

# Key Words While Grocery Shopping

— A Write To Read Activity —

(Ages 3 & Up)



Look, there's the  
ice cream!

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I'm Janet Kierstead — here to show you how you can help your child **learn to read and write at the same time** — in much the same way you helped them learn to speak. And it takes about the **same amount of time** it usually takes a child to learn just to read.

Try this Key Words with Grocery Shopping activity, and you'll see what I mean.

The activity is based on the child's own **Key Words**. These are the one, two or sometime three words a child uses to identify something they're especially **interested in**. You can use Key Words in various ways — and the following activity is a fun way to get started. To expand on it, see the **Write/Read section** of my website. It shows how to guide your child's **skill development**, using **The Steps** — a series of follow-up activities for Key Words.

### Using Key Words with Grocery Shopping

**1. Shortly before** you leave for your next shopping trip, tell your child what's on your list. Have them choose **ONE** item they want the most — something they **really like**. (**Interest** is very important here, and only do **ONE Key Word a day**.)

Make sure they are **envisioning** it. For instance, say it's ice cream. Have them tell you what flavor they like best and the last time they had a cone. See if they remember where it is in the grocery store, and so on.



**2.** With the felt-tip pen, print the word, **saying the name and/or sound** of each letter as you write it on a heavy paper. (A recipe card will do.) Most letter names make the most common sound that letter makes — for one that doesn't, just casually make the sound that letter is making.

**I** — Say the **name of the letter, dragging out the iiiii sound**.

**C** — Drag out the **ssss sound, don't say the letter**.

**E** — Stay **silent** as you write the **e**.

**C** — Make the hard "K" sound, **don't say the name**.

**R** — Say the **name, dragging out the rrrrrr**,

**EA** — Say **eeee** as you write **ea**,

**M** — Say the **name, dragging out mmmm**.

Note: Your child will automatically begin to ABSORB phonetic connections. **No need to memorize or test them, in isolation**. A child's brain is equipped to "soak up" what's commonly called "phonics," just by repeatedly seeing them through the years. (Just as it does with the complexity of speech.) Trying to learn even the common ones, in isolation, is overwhelming for some children, causing them to lose confidence with print.

Linguists tell us that English speakers utter 44 different sounds. And as we all know, most of those sounds can be spelled in several different ways, e.g., be, bee, meat, lady, key, phoenix, grief, ski, deceive, people.

There's no way we can memorize all of those. But our brain manages to absorb and store them for us. (Still, thank goodness for spell-check.)

Your child will automatically be **beginning to absorb** those connections. Memorizing/testing can be overwhelming for some children. A young child naturally "soaks up," these connections, as they do with speech. (See note.)

**3.** Have them trace over each letter with the index finger of their writing hand. If they're able to trace the letters one at a time, you say the letter names or sounds again, as they trace. (A very young child will just swipe across the entire word. Accept that. Key Words should always be fun and easy for them **at their level**, to give them **confidence** with print.)

**4.** Hold the word card about 2 or 3 ft. away and say the word. Have them to say it, too. Punch a hole on in the corner of the card and help them place it on the metal ring.

**Then while shopping**, help them match the card to the words written on different cartons of ice cream. See how many places they can find the word on labels under the shelf or written close by. **At the check stand**, let them put the item on the conveyor belt, with the word on top. Let them explain to the checker what they're doing. In short, do whatever you can think of to tie the word card to the item. **After you return home**, see if they want to draw about the experience. If so, make a duplicate of the word to glue under the drawing — or have them copy the word, if they're **easily able to do that**.

**Next time** you go shopping (hopefully in the next 2 or 3 days), show them the word and wait. **Don't say the word, don't give hints, just wait** to see if they recognize it. (It's not yet reading, more like remembering the entire experience.) If yes, then keep it on the word ring. If not, casually take it off and set it aside. Then talk to determine what word they want this time.

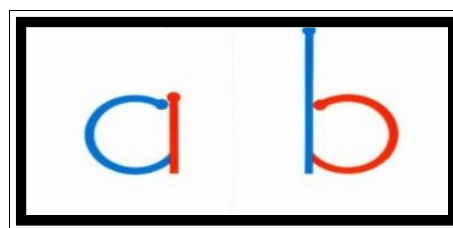


**It is extremely important that only words they instantly recognize stay on the ring. This will build confidence with print. Leaving it on has the opposite effect.** (In helping older children still struggling to read, I've found most lost confidence somewhere along the way and gave up. Starting them at Step 3, they recover and quickly gain ground.)

## Alphabet Formation Guides



Your printing does not have to be perfect, but the style you use should be clear and consistent. Here's a chart to use as a guide, in case you feel you need it.



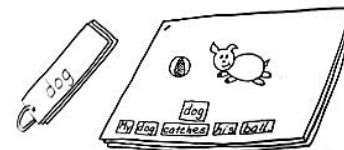
Both curves and lines usually begin at the top. Blue dots show where to begin.

## Use The Steps to Guide Skill Development

You can use this same strategy at home. If you also use *The Steps* — a series of increasingly complex follow-up activities — they will gently and gradually learn to write on their own. For the major skills are *integrated* into The Steps.

For instance, as the child grows, they will also begin to dictate a complete sentence. Gradually working through *The Steps* — *at their own pace, over time* — they will gain more skills. For instance, a child operating at Step 3, will dictate a sentence about their word, cut it up, then reassemble it. This causes them to work on skills even more specific to reading.

If you check out the pages in the website in the section *Writing & Reading*, you'll also see how to model the use of punctuation, capitalization, spelling and sounding out words, how to determine a young child's readiness for print, ways to modify Key Words for a very young child, and more. You'll also find in that section *a video* showing how to introduce the child at Step 5 or 6 to simple, professionally published story books.



Child's Writing Book at Step 3

So, working with Key Words and The Steps, a child is eventually able to write independently. And the skills they've acquired readily transfer to reading books. For by filling up one 5-page writing book after another, they have, in effect, created their own series of pre-primers. And they'll enjoy reading and re-reading these books to themselves and to others.

The self-written and illustrated books replace the pre-primers found in a professional reading program. Both the vocabulary and topics are a perfect match for them. This is what professional writers can only attempt to do, given they are writing for a large general audience. So, the child's own pre-primers are much better suited to them than anything a parent or school district could buy.

With this, the child will be able to both *read and write*. And again, they'll accomplish both in *about the same amount of time* it usually takes *just to read*. Given there's been no struggle, they will have become *comfortable using both* as a means of *communication*.

## Summary and Looking Forward

You don't need to buy and require your child to use separate materials, like work sheets, spelling tests, etc. Some children's workbooks, however, are cleverly done. So, if a child *truly enjoys* using them as a *choice activity* supplementing Key Words, it does no harm and would be *good practice*. But not as a primary method *for learning* these things. For memorizing may only go surface deep. For as any teacher knows, it's not unusual for a child to score 100% on a spelling test, only to turn right around and misspell those words in their writing. And the same goes for memorizing sight words. And as always, *maintaining confidence* through success with writing and reading is what's important.

Memorization is great for things like the multiplication table, but a child comes equipped with a much more powerful strategy for more complex challenges — like learning to read and write. We see this, for instance, in the way a young child so effortlessly "picks up" a second language and accomplishes so much else in their early years. And being asked to memorize something out of context can be confusing, causing the child to *lose confidence* with print.

So, bottom line is that a child learns best *through experience* — by *using the new skills* for a "real life" purpose. So, the best and easiest way to help a child is to follow the same basic strategy you used to help them learn to speak: *Carefully model* and give them time to *absorb* and *practice* what they see you doing. Just be a little more intentional about guiding them than we all are with speech. And Key Words and The Steps are designed to do that.

Also see in the menu pages on the website for what you can be doing with Phonics — and what an older child can do to develop higher-level thinking skills, through Projects.

Finally, I've created the website as an all-volunteer project with the hope of making things easier for children, parents and teachers. So, I'm happy to discuss any of this and answer questions. You can reach me through the Facebook Group, *Helping ALL Kids Write To Read*, which is dedicated to the ideas in the website.