

Especially for parents of preschoolers! 

Wired To Read

 *Literacy Learning Experiences*

Activities with computers can help children as young as 3 years of age build early language, reading, and writing skills.

What is the practice?

Research shows that by age 3, children's brains and muscle skills are developed enough for them to start using computers. Computer-based learning is one way that young children can develop their literacy and language skills. Children ages 3-5 who use computers, in addition to other activities off the computer, gain language, reading, and writing skills.

What does the practice look like?

Computer activities should match your child's age. They should let her play with words, sounds, or characters, try different activities, and discover new things. The software should have characters and topics that interest your child. The activities should match her age and her skill level. Research shows that children learn better from programs that let the child control the activities and make decisions. They should use clear instructions, and have many levels of difficulty. Your child should sit in a comfortable chair with the keyboard and mouse within easy reach. Keyboards made especially for young children have large keys. They also have color-coded command keys and features to make typing easier. They can be used in place of a traditional keyboard.



How do you do the practice?

When choosing software programs for preschool children, it is best to pick programs that let him work by himself. The programs should be realistic and use familiar objects and words. You can help your child use computers for gaining language and literacy skills:

- Use programs that have activities that interest your child.
- Place the computer within easy reach for him.
- Select a low-traffic and well-lit area for the computer, away from direct sunlight to avoid glare on the screen.
- Place the computer on a low table or cart at the appropriate height for your child.
- Keep software organized in some way. You can use a CD album, so that your child can easily flip through the disks and pick the one he wants.
- Provide several software choices with animated activities, sound effects, and characters that interest your child.
- Let your child help you with simple computer tasks, such as typing a word or using the mouse.

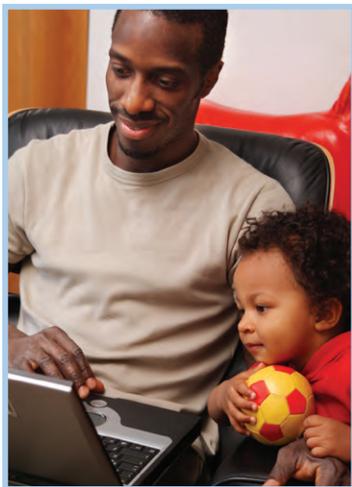
How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child spend time using the software programs?
 - Has his skill level improved?
 - Does he use more vocabulary or recognize more printed words?
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Take a look at more literacy and computers

Interest-Based Web Sites

Five-year-old Serena often spends time putting together new outfits on her dolls. Her mother noticed Serena's interest. She found a Web site for children on the Internet where they can create outfits for characters on the site. One day at the library, Serena's mother shows her the Web site on the library computer. She helps Serena use the computer mouse to explore the different activities. Serena chooses an activity that lets her pick different colors and styles for a girl character's clothes. "OK, first we have to name the girl!" says her mother, "What should it be?" Serena quickly gives the name of her favorite doll, "Dora." "Okay," says her mother. "Let's type that in the box." She helps Serena guide the mouse to the name box. "What letter comes first in 'D-D-Dora?'" asks her mother, emphasizing the first letter. "D is for Dora," says Serena as her eyes light up with recognition. "That's right!" says her mother. "Can you find the letter D on the keyboard?" She waits patiently for Serena to locate and press the key. "Great! You found it!" says her mother with enthusiasm. "Now let's figure out the next letter." She helps Serena identify and locate each letter in the name. Then she lets Serena take the lead in creating clothes for Dora.



Writing E-mail Together

Three-year-old Martin sees his father typing on his laptop computer. Dad reaches over and pulls Martin close. "I'm writing a letter to Aunt Corrie," he says. "Do you want to help me?" Martin eagerly nods. "Okay," says Dad. "I'm writing, 'Martin wants to say 'Hi' to you.' Now you type and tell me what you are writing." "Hi, I love you, bye, Marty," says Martin as he presses random keys. "That's good!" says his dad. "Aunt Corrie is going to be so happy that you wrote to her. Let me finish this letter and then we'll send it to her." He types in Martin's words to go with his letters. Then he places Martin's hand on the mouse. He guides Martin's hand, moving the cursor to the "send" button on the screen. He shows him how to press the mouse button to send the e-mail. "There," Dad says, smiling at his son. "You just sent the e-mail to Aunt Corrie." Martin looks pleased. Then he climbs down from Dad's lap and runs off to play.

Touch-Screen Action

Four-year-old Jaime has developmental delays. He likes to help his mother water plants in the garden and see how they've grown. Because of his love for plants, his mother buys a touch-screen program about plants that fits Jaime's developmental age. She sits by Jaime in front of the screen. It shows a picture of a plant pot. Mom asks, "Jaime, do you want to see the plant grow?" "Yes!" says Jaime. "I'll bet you can make it grow," says his mom. "Touch the pot and let's see." Jaime reaches up and touches the picture of the pot on the screen. To his delight, the plant immediately sprouts and grows across the screen through colorful movement and sound. Jaime laughs with pleasure. "Look! You made it grow!" says his mother, "You grew a pretty plant. See, this word says 'Daisy.' You grew daisies." "Again!" says Jaime. "You want to grow some more plants?" asks his mom. "Okay, let's see what other ones we can find."

