

# Reading Strategy: Choosing a Just Right Book

## Choosing your own books makes you a better reader.<sup>1</sup>

**What is this:** Choosing a “just right” book is a phrase that educators use to encourage students to choose a book that is not too hard, not too easy, but just right for the child’s reading level. The more just right books a child reads, the better reader he or she will become. Think of the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Goldilocks chooses the porridge, chair, and bed that are just right for her. The same process takes place when choosing books (without the bears coming home at the end!). It is important that students learn the process of choosing a book that is just right for them, because as they grow and learn their just right books will change.

**As adults, we do this when:** As adults, we have a pretty good idea of our own reading level, which includes our attention span, our interests, and our willingness to commit to a book or whatever is being read. Over the years as readers, we have fine-tuned the ability to assess a piece of text and determine if it is worth reading. In fact, it only takes us a few seconds sometimes to decide whether we are going to read a book, an article, a blog, or anything else we see. Children are still in the beginning stages of developing this important skill. By modeling the thought process with your children, you can help them shape their ability to choose a just right book.

**What does this look like for children:** Children are encouraged to use a checking activity called The Five Finger Rule to assess if a book is right for them. Here is how it works: Find a book that looks interesting, Read the title and author, Read the back and/or flap, Flip through the book, Read the first page while holding up one hand. Each time you come to a word you don’t know, put up one finger. If at the end of the page you have 0-1 fingers up, it’s too easy; 2-3 fingers, it’s just right; 4-5 fingers, it’s probably too hard.

### **What do I say to my child to make the most of this reading strategy?**

- Why did you choose that book? What looked interesting about it? How does this book compare to other books you’ve read?
- Did you use the Five Finger Rule? How many fingers did you hold up while reading the first page? Do you feel like this book is just right for you? Why?
- What do you do if a book is too hard for you? How do you figure out words in the book that you don’t know? What is a new word that you’ve learned in this book? Can you use it in a sentence?

### **Additional Online Resources:**

- [www.booknutsreadingclub.com/goldilocksrule.html](http://www.booknutsreadingclub.com/goldilocksrule.html)
- [www.brainpopjr.com/readingandwriting/readingskills/choosingabook/grownups.weml](http://www.brainpopjr.com/readingandwriting/readingskills/choosingabook/grownups.weml)
- [www.readingrockets.org/article/28279](http://www.readingrockets.org/article/28279)

<sup>1</sup> Lu, Y. L., & Gordon, C. (2008). The effects of free choice on student learning: A study of summer reading. *School Libraries Worldwide* 14(1), 38-55.



## Selecting Books for Your Child: Finding 'Just Right' Books

By: Kathleen Rogers (2008)

How can parents help their children find books that are not "too hard" and not "too easy" but instead are "just right"? Here's some advice.

### Five finger rule

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1. Choose a book that you think you will enjoy.
2. Read the second page.
3. Hold up a finger for each word you are not sure of, or do not know.
4. If there are five or more words you did not know, you should choose an easier book.

Still think it may not be too difficult? Use the five finger rule on two more pages.

### Choose a book that is a good fit for you!

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Read two or three pages and ask yourself these questions:

#### Will it be an easy, fun book to read?

- Do I understand what I am reading?
- Do I know almost every word?
- When I read it aloud, can I read it smoothly?
- Do I think the topic will interest me?

If most of your answers were "yes", this will be an easy book to read independently by yourself.

#### Will this book be too hard for me?

- Are there five or more words on a page that I don't know, or am unsure of?
- Is this book confusing and hard to understand by myself?
- When I read it aloud, does it sound choppy and slow?

If most of your answers were "yes," this book is too hard. You should wait awhile before you read this book. Give the book another try later, or ask an adult to read the book to you.

### Tips on reading with your child

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## When they can't read the word, say...

- Can you sound it out?
- Fingertap it.
- Can you think of the word or movement that helps you remember that vowel sound?
- What is the first and last sound? What word would make sense?
- Does it have a pattern that you have seen in other words? (ex-an, ack)
- How does the word begin?
- You said \_\_\_\_\_. Does that make sense?
- What word would make sense that would start with these sounds?
- Put your finger under the word as you say it.

## When they want to read a book that is too hard, say...

- Let's read it together.
- This is a book you will enjoy more if you save it until you are older — or later in the year.
- [Be honest!] When people read books that are too hard for them, they often skip important parts. You will have more fun with this book if you wait until you can read it easily.

Rogers, K. (2008). Selecting Books for Your Child: Finding 'Just Right' Books. Retrieved November 7, 2008, from [www.readingtogether.org](http://www.readingtogether.org).

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<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/28279?theme=print>

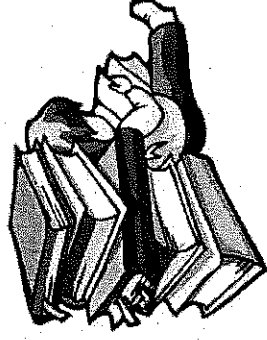
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# WHAT READERS ASK

Readers ask these things before they choose a book:

1. What is my purpose for reading today?
2. Based on that purpose, is this the right book for me?



# The Goldilocks Rules for Choosing a Book That is "Just Right"



## Too Easy Books

- I have read the book many times before.
- I understand and can retell the story without much effort.
- I know and understand almost every word.
- I can read the book smoothly and fluently without much practice.

## Too Hard Books

- There are five or more words on a page that I do not recognize.
- I am confused about what is happening in the story.
- When I read the words I sound choppy.
- I need help when reading this book.

## Just Right Books

- The book is new to me and the topic is interesting to me.
- I understand what is happening in most of the story.
- I can retell what I have read.
- I recognize most of the words on the page, but there are some words to work on.
- I can read the book by myself but may need help if I hit a tough spot.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## WAS THIS THE RIGHT BOOK FOR ME?

1. Write the title of your book on the line:

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Write your purpose for reading this book:

I chose this book because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Was your book just right or not? (*circle one*)

Too easy      Just right      Too hard

4. Explain how you know:

I know this book was \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Tell what you will do when you choose a book next time.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# IS THIS THE RIGHT BOOK FOR ME?

Try these tests



## The Goldilocks Rule

- Is this book too hard?
- Is this book too easy?
- Is this book just right?



## The Five Finger Rule

- Hold up your fist.
- As you try to read the book, put up a finger each time you find a word you don't know.
- If you get to 5 fingers before you are done with the book, it is too hard.



log in

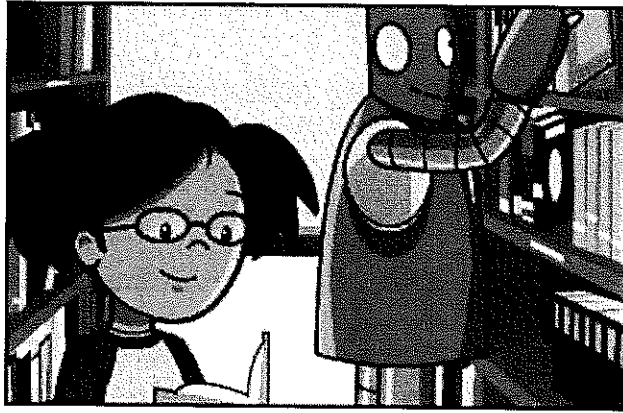
search 

go



## Choosing a Book

### Background Information & Activities



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Choosing a book is an important skill that children need to become good readers. Children who find a book that's just right for them are able to engage with the text without becoming mired by difficult words or concepts. This allows them to be free to ask questions, make predictions and inferences, and make connections to their own experiences. Remind your child that finding a book that is just right can be difficult and they should not feel discouraged if they think a book is too hard. Not every book is appropriate for everyone.

Book recommendations can come from teachers, family members, librarians, booksellers, and friends. We recommend watching the [Library](#) movie together as a review. Many classes participate in book clubs where students can swap books or have exposure to a wide range of books. Children learning at home can find book reviews written by other children online. Even children's magazines offer book suggestions for different reading levels. Encourage your children to think of sources where he or she can learn about good books.

There are several ways your child can figure out if a book is just right for them. The first thing they can do is look at the title and cover. Does the title seem interesting? Most of the time, there is a summary on the back of the book or inside the book jacket. This summary provides information about the book's subject and voice. Does the summary pique your child's interest? Your child may enjoy books in a specific genre, such as suspense, mystery, or fantasy. Explain that libraries and bookstores divide their books based on genre and if they don't have a title in mind, they can simply browse an area. Sometimes children become engrossed in a voluminous series and you may agonize over how to broaden their interests. Don't worry too much, children will move to something new when they lose interest and that may be a good time to introduce a new author or genre.

Your child can also take a Picture Walk through the book by flipping through the pages and looking at the pages. Do the pictures seem interesting and engaging? After they find a book, the next step is to determine if the book is the right level.

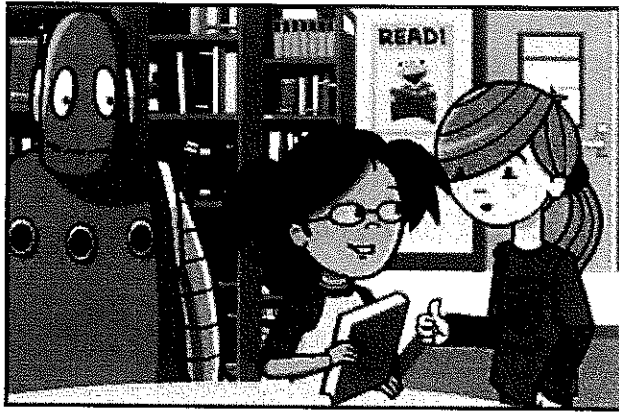
The Five Finger Test is a quick way to determine the difficulty of a book. If your child finds five words that are too difficult for them on one page, then chances are the book is above their level. If your child finds no difficult words, then there is a good chance that the book is below their level. However, this does not mean the book is not appropriate. Your child can also read a page aloud to test the reading level. If he or she can read it smoothly then the book is most likely appropriate. Your child can also test the reading level by reading a page and trying to retell what happened in his or her own words. If they cannot summarize the page, the book may be above level.

Remind your child of the Goldilocks Rule—find a book that is not too hard, not too easy, but just right.

**[Choosing a Book Teacher Activities - Click Here!](#)**

**[Choosing a Book Family Activities - Click Here!](#)**

## **Choosing a Book Teacher Activities**



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### Book Swap

Have your students bring in old books and trade with each other. Students can browse the books and test to see if it interests them and is the appropriate reading level. Lead students through a Picture Walk and have student volunteers explain why or why not the book interests them. Help students quietly read aloud a page and count difficult words for the Five Finger Test. You can break up students into pairs and have them retell a page from the book to each other.

### Cover to Cover

Have students make their own book jackets for their favorite books. Show students how to make book covers using paper bags and then have them decorate the front. Remind them to add the title and the author's name. Then have students write a book summary on the back. Explain that summaries tell the big events of a story without giving away too much. If necessary, go through sample book summaries together. Collect the books on one bookshelf so students can share their book jackets.

### Reading Campaign

Start a reading campaign at your school. Have your students create posters and pamphlets to pass out to students, teachers, and staff at the school. The handouts should explain the importance of reading and tips on how to find books. Students can design posters that teach how to use the Five Finger Test. If possible, organize a local writer to come to your class or school and have a reading or book-signing as part of your Reading Campaign.

### Genre Baskets

Have students learn categorizing skills by sorting classroom library books into different shelves or baskets according to genre. Students can decorate index cards to make labels for each genre, which can then be laminated and affixed.

## Choosing a Book Family Activities



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### Book List

Have your child ask friends and family members about their favorite books. They can talk about why they like the book and why it is different from other books. Discuss the topic, the author, and the time it was written. Have your child record these books in a booklist that he or she can revisit from time to time. Some of these books maybe above their reading level now, but in the near future they will find that the books will be just right.

### Meet an Author

Many local bookstores and cafes have readings and book-signings from writers. Take your child to a reading and meet an author. If possible, meet the author and have your child ask about the author's favorite books. Would your child like to be an author one day? What would he or she write about? Help your child keep a notebook of ideas for stories, poems, and books.

### Five Finger Test

Together, find a book that is slightly above reading level for your child. Have him or her read a page aloud and try to retell what happened in the story. Then have him or her perform the Five Finger Test and write down words that he or she does not know.

Together, think of ways to learn the meanings of the new words. Can they use context clues and figure out the meaning of the words using the words around it? Is there a glossary in the back of the book? Can you look it up together in a print or online dictionary?

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