

Finding the right book is easy



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A parent asks, "How do I find the right books for my child?" Like selecting shoes for a child, getting the right "fit" is crucial.

Shoes that are too big are like books that are too difficult, the child stumbles and gets frustrated. Similarly, tight, too small shoes resemble "baby" books that fail to challenge and allow ample room for the reader to grow.

One method of fitting books to a child is the "Five Finger" method. The procedure is relatively simple.

Let the child pick a book based on his/her interests. Ask a librarian for a list of award-winning books. Then, the parent selects and counts out one 100 word passage from the chosen book.

Next, have the child read the same selection aloud as the parent observes and notes any mistakes. Each time the child makes an error, the parent holds up a finger.

For example, if the child reads "shop" for "chop" that would be an error. If the parent holds up more than five fingers, then the book may be the wrong fit - too difficult. However, a text that is too hard may be used to "stretch" a child to try something hard and to learn new, interesting and challenging concepts.

If no fingers are showing, the child made less than five errors. It may be too easy. Sometimes though, reading an easy book can build a child's confidence and fluency (speed and accuracy).

Generally speaking, for a book to fit the child comfortably, the child should have about 95 percent accuracy in oral reading. That is, no more than one error should be made for each 20 running words. However, your child just saying the words correctly is not enough. Check comprehension by asking the child to retell what has been read.

An easier approach is simply to ask your child to read aloud a book and listen carefully. Does the child struggle to read hesitantly? Are there too many difficult words? Can the child remember what is read?

Finally, ask your child's teacher what level your child reads on and know his/her interests. Many schools use the Lexile framework to determine reading levels. A Lexile level is measure that matches the level of the book to the level of the reader. The Lexile scale ranges from 200L for a beginning reader to 1700L for an advanced text. For example your third grader would benefit from books 300L to 500L. Go to www.lexile.com for more information. Ask the librarian for books on your child's level. Fitting the child with the right book makes learning fun and easy.

