



## Reading: The Montessori Way

The life of the spirit prepares the dynamic power for daily life, and, on its side, daily life encourages thought by means of ordinary work.

Maria Montessori

Children don't just learn to read. They learn to love reading.

The goal of reading instruction is not just to teach a child to decode a word or a series of words. Instead, the goal of reading instruction should be to teach children to read and understand what they are reading. It would seem then, that phonetic instruction is only part of the picture in teaching children to read. There are a variety of skills and strategies that must be taught to help children become proficient readers. In addition to teaching the sounds, letters and groups of sounds we make, we must teach the strategies that make us good readers and that good readers use.

-  Children learn to read by reading
-  Children need a variety of books and materials that they can read.
-  Reading should be a positive experience for children always.
-  It is not the words that are important, but the thought process required to figure out the new words.
-  Reading is very personal. Children will naturally search for things that are meaningful to them.
-  Writing and reading are complimentary processes. What is learned in one area makes it easier to learn in the other.

Montessori Sensorial and Practical Life material support the reading process and prepare your child for writing and reading.

Sensorial exercises introduce the concepts of comparing and contrasting shapes, sizes, textures, colors and ideas. Also, the gradation of concepts and colors are practiced. For example: The pink tower teaches comparisons of size and shape, and gradation of size.

Practical Life Activities are a great stepping stone for further learning. These activities develop early writing skills by practicing the writing motion in different skills, such as scooping, pouring, washing, etc. A child learns to master his or her environment by learning skills for independence, and mastery of these skills paves the way to intellectual learning. Completion of practical life skills seems to put a longing for intellectual learning for young children.

# Overview of the Montessori Reading Program

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The Montessori reading curriculum has three essential components: A strong foundation in phonics, comprehension based on visualization, and whole language, or learning to read for meaning and using context clues.

Montessori reading is based on a strong foundation of phonics. This multi-sensory approach is unique in that it has children building words (encoding) before reading them (decoding). Developmentally appropriate activities allow children to build their own understanding of how sounds are represented by symbols, and these symbols are joined together to form words.

In the Montessori classroom, by the age of 4, children are developmentally ready and eager to begin the preparation for reading. Along with learning the sounds and tracing their symbols with the sandpaper letters, students simultaneously learn to hold a pencil and control its use with the insets for design.

When children have learned the phonetic sounds, they are ready to begin word building with the moveable alphabet. They begin by building two or three letter phonetic words (those in which all the letters make their most common sound, like dog, pig, ram, bat, etc.). To allow the children to work independently, they are given small phonetic objects which represent the words they are to build. Later, pictures of phonetic words can be introduced for variety and additional practice in word building.

After the child has mastered two and three letter word building, he or she can begin matching reading cards with the objects and later pictures, and begin working on building four or more letter phonetic words. After these are mastered, the child can match four or more letter words with corresponding objects and pictures, in a variety of formats.

Now the child can begin to read phonetic phrases and sentences, and match them with pictures. Specially prepared phonetic books are then introduced.

The key to comprehension is visualization, and in the Montessori approach to reading, children have lots of practice developing this skill. Visualization is an essential component of the grammar activities where an understanding of the function of words is developed using manipulative activities. Working with these activities gives children further practice in reading and comprehension through visualization.

It is only after children have mastered the phonetic sounds of letters, that they are introduced to the phonograms, sounds represented by combinations of letters like "sh" and "ph", long vowel sounds, and other less common pronunciations of letters. Once the teacher has introduced a new sound, the children can work independently to master the sound in words.

After mastering the phonograms, children's interest will lead them to read any book they wish. We strive with young children to give them beautifully illustrated books about the real world. There are also many reading activities related to science, geography, history and many other topics of special interest, as well as further experiential grammar activities, which the children greatly enjoy.

## Montessori Language and Literacy Curriculum: Ages 3-6

Early literacy skills are those skills deemed requisite to acquisition including expanding vocabulary and language, concepts of print, phonemic awareness, demonstrating awareness, knowledge of letters, and comprehending stories. Early literacy begins when young children begin to use oral language. The early childhood up until about age eight is often a window for learning early literacy. It is important for children to acquire literacy skills during this window of opportunities. According to early education theorist, Piaget, language represents a verbal pattern that follows a chain of actions and that thought through language represents elements of structure. In other words, language is a notation for a system cognitive instruments including classifications and relationships. Piaget also stressed that the environment of the child, the communication opportunities and the experiences that take place can shape the development of the child.

The following is a carefully graded Montessori methodology of early literacy skills acquisition:

-  Insets for Design, Sandpaper Letters and Large Moveable Alphabet (LMA) for motor movement.
-  Three –Letter phonics sounds which is the Pink Series comprising of matching, reading of sight words, phrases and sentences and Reading Books.
-  Early grammar includes Noun and Verb.
-  Four or more letters phonics blending which is the Blue Series involving matching, reading of word list, sight words, phrases and sentences and Reading Books.
-  Early grammar includes Noun extension, Adjective, Verb extension, Themes, as well as Singular and Plural.
-  Four or more letters phonograms and diagraphs which is the Green Series involving matching, reading of word list, sight words, phrases and sentences and Reading Books.
-  Later grammar includes Nouns, Adjectives, Verbs, Noun & Adjective game, Singular/Plural, Prepositions and Theme Box.
-  Early Writing

The mechanism of writing involves two distinct aspects – the motor mechanism which depends upon motor training, the work of the intellect and creativity. Montessori further explains that the movements involved in writing fall into two distinct activities. Firstly, is the management of the writing instrument. Secondly, is the drawing of the shapes of letters of the alphabets.

To prepare the child for writing Montessori advocates indirect preparation through the following developmental exercises; using Sensorial materials for moving the hand in a left/right orientation, using Sensorial material for fine motor control of the thumb, index and third finger i.e. the three fingers that will control a pencil, using Sensorial material to develop a lightness of touch and a tactile sensibility and using Sensorial material where the child traces with his fingers the outlines of the geometric shapes, thus experiencing movements that are similar to the movements he will make when writing letters, e.g. horizontal, vertical, oblique, clockwise and anti-clockwise circles.

To prepare the child more directly, Montessori introduced the following exercises;

-  Filling in the figures of the Insets for Design with controlled lines.
-  Tracing the Sandpaper Letters in the writing direction.
-  Composing words with the Large Moveable Alphabet. (LMA)
-  The Montessori teacher is patient, to wait until the child begins to write before giving him/her controlled writing exercises, such as copying or tracing letters.

### Montessori Language: Ages 6-12

In the lower elementary Montessori classroom, students begin to analyze more abstract concepts of language: the how, the why, and the from where? Montessori elementary students explore the history of language, written language, spoken language, literature and grammar, and syntax.

The Montessori Fourth Great Lesson is the story of how writing began. This impressionistic story grabs the attention of young students who are eager to learn about those who came before us. From there, they listen to and read great literature and are further motivated to tell their own stories through creative writing, reports, drama, poetry, and song.

Throughout this work, Montessori students are introduced to the rules of human communication through word studies, work with the Montessori Grammar Boxes, as well as beginning logical sentence analysis. The goal in the Montessori elementary Language curriculum is not to teach grammar but to give a concrete representation and foster a love of the function of words.

Dr. Montessori described the role of language in traditional education as forcing children speak and write when they have nothing to say. She said instead, that "The child must create his interior life before he can express anything; he must take spontaneously from the external world constructive material to 'compose'; he must exercise his intelligence fully before he can be ready to find the logical connection between things. We ought to offer the child that which is necessary for their internal life and leave them free to produce." (Spontaneous Activity in Education). By unlimited exposure in the Montessori environment, the child's mind is free to use a creative and imaginative process, giving them the means to write and tell their own story.