THREE PEAKS

A member of Ambleside Schools International

Supporting Learning

A Parents Guide to Supporting Reading, Mathematics, and Narration



Supporting Learning

"Children will naturally delight in the feast of great ideas set before them. They will savour them and grow in the ability to enjoy and celebrate their relations with persons, ideas and creation. But they will also at times struggle. We consider the struggle to be as essential to the learning process as the delight. Children must learn to labour with problems not yet grasped, to remain on task when uncertain of the outcome, to struggle to completion when mind and hand are tired, to experience the rewards and negative consequences of their actions. There will be no growth in character without the struggle."

— Bill St. Cyr, Ambleside Schools International

This booklet covers the three areas where your support at home makes the greatest difference: reading, mathematics and narration.

Each section helps you better understand:

- what mastery of the subject actually requires
- what your child is working towards at their stage
- the habits to strengthen at home

Part One: The ground we stand on

Respecting your child's thinking

Charlotte Mason believed that children are capable of making connections with knowledge independently. Teachers and parents should avoid interrupting with constant explanations or correcting every detail. Children should be given time to think and articulate ideas in their own words.

Creating a supportive atmosphere

Before reading, mathematics, or narration exercises, showing your child that you are fully present and interested in what they want to share with you strengthens your child's sense of belonging and value. Their brain is more responsive and they can access ideas more freely.

*** A Word about Practice**

In areas of music and sport, practising skill and technique is expected at least three to four times. But there is a sense that consistent practice is not often considered as a method for academic growth. There are students who naturally gain access to learning a skill or content knowledge and some who do not. When a student is weak academically, one assumes something is wrong cognitively; this may or may not be true. Before moving towards a professional evaluation, begin with practice 4-5 times a week for 20-30 minutes. The important point about practice is to begin practice now and continue practicing for several months, communicating consistently with the classroom teacher.

Part Two: Phonics and Reading

Reading through phonics (sounds) is the foundation of literacy. Phonics teaches the relationship between letters and the sounds they represent, enabling children to decode unfamiliar words, read with increasing fluency, and develop accurate spelling. As these skills become automatic, children are able to focus less on working out words and more on understanding, enjoying, and thinking critically about what they read.

Mastery of reading requires three things:

- secure knowledge of letter–sound correspondences
- the ability to blend sounds to read words and segment words to spell them
- regular practice applying these skills in meaningful reading episodes*

Once these foundations are firmly established, children can become confident, fluent readers who are equipped for lifelong learning.

** A reading episode is a single sitting with a book: short, unhurried and complete in itself.*

Phonics and Reading Through the Grades

Grade R–3

Children begin developing their phonological awareness, identifying that each phonogram* is associated with a particular sound. They learn to blend these sounds into words, decode unfamiliar words and read with increasing fluency. Phonemic awareness, sight word knowledge and decoding skills are important by the end of this stage.

** A phonogram is a letter or group of letters representing a single sound — such as sh, ai or igh.*

Grade 3

As children recognise a wide range of words more freely, they start to read with greater fluency and confidence. They shift from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*, using their growing vocabulary and comprehension skills to understand increasingly complex texts, make connections, and think critically about what they read.

Grade 4–7

Older children read literature from a variety of time periods, with differing writing styles, slang, and accents. They now read with increasing fluency and understanding, engaging with a broad array of ideas and more complex language. Through regular reading of quality literature, they continue to expand their vocabulary, deepen their comprehension, and develop the ability to analyse, discuss and appreciate a wide range of texts.

Strengthening Habits Necessary for Phonics and Reading

Reading books together is a simple and lovely way to form family bonds around good ideas. And the more enjoyable those read-aloud experiences are, the more they will cultivate that sense of enjoyment in reading. Reading however takes consistent practice and sustained effort. Practice developing the following habits at home.

Read Beside your Child

The habit of companionship. For children who are still sounding out words, your companionship is one of the greatest supports you can offer.

- **Read together**, with you reading just a little louder and slightly faster than your child. Your steady pace provides a model of fluent reading while allowing your child to participate with confidence.
- **Take turns reading** by alternating paragraphs, pages, or short sections. Your child hears fluent reading while still carrying part of the responsibility.
- **Echo read** by reading one sentence or phrase with clear pronunciation, natural phrasing, and expression. Invite your child to read the very same sentence immediately afterwards, imitating your fluency and enunciation.

These simple practices help children hear what good reading sounds like while gently building confidence and independence.

Cultivate Beautiful Reading

The habit of care. As children begin reading most of the words independently, our attention shifts from simply recognising words to communicating meaning beautifully.

Encourage your child to:

- notice who is speaking and what emotion should be heard in the character's voice;
- read alongside you occasionally, matching your smooth and slightly quicker pace to develop fluency without rushing;
- pronounce every word carefully, paying close attention to endings and speaking with precision and clarity.

Reading should gradually sound less like decoding words and more like someone sharing a story.

Read Thoughtfully

The habit of attention. Competent readers are ready to engage more deeply with the text.

Invite them to become "reading detectives" by searching for:

- punctuation that shapes meaning;
- words with similar spelling patterns;
- unfamiliar vocabulary or interesting expressions.

Pause naturally during reading and ask thoughtful questions such as:

- *What do you think will happen next?*
- *Why do you think the character chose to do that?*
- *Have you ever felt the way this character feels?*

These conversations help children move beyond reading words to understanding ideas.

Reading as a Gift to Others

The habit of expression. Encourage your child to read aloud as though they are giving the story to someone else.

Whether reading to a younger sibling, grandparent, or friend, encourage them to:

- speak clearly;
- read with sufficient volume;
- use expression that reflects the meaning of the passage;
- occasionally lift their eyes from the page to connect with their listener.

Reading then becomes an act of communication rather than simply saying words correctly.

Questions for Reflection

- Do our reading times cultivate peace, delight, and attentiveness?
- Do I allow my child sufficient time to think and persevere before stepping in?
- Am I modelling beautiful reading through my own pace, expression, and enjoyment?
- Are our conversations about books helping my child form relationships with ideas, characters, and language?
- How can our family make reading together a daily habit that nourishes both mind and heart?

Part Three: Mathematics

Mathematics is a field of knowledge concerned with abstract concepts such as numbers, geometric shapes, sets, functions, and measurement. It uses logical reasoning and proof to study and establish their properties, often expressed as algorithms, formulas, and equations. Mathematics is used to model and solve problems in science, engineering, technology, economics, and everyday life.

Mastery of mathematics at any level requires three things:

- understanding and rapid recall of maths facts
- mastery of algorithms
- and a knowledge of 'why' things work the way they do

Mathematics Through the Grades

Grade R–2

Children learn to read, write and order numbers as they grasp basic place value. They begin to count, recognise shapes and carry out simple measurements. Early calculation is introduced using a variety of strategies. Memorisation and rapid recall of addition and subtraction maths facts is important by the end of this stage.

Grade 3-4

Children expand their understanding of 'number' to all four operations and a range of real-life word problems; moving from one-step to two-step problems. Fractions and decimals are introduced. Measurement is expanded to angles and time. Memorisation and rapid recall of multiplication tables is important by the end of this stage.

Grade 5–7

Older children begin to apply their mathematical skill and knowledge to an increasingly broad range of problems across the disciplines of number, measurement, geometry, fractions, ratio, algebra and problem-solving. New algorithms will be taught for each area of learning, which need to be committed to memory.

Strengthening Habits Necessary for Mathematics

Mathematics is a subject which requires a high level of discipline and attention. Mastery is gained through hard work and by patiently building one skill upon another. There are no short cuts. Focusing on developing the following habits in your child when you are practising at home is very important.

Create a focused environment

The habit of attention. Find a helpful time and place for daily maths practice. Ensure that everyone is comfortable and that there are no screens or distractions for you or your child. Keep the session short so that attention can be expected and maintained throughout.

Practise consistently and patiently

The habit of patience. Maths homework is often necessarily repetitive. Help your children to have patience for daily practice by creating a light atmosphere and finding new ways to practise the same facts. In addition, highlight each day how much they are learning so that they can see the value of their patience.

Actively check the work

The habit of accuracy. Encourage carefulness and active correction of errors:

- *Are you sure that is right?*
- *Have you checked that?*
- *Can you spot your mistake?*
- *Try it again and see if you get the same answer.*

Learn from mistakes

The habit of accepting errors. Model discussion around errors without expressing frustration. This will also model patience. Remember that errors help children to understand the 'why'.

- *I'm not sure that's right, shall we have another go?*
- *Does that look right?*
- *Do you know why it wasn't right?*
- *What do you think you could do differently?*
- *Come, let's try together.*

Talk the maths through

The habit of reasoning. When a task is complete, it is good to reflect on one idea. This encourages a healthy relationship with the work and shows children that they have discovered something helpful.

- *Can you explain the maths problems?*
- *What methods can we use to find a solution?*
- *Are there any other methods you can think of?*
- *In the method you've chosen, what is your first step?*
- *Can you explain what steps you've followed to reach your solution?*
- *Does your solution look right when reflecting on the problem again?*
- *What is another way of asking this problem?*

Part Four: Narration

Narration is the act of reading or hearing a text just once and then retelling it in your own words.This practice helps students develop a habit of truly ‘getting to know’ what the author is saying. By expressing ideas in their own words, students actively process, organise, and internalise new knowledge and ideas, whilst encouraging mastery in attention, comprehension, reasoning, imagination, and communication.

Narration Through the Grades

Grade R–3

Children at this stage begin by narrating orally. They simply tell back fairy tales, fables, or short historical stories in their own words. Every child narrates to some degree, retelling what they did at school, how they enjoyed a particular occasion, or what happened at a friend's house.

Grade 3

As their oral skills strengthen, children begin written narration, in addition to oral narrations. After a text is read, children talk about what it was about. They then begin recording these retellings in written form.

Grade 4–7

Older children use written narrations in most of their subjects, such as literature, history, science, geography, and citizenship. These written narrations encourage the use of accurate grammar, different styles of writing, and appropriate structure.

Strengthening Habits Necessary for Narration

If the mind is to be active it must do the work of attending, reflective thinking, and expression through the act of narration. Developing habits that work towards helping a child fully attend to the text and truly seek to understand and know what the author is telling us, is essential to helping a child attain all that is theirs to know. When children struggle to recall events and stories, parents can help by encouraging the following habits:

Exciting his/her anticipation

The habit of attention. Before reading a text, trigger attention by talking about the title of the book, provided illustrations, or past episodes from the book. In doing so, you set the stage for what's to come.

Begin with shorter texts

The habit of mastery. Use texts that tell short stories or short descriptions of an event that took place. Gradually increase either complexity or length over time.

Prepare for focussed listening

The habit of active listening. To help direct your child's listening, ask one of the following questions:

- *Are you ready to hear what the author has to tell you?*
- *As we hear this story, listen to how the author describes …*
- *When I read this story, you will see how the author portrays a …*

Narrate (Tell Back)

The habit of accurate recall. After listening to the text, ask your child to tell you what the text was about. Without interrupting, show your child your interest through nods and gentle expressions appropriate to the text. Encourage further detail by asking:

- *What else or what next?*
- *Ask them to tell back from a specific part of the text.*

Encourage reflection

The habit of relating. Once you feel that your child has come to know the text, encourage a deeper relationship with the text with some of the following questions:

- *How might you have done things differently?*
- *What do you think would have happened if …?*
- *Compare how this character changed from the beginning to the end of this chapter.*

Part Five: Working together

What we do at school, and what you can do at home

	At school	At home
Reading	Systematic phonics instruction, guided reading, quality literature	Daily reading aloud together, echo and paired reading, conversation about books
Mathematics	New concepts and algorithms taught and practised, misconceptions addressed	Short, regular practice of facts already taught; calm handling of error
Narration	Daily narration across subjects, written and oral	Engage in conversation, after daily literature reading, ask your child to tell that section back to you

Three things to do this week

1. **Choose one time and one place.** Twenty to thirty minutes of good practice, screens away, the same slot most days. Consistency matters far more than duration.

2. **Read aloud together tonight.** No preparation, no assessment. Just the two of you and a good book.

3. **Ask for one narration.** Read a short passage once, ask what it was about and say nothing until your child has finished.