

## **Ways to Make Summer Learning Fun for Everyone**

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By now, we all know how important it is to keep students' academic skills up during the summer months. For all learners, it is crucial to prevent backsliding so review time at the beginning of the school year is minimized, and children feel more confident about their knowledge and can apply it to new concepts.

For many parents, the first step is to figure out how much support their children need over the summer. If very specific subjects have been identified by teachers or other academic professionals, and/or if your child have been diagnosed with a specific learning difference (such as dyslexia, ADHD, executive functioning issues, or other documented learning issue), it is usually a good idea to seek the help of a highly trained professional tutor for one-to-one tutoring or enroll your child in a small-group summer program designed to fit his or her needs.

For these types of kids, as well as those who just need to maintain what they've been taught and build on these skills, there are many different ways parents can support their kids at home or away on vacation, all while reconnecting as a family and having a good time.

Following are some easy, no-cost or inexpensive ways for parents to help their children maintain and build their skills during the summer:

### **For a Range of Ages**

**Cook together:** *skills involved = measurement, fractions, reading, sequencing, independence (especially for the college-bound child)*

Cooking is something you are likely to be doing anyway. By engaging your child in the process, you are creating a stronger bond as a family, while working on the skills listed above, and you get to eat the results of your labor together! It is a fun, tasty way to cover a lot of learning.

**Playing cards:** *skills involved = turn-taking, gracious winning/losing, following rules, basic math facts (and increasing speed)*

Examples of games to play include: for younger kids - Go Fish, Old Maid, for older kids - War, Spit, Nerts, One-Eyed Jack

**Board games with dice:** *skills involved = turn-taking, gracious winning/losing, reading, following rules, following directions, basic math facts (and increasing speed)*

Almost any board games you have will work. Just make sure you keep in mind the ages of your children and try to match the level of the game to what they can handle (for example, if you have an emergent reader, try to stick to games that have simple rules and directions so they don't become overwhelmed and frustrated).

In this age of technology, we sometimes forget about the basics; but the "oldies but goodies" really are great low-cost ways to maintain and build skills. Playing cards and board games with dice make math more tangible for children. The visual and tactile reinforcement of the basic math facts will help kids increase their automaticity with addition and subtraction, all while having fun.

**Read aloud to your child:** *skills involved = modeling good fluency and inflection, listening comprehension, fostering love of learning, critical thinking*

Nothing replaces reading aloud to your children. It is a wonderful way to reconnect, whether your child is not yet reading or is well into being an independent reader. It is especially important when your child struggles to read, but has interests that are well beyond his or her reading level. Pick books that are of high interest to your child, so he or she can engage his or her brain at the appropriate intellectual level regardless of his or her own personal reading level.

You can also read books together, where you read one page, your child reads the next, and so on. Make sure these books are at the reading level of your child for the best success.

Sharing the story and being able to discuss the characters, plot, setting, make predictions, and share opinions helps develop your child's critical thinking and comprehension skills. Look for facts and parts of the story that support your ideas specifically. Comparing the book version with the movie version for selected stories can also be a lot of fun. In general, it's best to try and read the story first, then see the movie, so the images are created in your child's head from the text first.

**Reader's Theater:** *skills involved = inference, memory, comprehension, reading, writing, spelling*

If your child really loves a particular book, you can encourage him or her to continue the story after the written text ends. What would happen to the characters next? How would you add to the story? Would the characters have a whole new adventure and meet new characters? If your child is reading and writing, he or she can write their own continuation. Maybe he or she would prefer to tell you the continuation and you write it down, and he or she can illustrate it. Perhaps your child loves plays and can create one to be performed by his or her

stuffed animals with your child providing all the different voices (or recruiting family members for different roles). Encourage your child to share his or her story with others, and praise their efforts with specific feedback.

### **For Younger Children**

**Rhyming games:** *skills involved = phonemic awareness (the sound/symbol relationship of letters) for the foundation for reading*

If you are taking a car ride or plane ride for a vacation, this is the perfect time to engage in rhyming games. You can make up your own limericks or short poems; have your child supply the word at the end that will rhyme what you already said. Stink Pink is a fun game that involves synonyms and equal word parts. For example, you say, “This is a Stink Pink (two rhyming one-syllable words)...a large feline (the answer is a Fat Cat). As your child becomes more confident, they can try coming up with one for you. As they get older or more sophisticated, you can increase the difficulty – a Stinky Pinky is a two-word, two-syllable answer, and so on. This type of game doesn’t cost anything or involve any pieces, but keeps the entire family’s brains active!

**Poetry and Nursery Rhymes:** *skills involved = phonemic awareness (the sound/symbol relationship of letters) for the foundation for reading, reading, reading fluency (automaticity and flow of reading), vocabulary development, contextual inference*

Poetry is useful and engaging for a range of ages. Starting early with young children helps develop their ear for rhyme, and the rhythm of good, fluent reading. Because poetry is often shorter (or looks shorter with its stanza format), it seems more approachable for early readers and those who struggle to read. It is also easier to read several times in one sitting to increase fluency. Poetry and nursery rhymes also help develop the ideas of imagery, analogies, similes, and metaphors. Nursery rhymes are memorable and are often accompanied by wonderfully colorful illustrations to help with contextual learning.

**Alphabet Road Signs or License Plate Alphabet:** *skills involved = alphabetizing, sequencing, spelling, reading, working memory*

Another no-cost activity for a car ride is Alphabet Road Signs. Simply explain that you will be looking at the road signs you pass, trying to find words that begin with or contain “A.” Once somebody finds that and announces it (that person should say what the word was if they are able to read), it is time to look for one with “B” and so on, until you’ve run through the whole alphabet in order. For nonreaders, you can do the same thing with pointing out the letters on license plates (this is getting harder these days with fewer states using letters and going to numbers only!).

## **For School-Aged Children**

**Games: Bananagrams, Scrabble, Boggle:** *skills involved = turn-taking, , gracious winning/losing, reading, following rules, following directions, spelling, vocabulary development, math (when totaling up points to see who wins)*

Many of these games come in travel versions and are easy to pack, or can be played at home. If your child does not like to be timed, Boggle can be played without the timer. All of these games can be fun for the entire family into adulthood.

**Mad Libs:** *skills involved = parts of speech, vocabulary, reading, writing, spelling*

Mad Libs have been around for awhile, but they are now available with themes that tie into television programs or movies children like, as well as specific subjects, such as Star Wars, Disney characters, etc. This makes them high interest and if your child is knowledgeable about the details of the Mad Lib, the nonsense nature of putting a random adjective into the story will be especially funny for them. To make this a learning tool, after you have read the silly version with your child's choices, be sure to discuss what would have been an appropriate adjective (or whatever part of speech indicated under each blank) if you had wanted the story to make sense. Take turns if your child is a reader.

**FlashMaster:** *skills involved = increased math facts fluency*

FlashMaster is a great tool for grade-school-aged kids who need to improve their automaticity with basic math facts (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division). It costs a little more than board games (about \$50) and can be ordered online by Googling FlashMaster. Parents do not have to be directly involved with this after the initial directions are explained, but it is important to check in with your child and have him or her show you what progress he or she is making. There are 9 different levels and several time settings, so kids can increase the difficulty gradually as they master each level (generally, a child should be in the 90 – 100% range before moving to the next level). Children enjoy challenging themselves with this simple support tool, and they get to see exactly which problems they need to work on. It is a lot more fun and interactive than the standard flash cards.

## **For Older Children**

**Books on Tape/Disc:** *skills involved = listening comprehension, critical thinking*

It can be more challenging to engage your older children in learning activities. If you are taking a trip, or even if you plan to sit on the beach or around the firepit this summer (with a portable disc player), this is an ideal time to listen to a book on tape or disc. If you are in the car, your child - and you – are the captive audience. You have the benefit of hearing the same thing at the same time. You can pause if somebody missed something, had a question, or if you want to discuss a part of the story. When you share this experience, you give your child an equal voice in a discussion, you give yourselves something to have in common and discuss over lunch or during your vacation, and you pull together as a family, even if you disagree over the selection.

This choice is particularly important if you have a child who struggles with traditional reading. If you listen together, you can also help your child build his or her written synopsis as a reminder when school is back in session and he or she is asked what he or she read over the summer and/or has to report on required reading.

By incorporating some of these enjoyable, easy, low-cost or no-cost activities into the summer, parents get a chance to see and understand what their kids know and how to help them grow. We already know it is important to slow down a little and take the time to be together as a family – these ideas help accomplish this, while maintaining and developing crucial literacy and numeracy skills, *and* having a great time!