Reading logs: do they help or hurt?

Peabody guide · updated 2026-10-30

What a 2012 study of required reading logs found, why minutes and nightly signatures can backfire, and how to keep a log that counts books instead.

A reading log can hurt when it is compulsory and counts minutes: in a 2012 study of 112 second and third graders, children given a required 20-minute nightly log with a parent's signature came to like reading less over two months, while classmates whose log was optional came to like it more. It is one small study, and it measured feelings rather than reading, but it is enough to change how I use a log. This guide is what the study did and did not show, what to do when school sends a log home, and how Peabody's logs are built: the child's own challenge counts books, and the only minutes column is on a paper weekly log, for schools that ask. It is all free, like the rest of Peabody through the end of 2026.

What the 2012 study did

Sarah Pak and Allyson Weseley published The Effect of Mandatory Reading Logs on Children's Motivation to Read in the Journal of Research in Education in 2012 (the ERIC record). Fourteen second and third grade classes in one suburban district took part, 112 children aged 6 to 8, and each class was assigned at random to one of two logs.

- The required log. Read at least 20 minutes every night (more if you like), write it down, and have a parent sign after each entry.
- The optional log. The same logs, handed out with encouragement to read, but optional.

The children answered a survey about reading at the start and two months later, choosing between cartoon faces from happy to cross.

What it found

- Interest in reading fell in the classes with the required log and rose in the classes with the optional one.
- Attitudes to reading for fun moved the same way: down with the required log, up with the optional one.
- Attitudes to reading at school fell in both groups over the two months, log or no log.

The authors' explanation is about choice: a nightly minimum with a signature makes reading something done because someone else requires it, and children draw their own conclusion about whether to choose it in their free time.

What it did not show

- It measured feelings, not reading. Nobody counted the books or minutes either group actually read. The authors point to earlier work linking the two, but this study did not measure it.
- It was small and short. One district, 112 children, two months. The authors say a longer study is needed: over years of logs, the effect could fade or add up.
- It tested one kind of log. Twenty minutes a night, every night, signed every night. It says nothing about a log a child keeps because they want to, or one that counts finished books.

So the honest summary is narrow: for these children, a compulsory nightly minutes log did not help them like reading, and the optional log did better. That is not the same as "all reading logs are bad".

Why minutes are the hard part

Even without a study, minutes cause trouble at home. A timer turns a good chapter into a countdown. A child who reads a whole picture book in eight minutes has "failed" a twenty-minute night, and a child enjoying a book stops at twenty because the line is filled. A book is different: it is finished or it is not, and nobody needs to referee. For children under eight, I count books or days with reading, never a column of minutes.

When school sends a log home

A class's rules come first. Some ways to keep a log from taking over:

- Ask what the log is for. If the teacher wants to see that your child reads at home, a list of titles may answer that as well as minutes do.
- Fill it in together once a week, rather than as a nightly check.
- Let your child choose the book. The required part is the log, not the title.
- Count being read to, if the teacher agrees. For a 6-year-old, a bedtime story is reading.
- Sign honestly. A missed night is information, not a failure.
- Keep their own reading separate. The school's log is the school's; the challenge on the fridge is theirs.

How Peabody's logs are built

I built Peabody's Book Club for my own children, and the logs follow the rules above.

- The child's own challenge counts books. Winter Break is 10 books for ages 5 to 7, 6 for 8 to 10 and 4 from 11 up. 100 Books, Book Bingo and Read-Aloud 20 count books too. Nothing on the tracker has a minutes column, and a book is logged with a tap.
- January counts days. In the January challenge, a day's square colours in when a child finishes a book or reads, or is read to, for 20 minutes. There is no timer: the child taps "I read for 20 minutes". Twenty coloured days is the finish line, and a missed day stays empty

with no message about it.
• The log that prints from a challenge has the title, the date and a column for a grown-up's signature, with no minutes.
• The paper weekly log has the minutes column. The weekly reading log has Monday to Sunday rows, the title, a "pages or minutes" column, "how was it?" faces, a column for a grown-up to sign and a total line. It is there for schools that ask for minutes. If yours doesn't, write pages, or leave it blank.
• The monthly log is 31 squares to colour or write a title in, with lines for days read and books finished: the monthly reading log.

Yes, the printed logs have a signature column, so the sheet can go back to school. If nobody is asking, leave it blank. A logged book stays on the device: Peabody receives only a count that a book was logged in a challenge, never the title or anything about the child.

A log a child wants to keep

What I aim for in a log a child keeps going: the child fills it in. It counts finished things they can see: a stack, a mountain, a coloured square. The finish line is reachable with a day or two to spare, missing a day costs nothing, and at the end it is theirs to show, not something to be checked. If the next book is the problem, what should I read next asks three tap-to-answer questions, and Peabody's library has 425 free stories on 19 reading levels that are a tap to log.

Questions parents ask

Do reading logs make children read more?

The 2012 study did not measure how much the children read, so it cannot say. It found that children with the required log came to like reading less.

Should I refuse to sign the school's reading log?

I wouldn't start there. Talk to the teacher first, and ask whether a weekly signature or a list of titles would do. At home, keep your child's own reading free of the clock.

How many minutes a night should my child read?

I can't point you to a number from a study I have opened, so I won't give one. Count books or days instead: a book finished, or a day with reading in it, is something your child can see.

Can Peabody's log go in to school?

Yes. The chart from any challenge prints with a table of the books so far and a line for records, like "Read 6 books, 19 Dec – 27 Dec", plus a QR code back to the challenge that carries no child data.