

# What is the Best Way to Teach Reading?

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The controversy, almost war-like conflict, over the best way to teach reading has been waged for decades. The pendulum seems to swing to one side or the other to an extreme. When the extreme is reached on either side of the issue, many children struggle to read and the pendulum swings back in the other direction. If you are a home school teacher of young children, chances are very good that phonics is your go-to approach. A conviction that phonics is basically the ONLY way to teach reading leaves many parents purchasing one phonics program after another. Maybe your current phonics program is failing to produce a reader or maybe it worked for other children in the family but not for this particular child. Sound familiar?

When I was in elementary school, many years ago, reading instruction was a whole word approach. I know that method works as I got through college more than satisfactorily. My first job after graduation was a kindergarten class where teaching phonics was required. I learned right along with the children and still find it very helpful in decoding unknown words.

Don't get me wrong, I love, love, love phonics as way of teaching reading! I attempted to teach both of my children to read in our home school with an intense phonics program. To put it another way, I successfully taught one of my children to read with phonics and the other one struggled to read anything past a three-letter-word even though she knew all 70 phonograms. I was perplexed!

Could it be that there are prerequisites to reading in general and for phonics specifically? Yes! Phonics is an auditory approach to reading. You have to hold one piece of information and then another piece and the next and sometimes even a rule to accomplish the decoding of the word. The capacity to hold auditory sequential pieces of information together is called your auditory processing ability. Without good auditory processing (auditory short term memory), phonics is a painful, frustrating and often ineffective way to learn to read. With practice, a person's auditory processing can be raised and then phonics can be applied successfully. One needs a strong level 5 or better yet, a 6 auditory digit span for phonics to work well. To get a free test kit to discover processing levels for your family members go to [www.LittleGiantSteps.com](http://www.LittleGiantSteps.com). This information will give you a clue as to whether low processing is a root cause of a person's reading struggle.

You may be wondering what to do if your child's processing is low and reading recognition as well as reading comprehension are a challenge. I know the following statements are almost heresy in the home school community but please hear me out. Many families have been helped with another way of teaching reading. Children's belief in themselves as readers has been restored with a different approach.

- While you are working on the child's processing for two minutes twice a day, teach "sight words" by telling the child what the word is.
- You can also read a sentence and have the child read the **same** sentence after you. This is called Echo Reading and is a temporary but very effective approach!

There are some good resources indicated on the next page of this article to get you off to a good start with both of these alternative approaches. In an effort to help you feel more comfortable with your decision, read the paragraph at the bottom of the next page. You will see that YOU ARE A SIGHT READER! What? Yes, as soon as you know a word, you never sound it out again to the point that even if the letters are in the wrong place, you can still read what is written.

So how does this square up with your belief that phonics is the best way to teach reading? Simple, as soon as your child's auditory processing is at a level to handle phonics, you go back to that approach. In the meantime, your child can develop a really good sight word vocabulary and will feel encouraged by a new ability to read words. The best of both worlds is now achieved! Your child has a head-start on identifying a word immediately and then will master an ability to decode other words phonically.