although “invented” or phonetic spelling is still common, first-graders are able to accurately remember the spellings for patterns and words that are studied in the classroom. They are able to write complete sentences using descriptive words, and can apply conventions for punctuation and capitalization. They can write short passages that describe a sequence of events, or write a narrative with a definite beginning, middle, and ending.

### **Concerns?**

If you have concerns about your child’s literacy development, seek help sooner rather than later. This is particularly important if there is any family history of dyslexia or other learning difficulties. First grade is a critical time. Children who have difficulty learning to read often begin to believe they are not smart, and lose confidence in their learning abilities. In reality, children who struggle with reading are often exceptionally bright and creative children with a diagnosable and treatable reading disorder. Early identification and intervention can make a world of difference in your child’s early learning success, and in their lifelong feelings about school.

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