

Upper Elementary

Reading, Writing, Arithmetic . . . and More!

Fourth and fifth graders are in "upper elementary" grades. They have learned to read and write and do simple arithmetic. They are ready to build on this foundation, and also to increase their fluency in all these skills.

They might be able to easily read on their own, but please have your 4-5-graders **continue to read aloud** to you . . . you can enjoy the thrill of discovery together as they--and you-- learn new things from the pages of books. Having your older elementary children read aloud provides an easy way to talk with them and be a part of what they are studying.

Spending extra time to **make addition and multiplication facts "instant"** is an important focus of these years. You can use a variety of methods for drill and review-- until it is evident the child easily knows the math facts. Try practicing with spoken methods, copywork of math facts, written math practice pages, and educational card games.

Learning **subtraction and division** facts is also helpful, but knowing facts for adding and multiplying makes learning these much easier-- so focus on quick mental adding to make all numbers to 20, and memorizing of multiplication facts through 12's, *before* giving extra drill on subtraction or division.

Upper elementary is a good time to begin regular **keyboard skills** practice. We live in a world that relies more and more on using computer keyboards. But efficient typing doesn't happen just by growing up surrounded by technology. By 4th or 5th grade, when kids already have a good start in printing and cursive, there is another writing method for them to get acquainted with-- using type on a word processor.

Spend a school year having your child learn to **touch type** with correct fingering. Then continue with regular typing practice assignments for a couple more years, to gain proficiency and speed. By eighth grade he/she will be ready to use typing skills whenever needed-- typing writing assignments, easily touch typing e-mails to friends, etc, without needing extra typing practice.

Some more suggestions for teaching upper elementary students:

Encourage your child to check out library books he/she is interested in **reading independently**. During 4th and 5th grades many kids are beginning to explore reading for their own enjoyment. If you have a reluctant reader, try cartoon books --Garfield and Calvin and

Hobbes and Peanuts are some that kids often like. Libraries have summer reading programs, which can give extra motivation for reading during the summer.

If your child has trouble "getting" or remembering the steps of **long division** (usually introduced in 4th grade), have him or her stop or lessen the regular math lessons and just do a couple of long division problems each day for math, until this skill is learned. This algorithm with all its steps can seem overwhelming, especially when doing long division problems is just added into an already long math practice set.

Also, it is helpful to have your child use scratch paper so there is plenty of room to write all the steps-- math work pages often use small type and it can be next to impossible to actually do the problem in the space provided.

A 4th or 5th grader may still need your help in transcribing stories or information he dictates-- but he/she will be able to **write more on his/her own**, and will be able to **copy longer passages**. If handwriting seems difficult for your child, try requiring him/her to copy four sentences, or one paragraph, at a time. If handwriting is easy, he/she can write several paragraphs.

Try to include some hands-on projects with your science and history/geography studies. By upper elementary grades, it can be easy to assume that since children know how to read and write, those modalities are the way for them to learn. But often, they will have greater enjoyment and retention if you do some **extra activities** to complement the reading and writing studies.

For example, during our study of earth science, we made an ice cream cake in a large bowl, adding a different colored layer each day to represent layers of the earth. This was such a fun project, and I don't think my kids will *ever* forget the basic concept that the earth has layers-- even though they may not remember the specific name of each layer.

Diane Hurst © 2010

www.gentleshepcurr.com