

Complete Montessori English Teaching Guide

From First Words to Reading Books • Ages 2.5 to 6

Includes ESL Tips for Chinese Learners

The Progression:

■■ Oral Language → ■ Sound Games → ■ Sandpaper Letters → ■ Moveable Alphabet → ■ Pink Series
→ ■ Blue Series → ■ Green Series → ↗ ■ Writing

Key Principles:

- Follow the child - observe readiness signs before moving on
- Concrete before abstract - real objects before pictures, sounds before symbols
- Writing before reading - children encode (spell) before they decode (read)
- Multi-sensory learning - visual, auditory, and kinesthetic together

Stage 1: Oral Language ■■

Ages 2-3 years

Building vocabulary through immersion. Children need 200-300 words before formal phonics begins.

Vocabulary Building

How: Three-Period Lesson: 1) Say word clearly 2-3x while holding object, 2) 'Show me the apple', 'Put cup on my hand' (longest phase), 3) Point and ask 'What is this?' (only when certain)

Materials: Vocabulary baskets with real objects, Safari TOOBS animals, 3-Part Cards

■■ ESL: Extend Period 2 significantly for Chinese learners. Accept pointing/nodding.

Following Instructions

How: Start with single-step commands ('Stand up'), progress to two-step ('Pick up ball AND put on shelf'). Use Simon Says daily.

Materials: Action cards with pictures

■■ ESL: Use gestures WITH words initially. Gradually reduce gestures.

■ Ready for next stage: Child identifies 20+ objects without hesitation, follows 2-step instructions

Stage 2: Sound Games ■

Ages 3-4 years

Training the ear to hear individual sounds. NO letters shown - purely auditory.

Beginning Sounds

How: 'I spy something that begins with /m/' (use SOUND not letter name). Start with /s/, /m/, /f/ before /t/, /p/, /k/.

Materials: I-Spy basket with 40+ objects sorted by initial sound

■■ ESL: Chinese has different sounds. Extra time on: TH, V, R, L, blends.

Ending & Middle Sounds

How: After beginning sounds are solid: 'I spy something that ENDS with /t/'. For middle sounds, stretch: 'c-AAA-t'

Materials: Objects sorted by ending sound, CVC picture cards by vowel

■■ ESL: Chinese words don't end in consonants - this is HARD. Be patient.

Blending & Segmenting

How: Robot talk: /s/-/u/-/n/ → 'Sun!' Elkonin boxes: push chip per sound for segmenting.

Materials: Blending cards, Elkonin box mats, chips/counters

■■ ESL: Blending is the KEY to reading. Practice daily with games, not drills.

■ Ready for next stage: Child identifies beginning/ending/middle sounds, can blend and segment CVC words

Stage 3: Sandpaper Letters ■

Ages 3.5-4.5 years

Connecting sounds to symbols through touch. Multi-sensory learning creates lasting memory.

Tracing Letters

How: Hold tile, trace with 2 fingers while saying SOUND (not name). Order: s,m,a,t → p,i,n → c,o,d → b,f,g...

Materials: Sandpaper letters: PINK consonants, BLUE vowels, GREEN phonograms

■■ ESL: Chinese children know stroke order. Use this strength!

Consonants & Vowels

How: Introduce 3 contrasting letters per lesson. Teach SHORT vowels: a=apple, e=egg, i=it, o=octopus, u=umbrella

Materials: Full letter set, small objects per sound, salt/sand tray

■■ ESL: Short vowels don't exist in Chinese. Use mouth position cues.

Phonograms

How: After single letters: sh, ch, th, ck on GREEN tiles. 'Two letters = one sound'

Materials: Green phonogram tiles

■■ ESL: TH is very hard - tongue between teeth! Practice: the, this, that.

■ Ready for next stage: Child traces correctly, says sounds automatically, knows 15+ consonants & all vowels

Stage 4: Moveable Alphabet ■

Ages 4-5 years

Building words before writing. In Montessori, children WRITE (encode) before they READ.

Building CVC Words

How: Place object (cat). 'What sound starts cat?' (/c/) - find letter. 'Next?' (/a/) 'Last?' (/t/). Don't ask child to READ yet.

Materials: Large moveable alphabet (RED consonants, BLUE vowels), CVC object baskets

■■ ESL: This is where reading clicks. Build LOTS of words without reading pressure.

Pictures → Phrases → Sentences

How: Progress: objects → pictures → phrases ('the fat cat') → sentences ('The cat sat.')

Materials: CVC picture cards, phrase cards, sentence cards, capital letters

■■ ESL: Articles (the, a, an) don't exist in Chinese. Teach explicitly.

■ Ready for next stage: Child builds CVC words independently, simple phrases and sentences

Stage 5: Pink Series ■

Ages 4-5 years

Reading simple 3-letter words. Transition from spelling to reading.

Short Vowel Reading

How: Object-to-word matching: Place objects, sound out word cards, child matches. One vowel at a time: A → E → I → O → U

Materials: Pink Object Boxes (8 objects + word cards per vowel)

■■ ESL: Short A is distinct. E/I are close - use minimal pairs (pen/pin).

■ **Ready for next stage:** Child reads all 5 short vowel CVC words fluently

Stage 6: Blue Series ■

Ages 5-6 years

Reading consonant clusters (blends). Both sounds heard: bl, cr, st, nd, mp.

Blends

How: Beginning: bl, br, cl, cr, dr, fl, fr, gl, gr, st, sw, tr. Ending: nd, mp, lk, nt, nk. CCVC (frog) then CVCC (milk).

Materials: Blend cards, Blue Object Boxes, CCVC/CVCC word cards

■■ ESL: Consonant clusters are VERY hard for Chinese speakers. Go slowly.

■ **Ready for next stage:** Child reads CCVC/CVCC words with clear pronunciation of all consonants

Stage 7: Green Series ■

Ages 5-6 years

Vowel teams and digraphs. Multiple letters making one sound.

Phonograms

How: Long A: ai/ay. Long E: ee/ea. Long O: oa/ow. Diphthong: ou/ow (ouch). R-controlled: ar, or, er/ir/ur (same sound!)

Materials: Green Phonogram Boxes, word lists by pattern

■■ ESL: Long vowels are easier than short - more distinct sounds.

■ **Ready for next stage:** Child reads common phonogram words accurately

Stage 8: Writing ■

Ages 4-6 years (parallel)

Writing develops alongside reading. Compose with moveable alphabet before physical writing.

Pre-Writing & Letters

How: Metal insets for pencil control first. Then letter formation on chalkboard (large), then paper.

Materials: Metal insets, chalkboard, large lined paper, journals

■■ ESL: Letter formation differs from Chinese characters. Start fresh.

■ **Ready for next stage:** Child writes CVC words, progressing to phrases and sentences