

# THE RESEARCH Report Blues

**Help your child learn how to read for information.**

Your child comes home looking frustrated. It turns out that today's homework assignment involves doing research—using an online encyclopedia, maybe. Or even just reading a chapter in that fat science or social studies textbook. Your child complains that the assignment is just too hard, maybe even impossible! And when you open the textbook, you also want to howl. Who wrote this stuff, anyway?

Given the fix your child is in, it's important that you not panic as well. Of course, anyone who's struggled with a keyboard or a soccer ball knows the path to mastery can be a bumpy one without a good coach. These strategies, offered by teachers and reading specialists, can help smooth the way:

- **Check the reading level.** Many textbooks are not keyed to your child's reading level. So what's a parent to do? Try reading the chapter yourself, and talk about it with your child to help her grow more familiar with the topic. Pick out the key concepts and vocabulary, and have a conversation about them. Look up words in the dictionary together. Even better: try to find some angle of interest to your child.
- **Make it easier.** You can also help your child by introducing some easy books on the same topic to break the ice. Choosing a book with easier vocabulary makes the research rewarding—and helps him feel successful rather than frustrated. If you're stumped for an easier alternative, ask your local librarian for help.
- **Don't play teacher.** As your child struggles, it can be tempting to jump in and start acting like a teacher, poring over textbooks, hammering away at concepts and vocabulary. When you feel this urge coming on, resist it! Instead, take her to the library or bookstore. Talk about what interests you about the topic. Be supportive and encouraging. But don't judge your child's performance. Instead of asking, "What's the main idea?" or "What did you learn?" you can ask your child, "What did you think of it?" or "Did you agree?" That way, you get her to think about it, but you are not evaluating her performance, like a teacher would.



- **Show your child the shortcuts.** Textbook editors provide a road map to reading for information; all you have to do is point it out. Help him recognize and use cues such as:
  - the table of contents
  - key words in boldface type
  - titles summarizing the main idea
  - subtitles tracking the main points in the argument

Focusing on these clues helps children learn to analyze and organize information.

- **Expose your child to the world.** Reading sticks when children have more knowledge about the world. That's because experiences provide a context for the words and ideas. A trip to the aquarium makes reading about sharks easier and more interesting. Talking about the organic fruits at the supermarket makes studying pesticides or pollution more relevant.