• Making up and telling stories that relate to your child’s own experiences. Make up stories together that have a beginning, middle, and ending.

• Visiting the library together. Check out some books and allow your child to explore this new and exciting place. Getting a library card will also be exciting for your child!

• Pointing out the similarities in words when you can: tri-cycle, tri-angle, tri-pod. Can your child notice what these words have in common?

Most importantly, make reading and writing a fun experience. Make sure your child sees you reading. With this foundation, school-based reading and writing will be a snap.

When you have a question, call or visit your local office of The University of Georgia’s Cooperative Extension Service.

You’ll find a friendly, well-trained staff ready to help you with information, advice, and free publications covering agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth development.

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The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State University,
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Gale A. Buchanan, Dean & Director
Ask your child what he expects to learn in first grade, and he will probably say, “I will learn to read!” Being able to read and understand what is written is one of the most important intellectual skills taught in our schools.

Not only do we want children to be able to read and write, but we want them to enjoy it, too! Infants and toddlers who love being read to will usually become children who love reading. These children tend to have an easier transition to formal schooling.

How do we “teach” our children to love reading and learning? We teach them to enjoy books and learning by reading to them from infancy.

Use different methods for different age groups and developmental stages. Almost no three-year-old can sit at a desk “reading” for extended periods of time.

Forcing a preschooler to sit still and learn to write the alphabet when he doesn’t want to is frustrating for the parent and the child. Worse, “writing” becomes a chore instead of a pleasure.

What can parents do to help their youngster prepare for and then succeed in school? “Pre-reading” and “pre-writing” experiences provide a solid basis.

Activities that help a child get ready to read should be appropriate for the age and the development of the child. Here are some ideas:

**Babies**

Give your baby a variety of safe items to touch and hold. This will help develop finger coordination, which is important for using crayons and pencils later on.

Select picture books with bright illustrations. Plastic or treated fabric books are easy to clean and more durable.

Read to your baby. As you do:

- Draw her attention to the picture on the left first; then to the right. Tap it as you say “look.”
- Name the objects in the picture and wait for a reaction (laughing, gurgling, touching, etc.).
- Establish a routine that includes reading, such as reading a story every day before naptime. Make it fun for both of you.

**Toddlers**

Continue all the activities you did with your baby, but as you read:

- Point occasionally to words.
- Have your toddler turn the pages and name the pictures.
- Ask “what” and “where” questions about details in the pictures.
- With favorite stories, pause and omit a word occasionally for your toddler to fill in.

Encourage any attempt at “writing,” regardless of how messy it may appear.

**Preschoolers**

Read to your child regularly and often, even if he enjoys the same books repeated. Many children want to hear the same book over and over until they know it so well they can “read” it to you. To introduce your child to new words, read her a wide variety of materials such as newspapers, cookbooks, poems, etc. Allow the child to “write” and draw. Include other experiences such as: