How to read manga right to left: a family guide

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How to read manga: open it from what looks like the back cover, start each page at the top right, read panels and bubbles right to left. A five-minute family guide.

To read a manga printed the Japanese way, open it from what looks like the back cover, start at the top right of the right-hand page, read the panels right to left, row by row, and read the speech bubbles in each panel right to left too. That is the whole trick. Most children get it within five pages; most grown-ups take a little longer, because we have had more years of reading the other way.

This post is for the moment a child brings home their first manga, opens it at the front and finds the last page. It isn't printed wrong. Japanese books are bound with the spine on the right, and many English editions of manga keep that layout so the artwork isn't flipped.

The four steps

These are the same four steps that sit at the top of Peabody's manga wing:

1. Open it from what looks like the back cover. In a Japanese-style book, that is the front. Many English editions put a page there saying "Stop! You're reading the wrong way" for exactly this reason.
2. Start at the top right corner of the right-hand page. The first panel is in the top right, not the top left.
3. Read the panels right to left, then go down a row and read right to left again. Think of it as a mirror of an ordinary comic: across the top, then down, then across again.
4. In each panel, read the bubbles right to left too, top ones first. When two people talk in one panel, the one on the right usually speaks first.

Practising together

The easiest way to learn is to point. Sit side by side, open the book from the right, and run a finger along the path of the panels on the first few pages while your child reads the bubbles aloud. After a few pages, swap: your child points, you read. By the end of the first chapter, most children don't need the finger.

A few things trip readers up:

- Big panels that span two rows. Read the tall panel when you reach its top corner, then carry on with the shorter ones beside it.
- Sound effects. In many manga, sound words are drawn into the art rather than in bubbles; some English editions translate them in small print beside them. They are part of the picture, not part of the order, so a child can enjoy them whenever.

• Page turns. The page turns the other way, so a dramatic reveal comes on the left-hand page after a turn. Children usually enjoy discovering this.

Not every manga reads this way

Some English editions are "flipped" to read left to right like any other comic. Of the two manga on Peabody's list, Yotsuba&! (Yen Press) reads right to left, and Chi's Sweet Home reads left to right in its English volumes, so it opens like an ordinary picture book. Each card in the manga wing says which way it reads, and the Yotsuba&! page says so in its first lines.

And not every comic drawn in a manga style is manga. Berrybrook Middle School, drawn in a manga style by Svetlana Chmakova, reads left to right.

Which manga to start with

There is a separate post on that: manga for kids under 10 explains why our list has only two series, and whose age each one is. For a first right-to-left read, Yotsuba&! is a good choice: each chapter is one ordinary day, so a child who loses their place has only a few pages to go back.

Questions grown-ups ask

Why don't publishers just flip manga for English readers?

Some do, and some used to more than they do now. Flipping the pages mirrors the artwork, which changes what the artist drew (a character who is right-handed becomes left-handed), so many publishers now keep the original layout and teach the reader instead.

Is right-to-left reading confusing for a child just learning to read?

The words in each bubble still read left to right, as English does; only the order of the panels and bubbles is reversed. Most children treat it as a puzzle. If it frustrates a very new reader, start with Chi's Sweet Home, which reads the ordinary way.

Do we have to read the volumes in order?

For Yotsuba&!, not strictly: each chapter is a self-contained day, though the small details pile up if you go in number order. For Chi's Sweet Home, yes if you can, because it follows one kitten's story. Both series pages have a checklist kept on your device.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, and our library has stories levelled for every reader, in the ordinary direction.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/how-to-read-manga