

Secondary Literacy Guide for Families

Families play a key role in helping children become lifelong readers!

The Secondary Family Literacy Guide was made with New Mexico families in mind. This guide aims to help families support their middle and high school children's reading and writing development at home. It explains important literacy skills needed to be college and career ready and provides simple literacy activities families can do with their children. The guide also provides questions for parents and caretakers to ask teachers to learn about their child's progress in school and partner together for their child's success.

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How to use the guide

Throughout the guide, you will see bolded and underlined terms typically used in educational reports and parent teacher conferences. To help build your understanding of this terminology and better equip you to navigate the education system, we provided a glossary at the end of the guide to define each word. If viewing this in a digital format, click the hyperlinked words to be taken to the glossary immediately.

To use the strategies listed in the guide, focus on one at a time and work with your child's teacher to determine which to start with. Once your child has mastered one strategy, you can gradually add others from the guide. Over time, these strategies will help build your child's literacy skills.

It's also important to choose appropriate texts (books, magazines, etc.) for your child's grade level when using these strategies. Using them with complex texts will help your child gain the necessary knowledge and skills for their grade-level work. For more information on choosing complex texts, please refer to the resource page at the end of the guide.

Partnering with your child's teacher

Your child's teachers are valuable resources for you to partner with as you work to build your child's literacy skills at home.

At this age, your children will have different teachers that teach each core subject area. Below are some ideas for how you can partner together with any of their teachers.

- Connect as early as possible with teachers to share your child's strengths and areas where you know your child will need support. Generally, schools have open houses and meet-the-teacher nights at the beginning of the year. Attend these if you can. If you cannot attend, reach out to the teacher and find a time that works for you both to meet.
- Ask your child's teachers if they have a classroom blog, website, or newsletter. If they do, sign yourself up to receive updates.
- Set up a family conference with your child's teachers to check their academic progress at least once a semester and ask what your child should be working on at home.
- Contact your child's teachers through email or phone calls to partner with them. If you want to work on something as a team, bring it to the teacher's attention. If a translator is needed, it is your right to ask for and receive translation services.



Fluency

Why is fluency important?

Fluency means reading with a natural speed, reading words accurately, and reading with appropriate expression or tone. This skill is important for children in this age range (11-18 years old) because fluent reading helps them understand and remember what they read. As children get older, they read more complex texts with rich stories and informative topics. Fluent readers have an easier time understanding complex texts because they have already mastered most of the words they are reading and can focus more time and energy on the content they are reading. In contrast, less fluent readers spend more of their time and energy on decoding (reading) words and struggle to understand the text's meaning. This makes for a slow and challenging process, causing frustration and dislike for reading. **Secondary** readers need well-developed fluency skills to avoid issues with reading comprehension.

What should your child be able to do?

In grades 6-8, your child should be able to:

- Automatically read (**decode**) and recognize words

- Group words into meaningful phrases or chunks
- Read with expression throughout the text
- Quickly self-correct word identification mistakes
- Understand and **synthesize** what they read
- (End of 6th grade) read about 185 words per minute *
- (End of 7th grade) read about 195 words per minute *
- (End 8th grade) read about 204 words per minute *

Represents silent **reading rates; oral reading rates will be slightly lower. What should your child be able to do?*

In grades 9-12, your child should be able to:

- Consistently read at a conversational pace
- Make few word identification mistakes, but quickly self-correct
- Understand increasingly complex text while making connections across concepts
- (End of 9th grade) read about 214 words per minute *
- (End of 10th grade) read about 224 words per minute *
- (End 11th grade) read about 237 words per minute *
- (End 12th grade) read about 250 words per minute *

**Represents silent reading rates; oral reading rates will be slightly lower*

How can you build reading fluency at home?

Modeled Reading

Modeling is a helpful strategy to improve your child's reading fluency. Modeling involves your child listening to fluent readers (teachers, parents, or peers) to learn how a reader can use their voice to help make sense of written text. For secondary students, one effective form of modeling is pairing printed versions of a book, text, or article with its audiobook version. Many audiobook resources, such as Whispersync for Voice, offer interactive reading where the text is highlighted while students listen and follow along.

When live modeling fluent reading, it is highly recommended to read shorter sections instead of whole books or passages. Shorter modeling sessions are better for holding your child's attention and improving knowledge **retention** and **comprehension** of what has been read.



Partner Reading

Partner reading is a research-proven strategy where a fluent reader partners with a less fluent reader. Both readers take turns reading a text aloud, and as the more fluent reader reads, their partner listens and takes note of the reading speed, accuracy, and expression. When the readers switch, the more fluent reader provides coaching, feedback, and support to their partner.

Example:

Parent: "I noticed you were a little unclear about the pronunciation of one word. The word is _____. Let's read the sentence with that word again together."

To make partner reading work better, readers should ask questions at the end of each section to make sure they understood what they read. Here are some example questions:

- *Can you tell me about what we just read?*
- *What did we just learn?*
- *Do you want to read any part again?*

Repeat Reading

Repeat reading means reading the same text or parts of it several times. It helps improve reading fluency and understanding. Secondary students can benefit from this strategy because their texts are often

difficult to understand with an initial read. To do repeat reading, your child should read the same part of a text (paragraph) 4-5 times out loud. Family members can listen, give feedback and praise. Your child's reading accuracy, speed, and expression will get better each time.

Quick Linguistic Tips!

It's an asset to be bilingual or multilingual in today's society. If parents or caretakers are fluent readers in a language other than English and have access to books written in their native language, use these to model fluent reading. Your child will benefit from hearing stories read to them in any language by fluent readers. If your child is also multilingual and understands the stories being read to them, ask them comprehension questions in their home language to gauge their understanding of the text. They can answer in whichever language they feel most comfortable. The important thing is that they show you that they understand the text and respond thoughtfully.

Bilingual books are also a great resource to use and can be found at public libraries, online, and at schools. Try reading these with your child to do modeled reading, partner reading, or repeat reading.



Background Knowledge & Vocabulary

Why are background knowledge and vocabulary important?

Background knowledge and vocabulary are crucial to language comprehension. Language comprehension is one of the components that help students comprehend when they read.

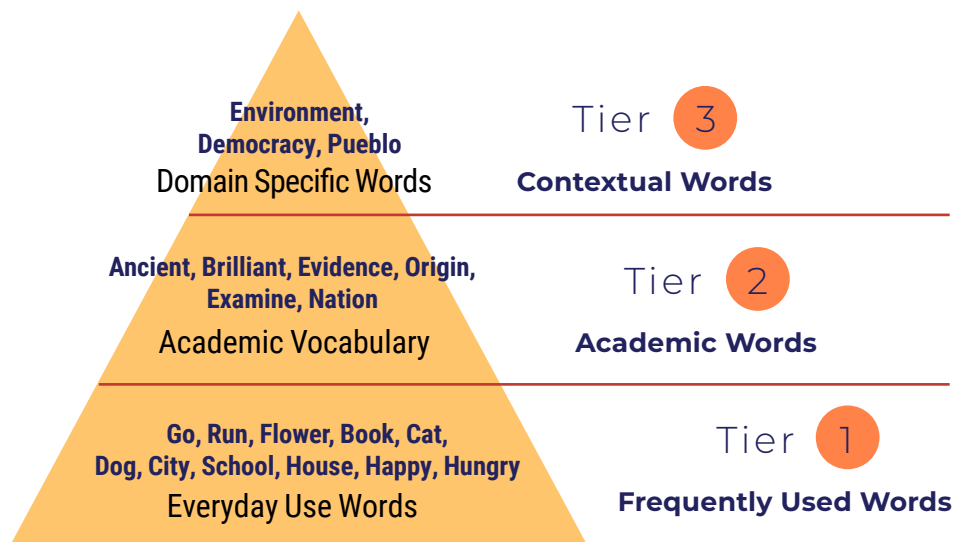
Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the words you know, understand, and use to communicate effectively. Secondary students need to understand the meaning of a word and how to use it correctly. Building vocabulary is necessary for secondary students to communicate well orally and in writing. A large vocabulary helps students understand what they read, especially in academic language and discussions.

A good vocabulary also helps students do better in school. Vocabulary is divided into two types: receptive and expressive. Receptive vocabulary is what we read or hear, while expressive vocabulary is what we can say.

Vocabulary words can be grouped into different tiers based on their usage:

- (Tier 1) Frequently used words are common words that we use every day.
- (Tier 2) Academic words are words that appear in many different places, such as books, newspapers, and magazines. These words are important for academic success.
- (Tier 3) Contextual words are words that are specific to a particular topic or subject. They are often technical or scientific terms like “molecule,” “tundra,” or “atom.” These words are important for understanding and communicating within a specific subject area.



Background Knowledge

Background knowledge or prior knowledge is what someone already knows about a particular subject or topic. Background knowledge is gained through repeated exposure, including lived experiences, online research, literary and informational texts, and verbal exchanges. Strong background knowledge helps secondary students analyze, process and explain their thoughts, making them more confident in understanding a topic. In addition, as secondary students build background knowledge on different subjects, they will find reading, remembering, and understanding academic texts easier.

What should your child be able to do?

In grades 6-12, your child should be able to:

- Determine the meaning of unknown words in text using word relationships, **context clues**, glossaries, or dictionaries
- Utilize **synonyms, antonyms**, and figures of speech to clarify the meaning of unknown words
- Differentiate between the meaning of similar words based on the context in which they are used (for example, strong-willed, willful, firm, tenacious, resolute) based on how they are used in context

- Practice using new words in the correct context (verbally and written)
- Show interest in new subjects, topics, or types of text
- Read multiple texts on a topic to build background knowledge
- Show new knowledge and interests in multiple forms, such as speaking and conversation, letters, journals, stories, reports, diagrams, or essays

How do you build background knowledge and vocabulary at home?

- Encourage your secondary students to read about varying subjects and topics. Allow them to read in different forms, such as books, magazines, and online articles.
- Take your children to cultural places like museums, galleries, and historical sites to learn about art, science, and historical events. If you can't go in person, try taking your children on a virtual tour. Some cultural sites offer free virtual tours through their websites.
- Watch educational shows together as a family. This is a great way to help your child think critically and see things from different

points of view. TED talks, documentaries, and sites like YouTube can all be helpful for learning and gaining new knowledge. After watching, you can discuss what you learned and share your thoughts with each other.

- Encourage your child to use newly learned words in their conversations and in their writing to help reinforce their understanding of the word's meaning. It's important to practice using new vocabulary in the right context to deepen their understanding and help them remember the word better.
- Use oral storytelling to build your child's knowledge about their culture, traditions, and heritage. This will help strengthen your child's pride in their identity while increasing their geographical, historical, and linguistic knowledge.

- As a family, play word games such as Scrabble, Boggle, or Bananagrams. These games help your child expand their vocabulary and improve their spelling.



Quick Linguistic Tips!

If your child is learning a new language at school, continue strengthening their maternal language at home by teaching them words in that language. Once children understand a word or concept in one language, they don't have to spend time building that knowledge or context in the new language, making learning the vocabulary in their second language even faster.

Building Comprehension through Writing & Discussion

Why is writing and discussion important?

Students in secondary education need to learn writing and discussion skills to develop critical thinking. These skills allow students to assess information, make decisions, and form opinions. Moreover, writing and discussion abilities can improve communication skills, including the ability to express thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively.

What should your child be able to do?

In grades 6-12, your child should be able to:

Writing

- Conduct research using different sources, including books, articles, and websites.
- Evaluate the credibility and reliability of research sources.
- Express thoughts and ideas clearly.
- Organize writing effectively by using appropriate vocabulary and maintaining a consistent tone.
- Write for different purposes, such as persuading, informing, and entertaining, and adjust their writing based on the intended audience.
- Write various types of essays, including informative, argumentative, and narrative, and use evidence to support their arguments effectively.
- Use proper grammar and punctuation in their writing with minimal errors that do not distract from the intended meaning.
- Identify and correct errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.



Discussion

- Analyze literature, such as books, poems, and plays, and discuss things like the story, characters, themes, and symbols.
- Analyze informational texts, such as articles, websites, and historical documents, to see if they're accurate and unbiased. Secondary students should know how to find trustworthy sources.
- Understand different perspectives. Secondary students should be able to discuss how different viewpoints affect how we understand a text.
- Connect texts to personal experiences. Secondary students should be able to talk about how ideas and themes are different in different books and types of writing.
- Analyze different media types, such as ads, news articles, and social media. Secondary students should be able to discuss how different media types affect people's thoughts and actions.

How do you build writing and discussion skills at home?

- Ask your child open-ended questions that require deeper, more thoughtful responses. Responding to these questions helps develop critical thinking skills and promotes deeper discussions.

Examples:

- *What personal connection do you have to this story?*
- *Why might the character feel that way and what evidence supports your thinking?*
- *How does the information you learned inform future decisions you will make?*

- Reading different types of books can help your secondary student become a better writer. Varied reading teaches them new words, grammar rules, and writing styles.
- Encourage your secondary student to journal about their personal experiences, what they are learning, and any research they have done. Frequent writing helps them think more critically and communicate their thoughts better.
- Ask questions that require your secondary student to think more deeply and give thoughtful answers. This type of questioning helps them develop critical thinking skills and improves their conversations.

Quick Linguistic Tips!

Students from multilingual homes can practice writing on the computer, either online or in a word processor. Parents or caretakers can use applications like **speechify** or **google translate** to check their students' writing in their preferred language and provide feedback to their students. When having discussions with your children, use whichever language you and your child are comfortable speaking. Listen to the quality of their responses and encourage them to provide evidence or rationale when they state their opinions about various topics.

Resource Page:

Additional Resources

The following resources are available to help you understand text complexity and its importance to your secondary students:

- [*The Who, What, and Why of Text Complexity*](#) - EL Education
- [*Choosing Complex Narrative Texts*](#) - NAEYC

The following resources are New Mexico Public Education Department's Early Literacy Guides for parents:

- NMPED Early Literacy Guide in English: [*PK-5 Early Literacy Guide English*](#)
- NMPED Early Literacy Guide in Spanish: [*PK-5 Early Literacy Guide Spanish*](#)

The resources below can be used to support your young adolescent's fluency development:

- Fluency Passages for Multilingual Learners: [*Fluency Passages*](#) from OERcommons.org
- Fluency Passages for all learners: [*9th-10th Grade Fluency Passages*](#) from Achievethecore.org

The resources below can be used to support multilingual learners at home:

- [*Reading strategies for multilingual homes*](#)
- [*Reading and writing strategies for multilingual homes*](#)

Glossary

Antonym: a word of opposite meaning

Comprehension: the understanding and correct interpretation of what is read.

Context Clues: hints found within a sentence, paragraph, or passage that a reader can use to understand the meanings of new or unfamiliar words

Decode: the process of translating printed language into speech by matching a letter or combination of letters to their sound.

Reading Rate: the number of words read per minute.

Retention: the process of storing information in the brain

Secondary Student: a term that refers to children ages 11 - 18 years old in middle or high school

Synonym: a word of the same meaning

Synthesize: the process of pulling together background knowledge, newly learned ideas, and connections into a complete and original understanding of a text or idea