



Second Grade Reading Expectations

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

Second grade is a time of building and expanding basic literacy skills. How do you know if your child is on track with their reading skills as they approach the end of second grade? The following describes the foundational reading skills that second grade readers are expected to have.

Decoding and Word Reading

A second grader should be able to fluently read second grade level text from multiple subject areas. Their reading should be accurate, and use prosody and intonation to “read” punctuation such as commas and periods. Reading speed is expected to be around 90-100 correct words per minute by the end of second grade, for new material that has never been read before.

A reader in second grade can recognize many words on sight, and use their word attack skills to sound out unknown words. Second-graders know all of the common vowel patterns and can read them correctly in words, including irregular vowel diagraphs (such as *au, aw, ou, ow, oy, oi*). They can “flex” to decode words with vowel patterns that have more than one sound (for example *ea in beach* versus *bread, ie in tie* versus *chief, ow in throw* versus *cow*).

A second grader understands basic syllabification rules, and can apply them to break apart multi-syllabic words into syllables. For example, they can break the word *music* apart as *mu/sic* (with a long vowel in the first syllable), instead of *mus/ic* (with a short vowel in the first syllable). They know that a word such as *pic/nic* is divided between the 2 consonants, and that the first syllable will always have a short vowel sound. They also understand spelling conventions that affect the vowel sound in words with affixes (*hoping* versus *hopping*). They can accurately read words with regular plurals (-s, -es), as well as irregular plurals (*cries, wolves*).

Vocabulary and Comprehension

A second grader knows what a number of common prefixes and suffixes mean (such as *un-, re-, -ful,*) and can use their knowledge to decipher the meaning of new words (e.g. *reissue* means to *issue* something *again*). Vocabulary is expanded dramatically through reading and discussing written material, as opposed to direct vocabulary instruction. Second graders can often guess at the meaning of a word based upon context, and are able to use a dictionary or glossary to look-up the meaning of unknown words.

A second grader has also developed reading comprehension skills for a variety of text structures, including literary structures (narrative stories, poems) and expository text (factual material). They show their understanding of narrative text structures through their ability to retell the story in the correct sequence, make predictions, describe cause-effect, and identify the setting, plot, and main characters. For factual materials, second graders can summarize information they have read, relate material to their own real-life experiences, answer *why* and *how* questions, infer implied meanings, and compare



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information from different sources. Second graders are also able to read to perform a particular task or find information they are asked to find. For example, they can follow written directions, interpret charts and diagrams, and locate information in books using the table of contents, index, or headings.

One critical comprehension skill that second graders practice is the ability to self-monitor their reading, so that they reread a sentence if it does not sound right or does not make sense in the context of the paragraph. Second graders should also begin to enjoy reading, and want to read things voluntarily, rather than because they have to read.

Concerns?

If your child is falling behind in reading, it is important to get help early rather than later. Children who are below grade level in reading are at risk for falling behind in all academic areas, since reading is a primary avenue of learning. Studies show a significant difference in the vocabularies of fluent readers versus non-fluent readers, simply because of the greater volume of material that fluent readers tend to read. Research also shows that children who are still behind grade level in reading in third grade rarely catch up to grade level in later years. Seeking help can prevent your child from falling further behind, losing interest in reading, or losing confidence in their learning abilities and becoming discouraged learners. Reading is a lifelong skill, and the gateway to learning and long-term academic success.

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