



25 fun and free activities
that will develop your
child's reading without
opening a single book!



Readingmate

A habit of endless possibilities

"Reading is not exclusive to books just as learning isn't limited to the classroom."

- Readingmate



Our world is filled with opportunities to develop your child's literacy skills. Every shopping trip, cake baked and bath-time is the chance to develop your child's reading.

I've put together a rich range of activities that combine reading, writing, speech and language and literacy skills in a fun and interactive way.

You'll be able to incorporate these into your daily routines without your children suspecting a thing.

Just like that secret veg you sneak into the spag bol, these tasks can be carried out completely undetected.



"Books shouldn't be daunting, they should be funny, exciting and wonderful; and learning to be a reader gives a terrific advantage."

- Roald Dahl

I've included a rough age rating for each activity. But all of these tasks can be adaptable and appropriate for any age.

You know what your child's capable of better than anyone. Feel free to chop and change things to fit your child's needs.

These activities involve very little resources, time or effort. Let's get started!



25 book-free activities to inspire reading:

1. Say what you see (age 2+) – As you get dinner ready, talk to your child about things that are happening. For example, when they "help" by taking out all the pots and pans, talk about them. "Which one is the biggest?" "Can you find a lid for that one?" "What colour is this one?"

2. Talk about your surroundings (age 3+) – When walking down the street and your toddler stops to collect leaves, ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer. "Which leaves are the same?" "Which leaves are different?" "What else grows on trees?"



3. What if questions (age 3+) – Ask "what if" questions to develop your child's curiosity and imagination. "What would happen if we didn't shovel the snow?" "What if that butterfly lands on your nose?"

4. Speaking lists (age 3+) – Have your child watch you write when you make a shopping list or a "what to do" list. Say the words aloud as you write them.

5. Making lists (age 3+) – Your child may organically want to copy you as you're making a list. Have paper and a pencil at the ready so they can copy. And help your child form the letters and spell the words to build confidence.



"There are many little ways to enlarge your world. Love of books is the best of all."

— Jacqueline Kennedy

6. Chalkboards (age 3+) - Use a chalkboard or a family message board as an exciting way to involve children in writing with a purpose. They could write plans for the day, menus for the week or even just messages to each other.

7. Resources at the ready (all) - Keep supplies of paper, pencils, crayons, and the like within easy reach. If and when your child is feeling inspired, they can get started straight away!

8. Journaling (age 4+) - Create a journal with your child about a recent trip or family adventure. Doesn't have to be anything exotic! Recording the day's events and including drawings or photographs into the journal ties the family story to a written record. You can include everyday trips like going to the supermarket or the park.

9. Family storytelling (age 4+) - It helps for children to know that stories come from real people and are about real events. When children listen to stories, they hear the voice of the storyteller. This helps them hear how words are formed which will translate brilliantly when they learn to read aloud or read silently.

10. Love notes (age 4+) - Send your child little notes (by putting them in a pocket or lunch box, for example). When your child shows you the note, encourage them to read it or if they're struggling (I know lots of my students struggle to read my handwriting) you can read it aloud with expression.





11. Illustrating a story (age 4+) – Using a fairy tale, short story or nursery rhyme to read with your child and ask your child to illustrate a part of the story he or she likes best or draw a favourite character. You could then get them to describe what they've drawn to you.

12. Putting the shopping away (age 5+)

– After braving the supermarket, get your child to help you put items away. Ask for particular items and get them to find and say them back to you as you put them away. Get them to describe where each item lives and why it needs to be there (e.g. ice cream in the freezer to stop it melting).

13. Get your cook on (age 5+) – Have a look through some recipes with your child a recipe and get them to choose something to cook. Ask your child to read the recipe to you as you work and tell the child that each step must be done in a special order. Let your child help mix the ingredients. Allow your child to write down other recipes from the cookbook that he or she would like to help make.

14. Dictionary building (age 5+) –

Encourage your child to make a dictionary by putting together several sheets of paper for a booklet. Ask your child to write at the top of each page a new word he or she has recently learned. If the word can be shown in a picture, have him or her look through magazines and newspapers to find pictures that illustrate the words and paste them on the correct pages. Have your child write the meaning of each word and a sentence using each new word. Your child can then use some or all of these sentences as the basis for a creative story. Have your child read this story to you and other family members.

15. The power of telly (age 4+) –

Yes, you better believe it. TV can be used to develop literacy skills (in moderation). Ask your child to tell you about favourite TV characters using different kinds of words (e.g. Peppa Pig is pink and funny). You could also ask your child to name 10 of their favourite shows, put them into categories according to the type of show they are, such as family shows, cartoons, situation comedies, sports, science fiction, or news and information. If you find the selection is not varied enough, you might suggest a few others that would broaden experiences.

"Reading is a discount ticket to everywhere."

– Mary Schmich



"She read books as one would breathe air, to fill up and live."

- Annie Dillard

16. Treasure hunt (age 4+) – This can be done from the comfort of your own home or garden. Make up a treasure hunt for a small surprise. Use a series of written or picture clues help them find the 'treasure'. If you think they're playing too much with one toy/iPad, you could hide that up and get them to find it!

17. League tables (age 6+) – If your child is sports mad, this one's for you! Pick a team or an athlete to follow throughout a season, get a schedule of games or events and then watch for stories in the media. Read the news together and record the scores or make up a scrapbook and include interesting articles, photos etc.

18. Dining out (age 6+) – Whether it's a meal in a restaurant or a takeaway, give your child the opportunity to read menus to choose what they want to order.



19. Keep on rhyming (from birth) – It's not the easiest but if you fancy yourself as a bit of a poet or read books with rhyme, repeat them whenever you can. Use phrases like 'snug as a bug in a rug' or make up rhymes about things you're doing – for example, 'putting fish in the cat's dish'. It might seem silly at the time but listening to the connections in these sounds will really develop your child's phonics.

20. Out and about (from birth) – Whether it's a stroll in the park or you weekly shop, talk about objects outside the house – for example, the rustling of leaves, or the sounds of the birds or traffic. Ask your child to make the sounds for wind, rain, water, airplanes, trains and cars



"That's the thing about books. They let you travel without moving your feet."

- Jhumpa Lahiri

21. I spy (age 3+) – This can get very competitive and players but playing games like 'I spy' using colours, shapes or letters is great for toddlers. For example, 'I spy with my little eye, something that's green. What's something green I might be looking at?'

22. Household collage (age 3+) – Using items around the home, get your child to cut out or draw pictures of basic household items – chair, table, TV, wall, door and so on – then write the items' names on separate pieces of paper. Ask your child to match the name of the item to the picture.

23. 'Writing' in cards (age 3+) – This is a good one to do after you've written your own message to make sure there's enough room. Encourage your child to add a scribble or drawing on birthday cards or letters.



24. Back to the future (age 4+) –

Discussing future plans/trips/holidays can be a great way for you and your child to have a discussion about what you will do, what you'll need etc. This is a great opportunity for your child to have something to look forward to but also to develop their conversational skills.

25. Following instructions (age 4+) - Give your child simple instructions to follow and ask your child to repeat the instructions back to you. Gradually increase the number of steps based on how many your child can follow. For example, 'Go to your room. Get your hairbrush and a towel'.



"Once your child has a sound foundation of literacy skills, they'll feel confident, comforted and calm when opening a book."

- Readingmate

To get your child to be a reader, they should feel joy whilst doing any activity associated with it. Doing any combination of these activities will get your child confident all aspects of reading, including, phonics, speaking and listening and writing.

I've developed these tasks so that you can integrate them easily into your daily schedule. There's enough for you to do without me adding to it.

From the songs you sing in the car to the conversations over cereal bowls, every single thing is rooted in their ability to read.



"There are perhaps no days of our childhood we lived so fully as those we spent with a favourite book."

- Marcel Proust