

Why is reading a crucial skill?

The method of choice regarding communication is writing. The written word is everywhere! When you go shopping, in your free time, when using the PC, internet, cell phone – you don't get around reading. Good reading competencies are necessary to keep up in school, e.g. it is only possible to do story sums when you have good reading skills, to deduct unknown words and differentiate between important and unimportant information. In the same way we need reading to accumulate knowledge. At university the acquisition of knowledge takes place through reading. Also in our field of work we need good reading skills. Instead of using energy for the actual reading process it is essential to concentrate and focus on content, to integrate information, examine information critically and to connect it to previous knowledge, put it in relationship and then "store" it in memory. A good reader has automatised his reading process - that means he reads fluently, quickly and correctly.

„ Who can read fluently will usually understand more of the content
– and the other way round.“

(freely translated from „Wer Texte flüssig lesen kann, der versteht in der Regel auch mehr vom Textinhalt– und umgekehrt.“ Rosebrock u.a., Leseflüssigkeit fördern, S. 11)

How does one become a good reader?

1. Motivation and joy of reading is already established in early childhood. Story telling, looking at picture books and handling books are very important. Parents who read and show enjoyment in reading play a vital role as well.
2. For reading in German in the early reading phases it is important to voice the sound of the letter and not say/name the letter. Instead of *Be A e l e l* → pronounce *B A L L* (same in English).
3. For reading practice and motivation, choose books that deal with topics of personal interest.
4. Reading in free-time. It is important to read every day outside of the classroom. This can be done after school for relaxation purposes, or before going to sleep.
5. Reading aloud and to others. By reading aloud one processes information through additional senses than if one reads silently. It is very motivating being able to read to others. A child who is very shy might benefit from choosing his/her audience by himself/herself. (As a non-German speaker, encourage your child to read to you, even if you do not understand the language. Your child will be proud that he/she is able to present what he/she has learnt and is able to do something that you cannot do. This will boost motivation and self-confidence.)
6. Once a child has learnt how to read it is important to practise regularly. The earlier one starts with practice the more time can be spent consolidating and automatising the reading process before more difficult, complex texts have to be read and understood at school.
7. Reading a book together with parents, siblings or friends can be experienced as particularly rewarding and can increase the interest and motivation to read.
8. Teach your child the necessity of reading and application to daily life by asking him to read the recipe of his/her favorite dish, menus in restaurants, to plan free-time activities through reading brochures, football or other interesting sports reports, and so on.
9. If parents do not speak German as a first language it is still recommended to follow all above mentioned points. The better a first language has been learned, the better every additional language will be learned.

Parents speaking German as a first language should stick to only talking and reading in German – although it might be difficult at times.

Reading versus watching TV

Reading is an active process and motivates thinking and creativity. Children might obtain more independence as they realise that they can help themselves and do something actively for themselves. Watching TV, in contrast, is a passive process. Physiologically the brain waves of readers are more active compared to children who watch TV.

How can one improve Reading?

The tandem-reading method has proven to be effective in improving reading skills. This is a loud reading method that supports reading fluency. In the tandem-reading method there is always one coach (advanced reader) and one trainee (beginner reader). Coach and trainee meet ideally at least three times a week for 15 minutes. They choose a book which is appropriate for the current reading level of the trainee. They start to read together aloud. The coach points with his finger along the line. If the trainee makes a mistake and does not correct himself both start to read the sentence again. If the coach feels that a word has not been understood he asks the trainee about the meaning of the word. Together they then explore the meaning of the word. Through this process the trainee additionally enhances his vocabulary knowledge. When the trainee feels confident in his/her reading he/she gives the coach a sign that he/she can continue reading by himself/herself (e.g. touch on the arm). If the trainee makes a mistake and does not correct himself/herself, he/she is corrected by the coach and both continue to read together again until the sign is given by the trainee to read by himself/herself. The text is read four times in one sitting. After reading the passage, the content is summarised and the trainee gets feedback (praise!) from the coach and vice versa.

Become a coach in the reading tandem method in primary school!

An initiative of the Phoenix Centre

We would like to support children in the primary school section to become good and better readers. To do this we would like to give some children the opportunity to practise their reading after school hours. This is especially aimed at children who experience difficulty with reading.

For more details please check the German version of this article:

http://www.dsj.co.za/export/sites/dsj/downloads/dsj_pdfs/Phoenix-Centre/06-16-Lesekompetenz-ueber-das-Lesen-und-Lesen-lernen.pdf

Sources (in German):

Lesen – Erlesen, Lesefertigkeit, Leseverständnis: <https://www.schulpsychologie.de/wws/bin/1313610-1314378-2-lesen.pdf>

Manual Lesetandem: http://www.phlu.ch/fileadmin/media/phlu.ch/fe/Bilder/Manual_Lesetraining_LiT.pdf

Studie zum Lese-Tandem: http://www.fb10.uni-bremen.de/sdd2010/pdf/poster/Behrendt_Poster_SDD.pdf