Reading levels, 0 to 18: what each one means

Peabody · checked 2026-10-18

Peabody sorts every story into 19 reading levels, 0 to 18, measured from the text and never from the child. Levels 0 to 2 are decodable books, 3 to 6 pattern books and little stories, and from level 7 a page is a paragraph. Below, each level's grade, skills and a real opening, all free through the end of 2026.

- Level: Level 0 · Suits: Early reader · What it is: First sounds · Skills practised: first sounds, rhymes · Free stories: 14
- Level: Level 1 · Suits: Early reader · What it is: Short vowels · Skills practised: first sounds, rhymes · Free stories: 16
- Level: Level 2 · Suits: Early reader · What it is: Blends and digraphs · Skills practised: first sounds, rhymes · Free stories: 16
- Level: Level 3 · Suits: Kindergarten · What it is: Pattern books · Skills practised: first sounds, rhymes · Free stories: 23
- Level: Level 4 · Suits: Grade 1 · What it is: Little stories · Skills practised: phonics, first sounds, sight words · Free stories: 29
- Level: Level 5 · Suits: Grade 1 · What it is: Short stories · Skills practised: phonics, first sounds, sight words · Free stories: 23
- Level: Level 6 · Suits: Grade 1 · What it is: The bridge · Skills practised: phonics, first sounds, sight words · Free stories: 11
- Level: Level 7 · Suits: Grade 2 · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: phonics, sight words, spelling · Free stories: 44
- Level: Level 8 · Suits: Grade 3 · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 92
- Level: Level 9 · Suits: Grade 4 · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 42
- Level: Level 10 · Suits: Grade 5 · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 90
- Level: Level 11 · Suits: Grade 6 · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 54
- Level: Level 12 · Suits: Grade 7 · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 27
- Level: Level 13 · Suits: Grade 8 · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 77
- Level: Level 14 · Suits: Above 8th grade · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 35
- Level: Level 15 · Suits: Above 8th grade · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised:

vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 18
- Level: Level 16 · Suits: Above 8th grade · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 10
- Level: Level 17 · Suits: Above 8th grade · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 13
- Level: Level 18 · Suits: Above 8th grade · What it is: Paragraphs · Skills practised: vocabulary, spelling · Free stories: 9

The grade is where a level sits, not a label for a child: Peabody starts a reader a little under their grade, so the first stories are easy, and moves them up as books run easy. From level 14 there is no school grade; the writing itself is measured.

Level 0: first sounds, an early reader

Level 0 is for a child who cannot read yet. Every book uses only eight letters (m, a, s, t, p, i, n and d) and the little words a and I, with a few words on a page and a picture on every page.

Sentences up to 4 words, up to 4 words a page. Preschool readers start here.

Pit, pat! Tim sat. Pam sat. Pit, pat! Tim sat. Pam sat. Pit, pat! Pit, pat, Tim, Pam!

The opening of Pit, Pat. Level 0 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 14 stories at level 0.

Level 1: short vowels, an early reader

Level 1 books use every single consonant and every short vowel, the sounds in cat, pin, hop and bug, plus a few common words to learn by sight: the, is, to and and. There is one short line on a page and a picture on every page.

Sentences up to 5 words, up to 5 words a page. Kindergarten readers start here.

Gus is in bed. Get up, Gus! Gus is not up. Get up, Gus! Mom is in bed. Mom is not up. Gus hugs Mom.

The opening of Get Up, Gus!. Level 1 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 16 stories at level 1.

Level 2: blends and digraphs, an early reader

Level 2 books add blends and digraphs, like st, sw, sh, ch, th, ck and ng, and a few more common words, such as see, go, no, he, we and you. A page has a line or two and a picture, and the words are still ones a child can sound out.

Sentences up to 6 words, up to 6 words a page.

Ben can jump. Meg can jump. "Jump, jump, jump!" said Ben. Look! A frog on a log. "Can the frog jump?" said Meg. "Jump!" said Ben. The frog sat.

The opening of Jump, Jump, Jump!. Level 2 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 16 stories at level 2.

Level 3: pattern books, Kindergarten

Level 3 books are pattern books: a line comes back on every page with one small change, like a cat, then a hat, then a mat. A word the picture shows can be worked out from it, and a few common words are known by sight.

Sentences up to 6 words, up to 6 words a page. 1st grade readers start here.

Go, car, go! Go, bus, go! Go, boat, go! Go, train, go! Go, ship, go! Go, truck, go! Go, snail, go! The snail is slow.

The opening of Go, Snail, Go!. Level 3 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 23 stories at level 3.

Level 4: little stories, grade 1

Level 4 stories are little stories: one small thing happens, in a short sentence or two a page, with a picture on every page. The words are plain and show up again and again, about a hat, a kite or a cat.

Sentences up to 8 words, up to 8 words a page.

Jem has a new pup. It is Pug! "Sit, Pug," says Jem. Pug does not sit. Pug runs! "Sit, Pug," says Jem. Pug does not sit. Pug hops!

The opening of Jem and Pug Sit. Level 4 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 29 stories at level 4.

Level 5: short stories, grade 1

Level 5 stories are short stories with a few short sentences a page, still in everyday words, and a clear one-thing-happens plot. They suit kids who read the level 4 stories without much help and are ready for a page with a bit more on it.

Sentences up to 10 words, up to 12 words a page. 2nd grade readers start here.

It is cold out. Ned has no hat. Not in the box. Not on the bed. Not by the door. "Where is it?" said Ned.

The opening of Where Is Ned's Hat?. Level 5 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 23 stories at level 5.

Level 6: the bridge, grade 1

Level 6 is the bridge between short stories and paragraphs. A page has two or three sentences, 12 to 20 words, and a book runs a few hundred words, so it looks like a real page while the words stay plain.

Sentences up to 10 words, 12 to 20 words a page.

An old lighthouse stood by the bay. No one lived in it. It was dark and still. Pia and Grandpa sat on the porch. They looked at the tower. It was quiet.

The opening of The Blinking Lamp. Level 6 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 11 stories at level 6.

Level 7: grade 2

Level 7 stories have whole short paragraphs for the first time, still in everyday words and with a clear one-thing-happens plot. They suit kids who can read the level 6 books without much help and are ready for a page with a bit more on it.

Sentences up to 10 words, 12 to 30 words a page. 3rd grade readers start here.

Heron stacked nine stones, and the last was round. She did it every single morning by the water. This tower was the best yet. It was as tall as Duck.

The opening of Duck Says Sorry. Level 7 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 44 stories at level 7.

Level 8: grade 3

Level 8 stories are a page-long walk through one small adventure, with a few longer words that the story explains as it goes. They suit kids who read short chapter-style pages and enjoy a problem to solve, whether it is a missing sock or a hungry otter.

Sentences up to 26 words, 40 to 65 words a page. 4th grade readers start here.

"LADIES AND GENTLEFISH!" That was Barnacle Bob. He stood on a rock by the shore with a shell held to his mouth. "Tonight a thousand lanternfish swim up from the deep! Please keep your fins to yourselves. And now, folks. LIGHTS UP!"

The opening of Lulu the Lanternfish Lights Up. Level 8 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 92 stories at level 8.

Level 9: grade 4

Level 9 stories run a little longer and give the character a goal that takes several steps. The sentences get longer and there is more to picture.

Sentences up to 32 words, 55 to 85 words a page. 5th grade readers start here.

Waffles got his name when he was eight weeks old. He climbed onto a kitchen chair and ate a whole stack of waffles, syrup and all, while nobody was looking.

The opening of Goodbye, Waffles. Level 9 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 42 stories at level 9.

Level 10: grade 5

Level 10 stories have fuller scenes, a bit of back-and-forth between characters, and some words kids will have to work out from the sentence around them. They suit confident readers who want a real story with a beginning, a snag and an ending that is earned.

Sentences up to 38 words, 70 to 100 words a page. 6th grade readers start here.

THE OFFICIAL LOG OF COMPLAINTS, kept by Hollis Pratt, age eleven and four-fifths, of Room 9. Property of Hollis Pratt.

The opening of Complaints Department. Level 10 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 90 stories at level 10.

Level 11: grade 6

Level 11 stories ask the reader to keep track of more at once: a place, a few characters, and a puzzle that is not solved on the first page. They suit kids reading well above the early grades who like to think about why things happen.

Sentences up to 40 words, 80 to 115 words a page. 7th grade readers start here.

Kit Alder had not been in the deep end since the day she failed her swimming test, and she was not planning to start on a Saturday when the pool was shut.

The opening of The Deep End of Carrowglen. Level 11 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 54 stories at level 11.

Level 12: grade 7

Level 12 stories have longer sentences and ideas that take a second look, including real animals described in plain, factual language. They suit strong readers who are comfortable with a page of text and like stories about people working things out.

Sentences up to 48 words, 90 to 130 words a page. 8th grade readers start here.

Imani Okoye drank her water the way other people read a book, slowly and all the way to the end, and on Kestrel Station that was the only respectable way to drink it. Every glass of water on the station had been something else first.

The opening of The Slow Leak. Level 12 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 27 stories at level 12.

Level 13: grade 8

Level 13 stories are the end of the school-grade range: full-length scenes, richer words and characters who change their minds. They suit kids who read for fun on their own, or older readers who want an easy, gentle evening read.

Sentences up to 62 words, 100 to 145 words a page.

By the last week of February, Zoya Petrenko had gone thirty-one days without seeing the sun, and she had stopped being polite about it.

The opening of The Thirteenth Stop. Level 13 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 77 stories at level 13.

Level 14: above 8th grade

From level 14 up, Peabody measures the writing itself rather than naming a school grade. Level 14 stories use grown-up sentence shapes and a wide spread of words, with warm, low-stakes plots.

Sentences up to 62 words, 110 to 160 words a page.

Who invented the light bulb? The question has a confident answer, Thomas Edison, and the answer hides a problem.

The opening of A Practical Lamp, Not a First One. Level 14 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 35 stories at level 14.

Level 15: above 8th grade

Level 15 stories use longer, layered sentences and some technical words, and they stay patient with the reader. They suit fluent readers, young and old, who like a story with how-things-work details in it.

Sentences up to 62 words, 120 to 175 words a page.

Marisol Ybarra was going to win the county bridge contest, and she had already chosen the exact spot on her wall for the ribbon. The contest had three rules, which she had copied onto an index card and propped against the lamp on her desk.

The opening of The Truss. Level 15 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 18 stories at level 15.

Level 16: above 8th grade

Level 16 stories read like short fiction for grown-up readers: quiet scenes, careful description and ideas that are left for the reader to notice. They suit strong readers who are happy to slow down and reread a line.

Sentences up to 62 words, 130 to 190 words a page.

Felix had expected the summer at his great-uncle's house to be tranquil, and it was, except for the clocks, which never stopped telling him what time it was, each one disagreeing with all the others.

The opening of The Clock That Lost Time. Level 16 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 10 stories at level 16.

Level 17: above 8th grade

Level 17 stories are dense and unhurried, with long sentences, precise words and characters whose reasons take a moment to see. They suit practised readers looking for something they will have to think about a little.

Sentences up to 70 words, 140 to 205 words a page.

Kit had a secret, and it lay face down at the bottom of her backpack.

The opening of The Winter Count. Level 17 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 13 stories at level 17.

Level 18: above 8th grade

Level 18 is the highest floor of Peabody's library: the longest sentences and the widest vocabulary of the free stories. They suit skilled readers who want a challenge and read for the pleasure of it.

Sentences up to 70 words, 150 to 220 words a page.

The letter from the school district arrived in June, on the final afternoon of the term, folded inside every report card like an apology that nobody had particularly wanted to sign.

The opening of The Junkyard Orchestra. Level 18 in full: its limits, skills and games · all 9 stories at level 18.

Your child's school reading level

A school's letter level, Lexile measure or DRA number is a different scale from Peabody's, made by a different method, and Peabody does not give a Lexile measure or convert between them. What your child's school reading level means explains each system, where it comes from, its own free book finder and what to ask the teacher.

How a level is measured

From the text, never from the child. Each level has a longest sentence, a range of words on a screen, a ceiling on words off the familiar-word list and, from level 6, a Flesch–Kincaid range; the writer and the checker hold every story to them before it goes in the library. The cheat sheet has every limit in one table.

Questions parents ask

What reading level should my child be at?

Find their grade in the table and start one level lower, so the first story is easy. If they read it smoothly and can say what happened, go up a level; if it is a struggle, go down. Children differ, so treat the level as a guide.

Is a Peabody level the same as a school reading level?

No. Peabody's levels measure its own stories, and a school's level comes from its own system and a teacher's judgement. Use the school's number with the school's books, and Peabody's with Peabody's.

Is it free?

Yes. Every story at every level is free to read, with no account, and Peabody is free through the end of 2026, with no sign-up.

Free at peabody.kids/grades/reading