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Ways to Teach Dictionary Skills

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Dictionaries are the first reference books we learn to use. *Dictionary Skills* are important because these skills transfer to the use of other reference books that students will use in the future to conduct research or find information. Mastery of the dictionary should be an important part of your child's language skills, particularly in the elementary years. A student with proficient dictionary skills will find it easy to eventually use a world of different reference materials as he/she transitions to middle school, high school, and college. Use the following activities to help your child become a master of the dictionary.

Alphabetizing Stack Attack! – Keeping in mind the age, grade level, and abilities of your child, use four decks of note cards with the following activity to teach and practice *alphabetizing*.

Deck 1 – Label cards with *words beginning with each letter of the alphabet*: apple, break, cat, dog, etc.

Deck 2 – Label cards with *words beginning with the same letter of the alphabet to practice alphabetizing with the second letter*: cat, center, city, couch, current, etc.; damp, dent, dill, doll, dull, etc.

Deck 3 – Label cards with *words beginning with the same two letters to practice alphabetizing with the third letter*: chap, chip, chop, chubby, etc.; defend, degree, delight, etc.

Deck 4 – Label cards with *words beginning with the same three letters to practice alphabetizing with the fourth letter*: fern, ferry, fertimize, etc.; read, rea, rear, reason, etc.

To Play: Beginning with Deck 1, shuffle some or all of the cards and have your child alphabetize them as quickly as possible. After mastering Deck 1, practice with subsequent decks until the child masters alphabetizing each one. Then shuffle a combination of two or more of the decks to increase alphabetizing difficulty.

As you work with each deck, help your child find a few of the words in a beginner's or elementary dictionary during each practice session. As your child finds a word, point to the guide words (the "tag" words at the top of the left and right pages that the target word falls in between alphabetically). If the entry word (the word you are looking for) is one of the guide words, point out that it is the first or last entry on the page. Then have your child find some of the words on his/her own. Have him/her show that the word fits alphabetically between the guide words to self-check.



Guide Words Gotcha! – Choose a dictionary page and point to the guide words. Choose three cards from different decks of the *Stack Attack* game and place the cards faceup on the table. Have your child choose which word will be found alphabetically between the guide words. Begin with having only one answer choice. Gradually present more cards and more than one answer choice.

Which Page, Pal? – Open a dictionary and point to the guide words at the top of each page. Present a card from one of the decks in *Stack Attack*. Have your child lay the card on the page of the dictionary where that word will be found. Then have your child scan the page for the word to check his/her answer. To increase difficulty, present a word that will not be found on either page. Then have your child tell you if, alphabetically, the word should come *before* the guide word(s) on the left page or on a page *after* the guide word(s) on the right page.



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Basic Proofing & Editing Super Fun Deck®
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