

THOSE OF US who can read take our skill for granted. For us, reading is as easy as talking or breathing. Many of us can vaguely remember that learning to read was no easy chore.

But chances are, we've forgotten all the little struggles we had to wage to get where we could actually hear those little printed words in our heads! This forgetfulness makes it difficult for parents to sympathize with young readers, or for adults who can read to sympathize much with those who can't. Luckily, there are people who study reading, so even as adults we can begin to understand the mysterious process of learning to read.

Here are some simple facts about reading. Keep them in mind. They may help you help someone you care about learn to read:

- 5,000 words account for 90 percent of the words we read;
- 94 percent of all words appear less than 10 times per million words;
- people who know sounds and letters tend to do better when they start learning to read;
- but—just teaching the alphabet doesn't give students a noticeable advantage in learning to read;
- many children get over 1,000 hours of contact with reading and writing *before they enter school*; and

Learning to Read Well: Some Simple Facts



• students without such experience do better with their reading if they use "invented" spelling (rather than correct spelling) when they begin to write.

Other facts let us know that a good start in reading is very important. For example, 40 percent of poor readers in the fourth grade would rather clean their rooms than read! These children will overcome their bad start only with the

help of someone who cares.

The message is simple: Learning to read takes a lot of *low-pressure experience* with the written word. This includes being read to by someone else and talking about sounds, letters, words, and writing with someone who likes to read. It also includes things like telling stories and having someone else write them down. And, of course, it includes plenty of reading. Naturally, the best reading materials are those that seem to interest the beginning reader.

For more information, call the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) toll-free at 1-800/624-9120. We can help direct you to other resources. To find out more about the ERIC system and its varied units and services, call ACCESS ERIC at 1-800/USE-ERIC. Staff of ERIC/CRESS prepared this article, based on information in the ERIC database.