Tips for Reading Success
Your Hot Dots® Let’s Master Reading set offers structured question-and-answer activities designed to introduce and reinforce grade-specific reading skills. This tip sheet is designed to provide ways to supplement the learning in the set. Young children thrive in an environment where learning and play go hand-in-hand. The following hands-on activities will spark your child’s enthusiasm for learning and get them excited about reading.

Memory Match
This game not only reinforces letter concepts, but strengthens memory and problem-solving skills as well. To begin, have your child help you write letters on index cards (or construction paper) to make a set of uppercase letters and lowercase letters. Then, choose six letter pairs (12 cards in all), and lay them face down on a table. Let your child pick up two cards at a time to see if the letters match. If they do, have him or her place the cards to the side; if they don’t, return the cards face down to their original positions. Have your child continue picking up two cards at a time until all the letters are matched. Repeat with another set of cards.

Variations:
• Play the game with sets of rhyming words (such as cat and hat) instead. Your child can help you make the cards by writing words or drawing pictures.
• Play the game with pairs of words and pictures. Write words on the first set of cards (such as boy and house) and draw their matching pictures on the second set.

Hunt for Sounds
The ability to identify letters and discriminate the sounds associated with them is an important part of beginning reading. Here’s a fun scavenger hunt that will help you review letter sounds with your child. First, make a 26-page booklet by stapling 13 sheets of paper together. Write a letter of the alphabet on each page. Next, let your child hunt around the home for objects whose names begin with the various letters. When an item is found, have your child draw it on the corresponding page and label it. (For example, a lamp would be drawn on the page that features L.) For difficult letters such as x, write an appropriate word in the booklet (such as x-ray) and have your child draw the matching picture.

Variation: Instead of drawing pictures, let your child cut out pictures (from newspapers, magazines, flyers, and so on) and glue them into the booklet.

Crafty Letters
Your child will love practicing letter/word recognition with this activity. Simply replace traditional writing paper and pencil with craft materials and found objects. Then, let your child use the materials to form colorful letters and words. Here are some ideas to get you started:
• Make letters with different colors of modeling dough.
• String alphabet letter beads onto pipe cleaners to build words.
• Bend pipe cleaners to form letters and words.
• Write words in glue on paper and then sprinkle glitter on top to make letters that sparkle.
• Arrange toothpicks or craft sticks into letter shapes to make words.
• Glue small items (such as buttons, cereal, or pasta) onto cardstock to form the shapes of letters and words. (If your child needs help, write the letters on the cardstock first. Then have your child glue the items on top of your writing.)

I Spy
Review letter sounds and reinforce listening skills with this quick and easy guessing game. Begin by choosing an object in the room. (Do not tell your child what the object is.) Then give an “I Spy” clue that tells something about the object’s name, such as:
• I spy with my little eye something that begins with d. (doll)
• I spy with my little eye something that rhymes with bug. (rug)
• I spy with my little eye something that has the same beginning sound as pot. (pencil)
After giving the clue, let your child guess the object. If your child has trouble guessing, add additional clues, such as “I spy with my little eye something that begins with d and is sitting on a chair.” When the object is guessed correctly, give your child a turn at choosing the next object and giving the clues.

Phonics Tic-Tac-Toe
Add a fun twist to tic-tac-toe to reinforce phonics and spelling skills. First, draw a 3 x 3 grid on a sheet of paper. Get two different colored markers—one for you and one for your child. Next, choose a vowel sound, such as short u. Then take turns thinking of a word that has the vowel sound and writing it on the grid. If needed, help your child think of a word by giving clues (this is a bird that swims and quacks) or help him or her with the spelling and writing. The first player to write three words in a row wins.

Variation: Target different kinds of words, such as those that begin with blends (bl, cr, st, and so on) or digraphs (ch, sh, th, wh).

Flashcard Race
Recognizing words quickly and accurately is an important skill for developing reading fluency. This fast-paced game will help your child recognize words at a glance. First, choose eight or more words your child is learning. (Adapt the number to your child’s age and skill level; generally, the older the child, the more words you can review at one time.) The words can be phonics-based (for example, they all have the short a sound) or they can be sight words (words like the or have that do not follow conventional spelling patterns and can’t be sounded out). Place the cards face down on a table. Then say Go!, and have your child turn over the cards and read the words aloud. Have your child race to read all the cards in less than a minute. Play this game every so often to review words. As your child’s reading skills develop, increase the number of cards you use in the game.

Silly Sentences
This game lets your child create silly sentences that reinforce reading skills. Get three lunch bags, and label them 1, 2, and 3. Fill each bag with five flashcards that display the words shown below:

1
A boy
Two cats
I
A dog
The girl

2
washed
saw
found
licked
painted

3
a big cow.
three bugs.
a green turtle.
my sock.
an elephant.

Next, have your child draw a card from each bag and arrange them in order to make a sentence. Ask your child to read the sentence aloud. Repeat the procedure, and continue until your child has created five silly sentences. Then save the cards and bags so that you can play the game at a later time for a new combination of silly sentences. (Or, use the words above as a springboard for making other flashcards.)

Variation: Have your child write and illustrate the five sentences he or she made.

Photo Album Captions
The next time you have a set of family photos to put into a photo album, let your child help by writing or dictating the captions for each picture. Or, choose a few photos and have your child put them together and write about them to make a story about your family. Either way, your child will enjoy looking at the photos and reading the pages over and over again.
Read, Read, Read!

One of the best ways you can encourage children to enjoy books and reading is to spend time reading aloud to them. Here are some tips for making “read-aloud time” a special “you-and-me time” for both you and your child:

- **Set aside a time each day to read with your child.** Making reading a regular routine lets your child see that it’s an important family activity.

- **Choose a book that you and your child will both enjoy.** That means you’ll need to read it yourself before you introduce it to your child. Don’t select a book that you think is boring, because your child will be able to tell.

- **Find a cozy, comfortable place for reading.** Set out comfy cushions on the sofa. Get snuggly on your child’s bed. Make a tent by throwing a sheet over a table and sitting underneath with a flashlight. Spread out a blanket on the front porch or in the back yard. Whatever setting you choose, make reading time a special, intimate time with your child.

- **Read with expression.** Speak loudly or softly, quickly or slowly, depending on who is speaking/what is happening in the story. Use funny voices. And—don’t forget to add sound effects! Reading together should elicit smiles, giggles, oohs and ahhs from both you and your child.

- **Ask questions during the reading time to check comprehension.** When appropriate, discuss what is happening in the story. For example, point to a picture and ask your child to explain what is going on or to predict what might happen next. However, only ask questions when they seem natural. Sometimes, it’s better to read the story straight through without interrupting the flow; you can hold off on questions or comments until the end.

- **Explore a variety of topics and discover things together.** Reading opens doors to new worlds and exciting discoveries. Introduce your child to many kinds of reading materials (nature magazines, cultural stories, fairy tales, poetry books, how-to books, and more), and experience the joy of learning together.

Reading Chain

Children love to see how much they accomplish. A growing paper chain that keeps track of the books your child reads will motivate him or her to keep on reading. To make the chain, cut out 1½”x 8” strips of colored paper. Tape the ends of one strip to form the first “link,” and label it (child’s name)’s Reading Chain. Each time your child finishes a book (either by reading it alone or by having you read it to him/her), help write the title and author on a strip, along with the date when the book was read. Form a loop with the strip and tape it to the chain. Display the chain on the wall, under a window ledge, or other easy-to-reach place in the home. Your child will be thrilled to see how long the chain grows.