Books for level 1 readers: what level 1 means on Peabody

Peabody blog · Words and levels · updated 2026-10-30

Books for level 1 readers on Peabody: ten free first books to sound out, one short line a page, every short vowel, and how this level 1 differs from the others.

On Peabody, a level 1 book is a first book to sound out: its words use the single consonants and the short vowels you hear in cat, pin, hop and bug, plus a few words learnt by sight, with one short line and a picture on every page. There are ten of them, free to read with no account at level 1 in the library, and the Book Club gathers them on books for level 1. Peabody is free through the end of 2026, and the stories will read themselves aloud with the button.

One warning first: Peabody's levels are its own. "Level 1" on another site, in a school's reading scheme or on a shop-bought early reader is a different scale.

What a level 1 page looks like

Every level 1 book is held to a few plain limits, checked in code against the text itself:

- One sentence a page, five words at most. "Pup is in mud." "Mom has a tub." Those are real pages from Pup in the Tub.
- A picture on every page, so the page is never only words.
- The consonants and all five short vowels, one consonant sound at a time. Blends and pairs, like st, sh and ch, wait for level 2.
- A handful of sight words that cannot be sounded out yet and are learnt by heart: the, is, to and and.
- Short books. These six of the ten run from 7 to 10 pages and 24 to 37 words:

- Story: Bev Has a Pet · Pages: 10 · Words: 37
- Story: Can Ted Hop? · Pages: 8 · Words: 29
- Story: Fox and the Hen · Pages: 9 · Words: 37
- Story: Get Up, Gus! · Pages: 10 · Words: 34
- Story: Jen and the Jam · Pages: 7 · Words: 24
- Story: Pup in the Tub · Pages: 9 · Words: 31

Who level 1 is for

Level 1 suits a child who can already sound out the level 0 books and wants more letters. Level 0 is the very start: eight letters (m, a, s, t, p, i, n and d), the little words a and I, and a few words a page. Level 1 opens up the rest of the alphabet's single sounds while keeping the page just as short.

Where it sits on the ladder:

- Peabody levels: 0 to 2 · What they are: First books to sound out
- Peabody levels: 3 · What they are: Pattern books, for kindergarten
- Peabody levels: 4 to 6 · What they are: First grade: little stories, short stories, then a bridge of 12 to 20 words a page
- Peabody levels: 7 to 13 · What they are: 2nd grade to 8th grade, one level a grade
- Peabody levels: 14 to 18 · What they are: Past the school grades, for strong teens and grown-ups

Peabody gives levels 0 to 2 no school grade. They are early-reader books, for whenever a child starts sounding words out, and the first school grade on the ladder is kindergarten, at level 3.

Why another "level 1" is not this level 1

Every level on Peabody is measured from the story's text: how long the sentences are, how many words sit on a page, and which words are on its word lists. It is never measured from a child. Peabody doesn't measure or claim Lexile, AR or guided-reading letters, so there is no conversion chart to look up.

When I typed "books for level" into Google on 30 October 2026, the suggestions mixed "level 1 readers" with A1, A2, B1 and B2, which are levels for people learning English as a new language. Publishers and school schemes number their early readers too, each in their own way, so a book labelled "Level 1" elsewhere may be easier or harder than Peabody's. Open it and read a page together.

How to tell if level 1 fits

Sit with your child and one of the books above. If they sound out most words, need help with one or two, and can tell you what happened, it fits. If they guess every word from the picture, go back to level 0 for a while. If the book is easy and quick, try level 2, where blends like st and sh come in.

For a second opinion:

- The three-line check. The Book Club's levels page and the which level am I? quiz give a child three lines to read aloud and ask whether each was easy, OK or hard.
- A grown-up's tool. Peabody Teach has a free level finder for parents and teachers.

Level 1 books away from the screen

Peabody's ten are a start, not a shelf. For books from the library or the bookshop, the kids' list of sight-word and decodable friendly books is the place to look; its buy links are plain searches, with no affiliate tag, so nobody is paid when you click.

And a level 1 reader can join a reading challenge like anyone else. Read-Aloud 20 is twenty books read aloud to a little one, a patch of a reading quilt each. On 100 Books, a favourite read again on another day counts again, which suits a child who wants Pup in the Tub for the fifth time.

Questions parents ask

Is level 1 the same as kindergarten?

Not exactly. Peabody puts its kindergarten books at level 3, the pattern books. Levels 0 to 2 come before them as first books to sound out, with no school grade attached.

What comes after level 1?

Level 2, which adds blends and pairs of letters like st, sw, sh, ch, th, ck and ng, and a few more sight words such as see, go, he, we and you. Then level 3, the pattern books.

Can Peabody read the books aloud?

Yes. Every story has a button, so a child can hear a page and then try it on their own. You can also browse every level from the library.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/books-for-level-1-readers