Reading Records Explained: What to Actually Write in Your Reception Child's Diary

A gentle guide for parents and carers of children in Reception to help you understand how to use your child's reading record and what notes are most helpful for their teacher.

What is a reading record?

A reading record is a diary or folder that travels between school and home. Its main purpose is to keep a simple log of the books your child has looked at and to allow you to share quick messages with the teacher. In Reception (the first year of primary school for children aged 4 or 5), this is a wonderful way to see your child's progress. Every school does things slightly differently, so it is always a good idea to ask your child's teacher how they prefer the diary to be used.

How the reading process works

Your child will often bring home two types of books. The first is a 'decodable' book. These are specially written to match the phonics (the relationship between letters and sounds) your child is learning in class. These books help them practice blending sounds together to read words. The second type is a 'story book' for pleasure. These are for you to read to your child, helping them love stories and develop their vocabulary. Because these two activities are different, your teacher may ask you to log them in different ways in the diary.

What this means for your child

Using the reading record helps the teacher understand how your child is feeling about reading. If a child finds a particular sound tricky at home, the teacher can provide extra support in class. It also gives your child a sense of pride to see a list of all the books they have explored. Remember, the goal in Reception is to build confidence and a love for books, rather than rushing through as many pages as possible.

Simple ways to help at home

You don't need to be an expert to help. When reading decodable books, keep it playful. If your child gets stuck, encourage them to look at the sounds they know. In the diary, instead of just writing 'read well', try a short, specific note. For example, 'struggled with the 'sh' sound' or 'loved re-reading the funny part'. This gives the teacher a clear picture. For story books, simply noting that you enjoyed the story together is plenty. Keep sessions short and happy.

Common questions

Many parents wonder if they must read every single night. While regular reading is encouraged, the most important thing is that it remains a positive experience. If your child is tired, it is okay to keep it very brief or just read to them. You might also wonder if you should correct every mistake; usually, encouraging them to try the sounds first is the best approach. If you are ever unsure about a specific phonics sound, your teacher will be happy to show you the method the school uses.

Sources

- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: Early Years Foundation Stage
- GOV.UK, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework