

Tips for Maintaining Academic Skills During Summer

By Gayla Peek

Each spring, as the end of the academic year approaches, parents begin to look for activities to help their children maintain academic skills and continue to progress in reading over the summer months. Here are some “tried and true” strategies I’ve gleaned from many years of teaching.

- If your child doesn’t yet have his/her **own library card**, now would be a good time to apply for one. Regular reading throughout the summer helps to maintain reading skills and build fluency.
- Ask your child to **read daily for 15-30 minutes**, depending on the age of the child. Provide a quiet environment and plenty of **self-selected books** from which to choose.
- When your child chooses a book to read by him/herself, use **the 5-Finger Rule** to gauge the difficulty level. Have your child open the prospective book at random to any page and begin reading. Hold up one finger each time he/she encounters an unknown or troublesome word. When the child finishes the page before holding up all 5 fingers on one hand, the book is probably a manageable reading level. If all 5 fingers are raised before reaching the bottom of the page, the book is likely to be frustratingly difficult for the child to read independently. If the child still wants to read the book, consider reading it aloud to him or her, or try it again later in the summer.
- **Revisit old favorite stories** as well as adding new ones.
- Provide **a mixture of easy and more challenging books**; it’s not fun to read difficult material all of the time.
- **Read aloud** to your children, even if they’re beyond elementary school age.
- **Participate in the local library’s summer reading incentive program.** The program at Pleasanton Public Library begins on June 12. The theme was still a secret when I called the library to inquire, but it’s guaranteed to be fun!
- **Set a goal** for summer reading—10-20 books would be a good start.
- **Keep a log of the books you’ve read** during the summer. It’s encouraging to see it grow longer.
- For teachers and parents, this book spotlights the effort to motivate young readers: *Miss Malarkey Leaves No Reader Behind*, by Judy Finchler and Kevin O’Malley.
- **Practice academic skills in non-traditional ways.** Here are a few suggestions:

Reading

- Form a **breakfast book club** with friends and their parents. Choose a book to read and share your thoughts over breakfast or snacks.

- Make **bookmarks or book jackets** to illustrate the stories you read.
- **Read magazines** as well as books this summer.
- **Ask questions about your reading.** Do you like the main character? Why or why not? Was the problem in the story solved? Did the main character remind you of anyone in real life? How is this book like another book you have read? How is it different? Was the ending satisfying? How would you have ended the book differently?
- Share your thoughts in a **letter to the author** of your book.
- Read **recipes** and cook this summer. This is a great way to practice both math (measurement, fractions) and reading skills.
- **Read aloud to younger siblings** this summer. If you don't have any younger sisters or brothers, read to a favorite stuffed animal or pet.

Writing

- Get a **pen pal** this summer. A pen pal need not be far away geographically. Write letter notes, postcards, email.
- Have a great time with **word games, Mad Libs, riddles, and word puzzles.**
- **Write new lyrics** to well-known tunes. Sing them to your family.
- **Write lists**—grocery list, daily chore list, directions.

Math

- Apply math skills to a practical project—**build** a simple birdhouse, shelf, or other collaborative project between adult and child.
- Plan and draw your dream house; use graph paper and **measure** the size of the rooms. Figure out square footage, etc.
- **Figure out how much it would cost** to re-carpet your bedroom, tile the bathroom floor, paint the living room, etc.
- Go grocery shopping; help with meal planning, estimate the cost of the groceries.
- **Graph** the number of pages or books you read each week. **Estimate** first.

It might be fun to follow some common summer themes. Here are some books about:

Books Written as Letters, Notes, Journal Entries

For Younger Readers:

A Letter to Amy, by Ezra Jack Keats
With Love, Little Red Hen, by Alma Flor Ada
Dear Peter Rabbit, by Alma Flor Ada
The Jolly Postman, or Other People's Letters, by Allan and Janet Ahlberg
Dear Mr. Blueberry, by Simon James
Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from Obedience School, by Mark Teague

For Older Readers:

Dear Mr. Henshaw, by Beverly Cleary

Amelia's Notebook, by Marissa Moss
Amelia Writes Again, by Marissa Moss
Regarding the Fountain, by Kate Klise and M. Sarah Klise
(others by the same authors, *Regarding the Trees*, *Regarding the Bathrooms*, *Regarding the Bees*, *Regarding the Sink*, and *Letters From Camp*)
Diary of a Wimpy Kid, by Jeff Kinney

Books About Baseball

For Younger Readers:

Baseball Saved Us, by Ken Mochizuki
Teammates, by Peter Golenbock

For Older Readers:

In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson, by Bette Lord
Honus and Me, *Jackie and Me*, *Satch and Me*, *Shoeless Joe and Me*, *Babe and Me*, and several other titles, all by Dan Gutman.

Books About Vacationing, Camping, Staying Overnight

For Younger Readers:

Arthur's Family Vacation, by Marc Brown
Strega Nona Takes a Vacation, by Tomie DePaola
Ira Sleeps Over, by Bernard Waber
Vacation Under the Volcano, by Mary Pope Osborne
Camping Out, A Shadow Story, by Lisa Allen and Julie Sharp
Curious George Goes Camping, by H. A. Rey
Amelia Bedelia Goes Camping, by Peggy Parish
Maisie Goes Camping, by Lucy Cousins

For Older Readers:

The Mouse and the Motorcycle, by Beverly Cleary
Runaway Ralph, by Beverly Cleary
Ralph S. Mouse, by Beverly Cleary
A Week in the Woods, by Andrew Clements
Letters From Camp, by Kate Klise and M. Sarah Klise
Camp Out: The Ultimate Kids' Guide, by Lynn Brunelle
Cooking on a Stick, by Linda White
Sleeping in a Sack, by Linda White
Cooking in a Can, by Kate White

Finally, these websites provide a wide variety of ideas and resources to keep your children reading and writing all summer and into the fall:

<http://www.readwritethink.org>--Sponsored by the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Verizon Foundation, this site is a valuable resource for students and parents.

<http://thinkfinity.org>--This site, sponsored by the Verizon Foundation, has as its goal to provide the highest quality resources for teachers, parents, and students.

<http://www.rif.org>--This organization, Reading Is Fundamental, is the nation's oldest and largest children's and families' non-profit literacy organization.

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