

Kinesthetic learning - the idea is that if they feel things with their bodies, then they retain the information better. (Learners come in different styles, but almost everyone can benefit by being more "hands-on" with their learning.) In particular, using the first finger of your hand to feel (and track) the letters, can help. The more resistance or "feel" there is, the more it connects.

When doing letters, you want the child to 1) feel the letter, 2) say the name of the letter, 3) give a word that starts with that letter, and 4) then say the sound of the letter (As they say the sound of the letter, have them underline the letter from left to right.) (A, apple, "a")

When doing words, you want the child to write the words on the medium (suggested below) - they can say each letter as they write it down if it doesn't confuse them. After they have the word written, then they should underline the word from left to write to help with the tracking.

Examples:

-practice words (letters) on sandpaper

-take a piece of needlepoint canvas, put a piece of paper over it, then write the words with a crayon. (It's a "bumpy" feeling.)

-write the letters of the alphabet on index cards with glue. Let them dry overnight. When practicing letters or spelling, have the child pick the letters from a "Letter rainbow" and then trace over them with her finger as she says each letter.

-purchase colored sand from a craft department (like Wal-Mart's). Pour the sand on a paper plate and have them do the letters/words as described above.

-use whipped cream from a can on waxed paper or a cookie sheet. Do the letters or words as described above

Tracking ideas:

-draw a red line down the side of all work pages or reading sheets. It forces the eyes to move back to the left side once they complete a line. (Like a typewriter when you move the carriage.) For books, you can make a long red book marker out of construction paper to put on the left margin.

-use a "line finder" card. This could be an index card or a cool bookmark. Put it below the words to keep them on track. If they have a problem with jumping to the line above, you may want to make a card that has only a line width available. If you think that the overlays help, you can make a line finder with that overlay color for the line size.

General letter/word awareness:

-play the letter game in the car or when you have spare unused time (like when you're in the doctor's office).

It works like this:

You say, "I'm see (or thinking of) a word (or object) that starts with the letter ____"

The child then tries to guess what that word is.

If they get it, they get to try to come up with something to stump you.

(We usually do it with an object we can see - either inside or outside - the car. That helps kids to focus and to learn new vocabulary as you call different items by different names. If you pass by something and you can't still see it - like a cow - you would declare that you can't see it anymore.)

If they get good at this, then try doing it with words that end with certain sounds.

-rhyme time. This is simple - just say a word and try to think of how many words they can think of in that "family." I.E. - cat, hat, mat, fat, rat, . . . If they come up with nonsense words that fit the pattern, that's okay - you can use that to teach, too. Compliment them on the great job or laugh at the funny word they made - then ask if it is real.

-The sign game. This is great when you are traveling. You give the child something (like a city name) to spell out. Give the child something with easy to find letters - like "Billings". Give yourself something with tougher letters to find or a much longer word - like "Philadelphia". Using the billboards on the road, see who can spot the letters of their word first. You can only use one letter per billboard. You may have to write the child's word down and they can cross off each letter they find.

Read rhyming books or books that have rhythmic language.

Dr. Seuss books are excellent.

Poetry books like Shel Silverstein's Where the Sidewalk Ends

There is a funny book by Dr. Seuss called I Am Not Going to Learn to Read Today. One of the characters says he won't learn to read, but he gets tricked into learning to read by having fun with letters and sounds. I've seen it in a workbook form - I bought mine from Wal-Mart years ago when my child was young. It's cute if you can find it.

The biggest thing is to have fun learning to read.