

Learning the letters phonetically and starting to read:

When children are having fun and their imaginations are stimulated they are keen to learn and will do so with amazing speed. Learning letters and numbers can be a dull and lengthy process but in learning them by association, or creating a game out of it, you will be amazed at both the fun that can be had and how much your child can achieve, in a small period of time. Don't hold back, get involved and be as animated as possible. The children never forget silly six, especially if you try and put your head on the floor and kick your legs up! Start with just a few letters written on cards and after showing your child what they are; ask them if they can find them. Once they can confidently find the letter, move on to holding up the card and asking them what it is. This is explained in more depth below;

Montessori learning is based on these three steps:

Step one: Naming

Introduce each letter/ number to the child, starting with just a few letters at a time. For example hold up one card and say this is the h for hill, down the slide and up the h, h, hill (preferably while tracing over the letter to demonstrate going down and then up and around). Tell the child about how when they are walking up the hill they get out of breath and start to say huh huh huh as they pant, while also tracing over the letter with your finger. Encourage the child to repeat this, saying h and tracing over the letter.

It is a good idea to group letters together according to similarities in the way in which they are written :

c, o, *a*, d, g all have a curly c hidden inside them and we start with writing the curly c first and then add something to make it into a new letter.

l, b, h, k, p, t all start with a line, so they are best grouped together

m,n, r start with a little curl and then down and back up the same way, so put them together.

Step Two: Association/Recognition

In this step, the child is called upon to show you the appropriate item or card. You should not indicate which answer is correct. Simply say, "Show me the h h for hill" and then wait for them to find it.

After finding the card correctly, allow the child to again trace over the letter, as this will reinforce to them both the name of the letter, as well as the correct way to write it.

If the child does not get it right, tell them the name of the one they have chosen and give them another chance to find the one you have asked for. If they cannot find it, repeat step one and show it to them again, reinforcing the association.

Once the child is good at finding the letter with association, begin to ask them without it. Eg. "Where is the g". If they can't quite find it remind them by saying "g for...." Often they will be able to think of what it is associated with and this will help them find the letter.

Step 3: Recall

Once the child can find the letter you ask for without the need for associations, you are ready to test their recall. Now, you will point to the card or hold it up and ask, "What letter is this?" The child will need to recall the name. If he cannot, you may give them a hint by describing its association. Eg. "it looks like an apple doesn't it, what sound is that"

These three steps may not happen all at one time. A child may proceed through Step 1 and 2 and then not be able to complete Step 3. The next time you work with the material, they may be able to start right with Step 2 and move to Step 3. It is different for each child. Some will need to repeat the steps more than others. The need for repetition is important for mastery, and

should not be seen as something negative on the part of the child. Repetition not only perfects their skills, but also gives the child increased confidence in their abilities, while also strengthening the connections in their brain, allowing them to make these connections much faster.

Remember that the most important thing is that your child is having fun while they are learning. A positive attitude towards learning is by far, the most important thing that you can give your child. Always be patient and encouraging and they will reward you by continuously amazing you with how clever they are and just how fast they can learn new things.

Below is a list of associations we have given to each letter. Keep in mind that every child is different and that there may be a better association to help your child remember certain letters, such as the letter that their name starts with – have fun and be creative!

a for apple

b for baby – trace the first line down and say that it is the mum's *b*- back and then trace the circular part saying that she has a big *b*-belly with a *b*-baby in it.

c for curly – like the curls in your hair

d for drum – the round bit is the drum and the long part is the stick, when you hit the drum it makes *d d d* noises – pretend to bang on the drum making the *d d* sound

e for elephant – the big eye and the long trunk

f for frog to make the distinction between *t* and *f*, I say that the *f* has a frog's head on the top and then when you come to the bottom, you jump like a frog to make the line in the middle. You can also say that the frog has done a big jump and is flying so now he is frightened and is saying *f f f* frightened.

g for guh guh guh down the drain – the round drop of water goes *g g g* all the way down the drain

h for hill - down the slide and up the h h hill- you are so puffed out from climbing up the hill that you pant (hu hu hu)

i for itchy spot – the dot is an itchy spot

j for jumping jelly bean – j is bigger than itchy so it's a little itchy spot and a big jelly bean

k for kick – the leg is coming out to kick

l for lollypop stick

m for mountains – trace over the lines to show your finger 'walking up the mountain' or m for mummy is often popular

n for nose – you can fit your nose in it

o – when you say o your mouth makes an o – point to your mouth

p for puff the candle – with the Victorian Modern Cursive there is a *p* like this so we say there is a candle and then when you puff the candle out the smoke trails off

q for queen – she has her long dress on and it trails behind her

r for r r r says the little dog – it is a little dog with his ear out the back and mouth in front and he is saying r r r

s for snake – looks like a snake and the snake says sssss

t for tree

u for upside down umbrella (or an upside down n)

v for volcano – it's the volcano erupting

w for wet – it gets wet at the bottom of the w because the water can't get out or w for waves

x (ks), like when a naughty cat has come into your garden and you want to chase it away you say ks ks ks

y for yo-yo

z for zig zag zig– demonstrate how the z zig zags by tracing the letter with your finger

Avoid introducing capital letters and the names of the letters at this stage as it can be very confusing for the child until they have really mastered the lower case letters and sounds.

At the same time as learning letters your child can play 'I Spy' with you. This is done by placing a small collection of objects on the table in front of the child, all of which are spelt with three letters. You can then say to your child: I spy the c – a – t, can you find it? - Spelling out the object phonetically. Spell the word out for your child again until they can find the object for you.

Examples of ideal objects: box, cat, dog, cup, mug, pin, pot, hat, leg, top, pig

* You don't need objects, you can play it in your environment – can you find the b-i-n etc. You can also use picture books or sound out a few words every time you read a book to your child so that they can point to the picture of the word or guess it.

Once your child is able to make this connection and they know their letters – they can read!

* A Brain Gym activity, that helps to strengthen the connections in your child's brain and help them to associate the letters with the word it spells, is called Cross Crawling. This is done by the child lifting their left knee and reaching across and touching it with their right hand, followed by lifting their right knee and touching it with their left hand. If they cannot do it by themselves at first it is just as helpful for strengthening their connections if you help them by guiding their hands and legs. Repeating this exercise for several minutes a day can really help your child learn to read much faster. If my description confuses you go on Youtube and search for Brain Gym and Cross Crawl.

(Make it more fun by doing this along to some nice music)

You can give your child an extension now by making them worksheets with simple three letter words on the left side of the page and pictures of the word on the right side. Your child can then read the word and find the picture of it, drawing a line between the two.

Numbers:

One - hold up your forefinger to show them just one finger

Two - like a swan (trace over the number showing them a head the long neck and the body). If your child is not sure what a swan is show them pictures of swans on the computer or in picture books and compare them to a two

Three – curly curly three (trace over the three showing them how it is like two curls, show them the curls in your hair or theirs)

Four – while tracing over the number say “number four, shut the door” (chopping through the number is shut the door)

Five – we have five fingers on our hand (hold up your hand and then make a hook with your fingers and thumb and show that it is a hook like at the bottom of the five. It is also fun to give them a high five and if they are at all interested in pirates you can say that we have five fingers but instead Captain Hook has a hook.

Six – silly, silly six is standing on his head with his feet in the air (he is so silly isn't he)

Seven – number seven, straight straight to heaven (trace over the number showing how it is a straight line)

Eight – eight like a roller coaster (trace around the eight showing how it is like a roller coaster going around and around. If your child doesn't understand what a roller coaster is you can say it is like a crazy little dog, when you stand in the middle it runs around and around. Pretend that they are standing in the

middle of the eight and show them how the crazy little dog is so excited that it runs around and around).

Nine – Sensible number nine (number nine isn't like number six at all, he is very sensible. Number nine stands up nice and straight with his head in the air and his feet on the floor. Not like silly number six). *This is often a number that children get confused with six, so it is very good to accentuate the difference.