



## **Third Grade – A Pivotal Year for Literacy**

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

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Third grade is a critical year for students. They are expected to have basic reading and writing skills, and to begin to apply those skills in a variety of academic contexts. Does your child meet grade-level expectations? The following summarizes the third grade literacy standards published by the Oregon Department of Education.

### **Reading – Decoding and Oral Fluency Skills**

A third grade student is expected to have the “decoding” skills needed to easily read single syllable words, and to analyze and break down longer words into their parts. They should know and recognize common word patterns and affixes found in longer words (e.g. *-ight, -tion, -ful, -ness*). A third grader is expected to read grade-level material aloud fluently, using prosody to convey expression and punctuation with appropriate pacing. The oral fluency standard that Oregon has established for third graders is 110-120 correct words per minute. Oral reading fluency is measured through DIBELS testing conducted in the schools – typically each quarter.

### **Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary**

Reading comprehension becomes increasingly important in third grade, as children shift from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” They are now expected to have solid reading comprehension for a variety of text structures, including expository text (fact-based), literary/narrative text (stories), online information, magazines/newspapers, and poetry. For expository material, a third grader can pinpoint the main idea and supporting details, distinguish fact vs. opinion, and answer factual questions. For literary text, they are able to identify themes, recognize character traits and motivations, and retell story events in sequence. For both fact-based and literary text, a third grader can summarize the information read, identify cause-effect, make predictions, compare and contrast information from different sources, and relate prior knowledge and experience from their own lives to information found in the text. They are also able to self-monitor their understanding, and apply strategies to clarify information that does not make sense.

When encountering unknown vocabulary words, a third grader is able to flag those words and apply strategies to decipher meaning. These strategies include knowledge of word origins, common word prefixes (*un-, re-, pre-, bi-, mis-, dis-*) and suffixes (*-er, -est, -ful*), and contextual clues. A third grader can categorize and classify words, and demonstrates knowledge of relationships between words, including antonyms, synonyms, homophones, and homographs.

Reading comprehension skills are assessed statewide in third grade, through “OAKS” testing (Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills).



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### Writing and Spelling Skills

A third grader has been working on basic writing skills for two years, and is now expected to understand and apply all of the steps of the writing process, including: pre-writing or organization of ideas using notes or graphic organizers, production of a rough draft, revising and editing, and proofing. They are able to use reference materials to research and combine information from different sources. For expository (fact-based) writing, a third grader ought to be able to produce a solid paragraph with a topic sentence, details, and conclusion. Narrative stories include important contextual information, and properly develop the plot or story line. For both expository and narrative writing, paragraphs should contain logically sequenced ideas, and employ linking words to connect and transition among ideas. Sentences should contain a variety of vocabulary words, including descriptive adjectives and verbs. Grammar is expected to be correct, including subject-verb agreement and past and future tense forms. Writing conventions for punctuation and capitalization are followed, including commas in dates and addresses, quotation marks for speech, and capitalization of proper names, places, and holidays. Handwriting should be legible, paragraph margins observed, and appropriate spacing inserted between letters and words.

Third graders can correctly spell words with consonant blends at the beginning and end of the word, spell common homophones (*haul/hall*), and remember spellings for words that have been studied in class. They should be able to change word forms correctly for common endings (*swim > swimming, bunny > bunnies*), and spell common contractions. They can identify grade-level words they suspect are misspelled, and apply strategies to attempt to correct those spellings.

### Concerns?

If your child is behind in reading or writing, it is important to seek help now. Third grade is a pivotal year, and children that are behind in third grade find it increasingly difficult to catch up later. An evaluation can pinpoint the underlying cause of your child's learning challenges, and provide recommendations to help them succeed in school. Targeted intervention can help to develop the underlying foundational skills that are missing, and keep students from losing confidence in their learning abilities before they become discouraged learners.

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