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## Why Children Succeed or Fail at Reading

### Research from NICHD's Program in Learning Disabilities

#### Introduction

Most children will learn to read, no matter what method is used to teach them. But unless they receive special help, at least 20 percent of them cannot master this simple task that the rest of us take for granted.

Their difficulty is painfully obvious when they try to read out loud. Children with reading difficulties stop and start frequently, mispronouncing some words and skipping others entirely.

The first casualty is self esteem: they soon grow ashamed as they struggle with a skill their classmates master easily. In the later grades, when children switch from learning to read to reading to learn, reading-impaired children are kept from exploring science, history, literature, mathematics and the wealth of information that is presented in print.

Even what, to the rest of us, are everyday conveniences-- a road map, the instructions for a microwave pizza--become daunting tasks for those with reading difficulties. And as more information becomes available on the Internet, those who can't read will be left behind by an information revolution that is largely text based.

About 10 million children have difficulties learning to read. From 10 to 15 percent eventually drop out of high school; only 2 percent complete a four-year college program. Surveys of adolescents and young adults with criminal records show that about half have reading difficulties. Similarly, about half of youths with a history of substance abuse have reading problems.

Even people with a mild reading impairment do not read for fun. For them, reading requires so much effort that they have little energy left for understanding what they have just read.

Contrary to what many people believe, NICHD research has shown that reading disability affects boys and girls at roughly the same rate. Reading disabled boys, however, are more likely to be referred for treatment, as they are more likely to get the teacher's attention by misbehaving. Reading disabled girls may escape the teacher's attention, as they may withdraw into quiet daydreaming.

Another common misconception is that reading disabled people reverse letters and write in

