

Not all reading skills are equal.

Children begin to learn reading skills at birth.

Some skills, such as learning letter names and hearing the sounds that make up words, are constrained or limited. Once you learn the name of the letter "A," you don't need to learn any more about that letter name. Other skills are unconstrained or unlimited, such as vocabulary. Learning the meaning of words is something that continues throughout life.

All reading skills are important. Comprehension skills, however, are the best predictor of long-term reading achievement and success.



Decoding Skills

Notice print

Know letter names and sounds

Hear the sounds that make up words

Usually learned by 3rd grade



Comprehension Skills

Understanding the meaning of words and print.

Learned throughout life

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Trainer notes:

Not all reading skills are equal. Research by Dr. Scott Paris (2006) pointed to skills that have short-term and long-term impact on becoming a good reader. These are “constrained” and “unconstrained” skills, respectively.

Constrained skills include decoding skills like noticing print (print awareness) and knowing letter names (letter knowledge) and sounds (phonological awareness).

Constrained skills:

- Have a fixed end point; once they are mastered, you don’t continue to learn more about these skills. For example, once a child recognizes the letters of the alphabet in their different forms (lowercase and uppercase, in different fonts, etc.), he or she does not keep getting better at naming letters.
- Vary in when children learn them. The age at which children learn letter sounds can vary. Most children, however, learn letter sounds and other constrained skills by about 3rd grade.
- Help you learn other skills but are not an end in themselves.

Unconstrained skills include vocabulary and comprehension (narrative skills).

These skills:

- Do not have an end point. Children continue to learn new vocabulary and improve comprehension throughout their school years. Teens and adults also continue to learn new vocabulary and improve comprehension throughout their lives.
- Take longer to learn. As children continue to have literacy experiences, their acquisition of vocabulary and comprehension skills will accelerate, and they will become better and better at understanding what they read. As teens and adults continue to have literacy experiences, they too become better and better at understanding what they read.

Parents and caregivers can help children develop constrained and unconstrained skills by talking, singing, reading, playing, and writing.