



Reading to Kids read-aloud video tips

Thank you for helping us bring the joy of reading to kids at home!

Below are tips we have learned to help you create read-aloud videos, and forgive us if these seem obvious or you already know them, or they seem overwhelming. We don't want to dissuade, just want to help avoid problems we often see when folk record video of themselves. 😊

We are also open to any other tips you recommend we share with others – send them to info@readingtokids.org

- Any video you create would be a very large file, about 10MBs for every 10 seconds. We would end up streaming the video on www.YouTube.com, so it would be best for you to upload your video to YouTube, then **send us the link to it**.

Another option is www.Vimeo.com, which is similar to YouTube. We have more experience with YouTube, though, and it is more commonly used by kids, so if you have never used either, YouTube would probably be your better choice.

- You may choose to read aloud **any K-5th grade level book we have read aloud over the past 21 years**. You can quickly look up any book we have read before at <http://readingtokids.org/Books/BookOverview.php>. All of our read-aloud books were chosen by teachers at our partner schools, and at the above link you can see the grade level and craft ideas that may inspire your own craft you demonstrate in your video.

(Please keep in mind, though, that any craft ideas you see in our reader guides may include materials the kids won't have at home, so you may have to adapt them to simpler, common house-hold items that underserved kids are likely to have. [Click here for our list of Simple Crafts Kids Can Do at Home with Common Household Items](#))

- If you do not already own a copy of the book you want to read aloud, you can check it out from the public library (which you can do digitally), borrow one from a friend, or purchase online, either a physical book or a digital book. We have seen folks post videos of a book they read and show from an iPad, for example, or screen-share an electronic book. Volunteer Chris Martin has excellent tips about how to show a book's pages [below in this document](#). At www.readingtokids.org we have a list of resources for all visitors, including a list of free online books at <http://readingtokids.org/Home/main.php#eandaudiobooks>.

- If you haven't already, consider viewing a few of the **videos we link to** on the many sites now listed at www.readingtokids.org and <http://readingtokids.org/ReadingClubs/Videos.php> - but watch them with the eye of a director and performer. Notice what works to make a video effective and engaging to you so you can try to replicate that in your own video.

- If you want to include our **logo**, you can download it from <https://www.readingtokids.org/r2k/images/R2K-Logo-Hi-Res-PRINT2.png>. If you have one, please wear our **t-shirts** in your video.

- It can also be a really nice touch to **wear a nametag** that is big enough and your name written large enough for kids to see it.

- Please **mention the name(s) of our partner school(s)** you usually read at, and be sure to be **upbeat!** No need to mention what's happening in the world today – everyone knows and you don't want to accidentally bring up something that confuses your viewers, who may be of any age. Briefly telling them you miss them and hope to see them at a reading club soon is nice.

- **Capturing sound is even more important than good lighting**. People will watch imperfect video more readily than they will listen to soft or echoey sound, so try to have a microphone as close to your mouth as you can, and consider using blankets or pillows to reduce or eliminate echoes. Record a brief sample and play it back to hear the quality of your

sound before embarking on a full video recording. Often you will discover there is a persistent background hum from a computer fan or air conditioning that you tune out but your microphone will pick up and amplify. You can also consider re-recording your audio to replace the original audio. Volunteer Chris Martin has more excellent tips about sound [below in this document!](#)

- Check that your **lighting** doesn't reflect off pages as you show them to the camera. Check with a short test shoot how you will look and how showing the pages will look to the kids. Also, it's nearly impossible to have too much light on a video, which is why so many amateur videos can look so dark. But imperfect lighting is still not as bad as difficult-to-hear audio. Guides like <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-Professional-Quality-YouTube-Videos> are targeted to more than what you plan to do, but they offer great suggestions you can do with what you already have around your home.

- Busier pages you'll want to hold longer for kids to study, and you might even want to rig a stand to rest the book on as you hold it so the book won't shake. You may even consider filming the pages separately and using something like the free iMovie from Apple (<https://www.apple.com/imovie/>) or Googling "imovie for android" or "imovie for Windows". But really, your warmth of personality is the main draw – that and the story!

- Incorporate **open-ended questions**, and perhaps **very** brief pauses to allow kids to think and answer or guiding them to pause the video to discuss aloud with others who may be watching with them. Since kids can pause the video your pauses or guidance should be short, since those who choose not to pause will hear dead air that can sound awkward with no one answering your questions.

- Please **include a simple craft**, too, which you may film separately and add to the end of your reading-aloud video. **The kids we serve will likely only have very simple and basic craft supplies**, so if you guide them to use construction paper, mention that any kind of paper can also work, such as newspaper or mail your parents don't need. They will likely have things like toilet paper or paper towel cores, that sort of common household thing. [Click here for our list of Simple Crafts Kids Can Do at Home with Common Household Items](#)

- A principal told us having the volunteers read aloud with **sock puppets** and a craft making sock puppets would be delightful. Incorporating sock puppets, stuffed animals, pets, etc. can be very engaging to the kids. They should also have old socks they can make puppets out of to mimic your own puppet use.

- Another principal also told us that many of the kids we serve have no access to **any type of nature**, so incorporating images of flowers, trees, any type of natural environment, animals, insects, etc. would be great!

- Keep your audience aware of **where they are in the book**. When we read aloud in person the kids can always see where you are in the book, but when reading aloud on video they may not be able to see how many pages are left, even if they can see page numbers as you show them the pictures or text. Not knowing where they are in the book often causes viewers to lose focus, so we recommend occasionally mentioning things like "we're a quarter of the way through the book", "we're halfway through the book", "5 more pages left", etc. will help them retain focus.

- Be aware of **what else is visible in your video**, such as in your background. We may have things where you record yourself that might confuse a child (such as a scary character doll or mask) that you are so used to that you forget it is there.

- We haven't used the **Zoom** recording feature yet, but if you use Zoom and are familiar with its "**virtual background**" feature (<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/210707503-Virtual-Background>), then you can record yourself in a solo Zoom meeting with that as your background. Here are links to three backgrounds you can use that incorporate our logo:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/596pj3ni0qsos30/R2K_logo_Zoom_bkgrnd_kidlibrary.jpg?dl=0

https://www.dropbox.com/s/9nqq8mp9570nwbs/R2K_logo_Zoom_bkgrnd_bookshelves.jpg?dl=0

https://www.dropbox.com/s/z2vyy4121cbjb8r/R2K_logo_Zoom_bkgrnd_library.jpg?dl=0

- Even if you follow all of the above tips, we hope you understand why we can't guarantee we'll feature your video on our website. That said, we will certainly be eager to share those videos that capture well a virtual version of our reading clubs!

Please see the next page for excellent tips from volunteer Chris Martin!

Additional tips from long-time *Reading to Kids* volunteer Chris Martin

Our first project, *Oh, the Places You'll Go*, was a terrific learning project. You can view it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7gAbeFCuwc>. It was pretty fancy with the green screen and talented dogs.

The most difficult part, however, was **getting clear images of the book**. We scanned every page on a 10" x 12" scanner and then knitted them together. Initially, it sounded easy, but it took a couple of days. What I learned was that it was much easier to simply buy the Kindle (electronic) version of the book and then import those into the movie making program. I used Final Cut Pro, but the free iMovie program would have worked for 90% of the movie (OK, maybe not the dog walking with feet in his shoes).

The second most difficult part was **getting the sound right**. Most of the videos I've watched of people reading books sounds as if they were in a church. (There seems to be quite a bit of otherworldly feedback. We're all accustomed to wonderful sound in all of the media that we consume that amateur video/audio sounds awful.)

In our effort, the biggest problem was getting the microphone directly in front of our mouths. When Patricia read the book, she was in the closet with the microphone 5" away directly in front of her. She read the book from cover to cover without interruptions. Then we went back and discussed the book with the microphone further away so that it could pick up both of us. (We also had another microphone on her lapel so that sometimes you would hear her only on the right side of the screen.) The effect was a bit schizophrenic.

[Click this link for a 51 second video](#) that demonstrates how different microphones sound in different environments.

1. The first clip is of a pair of expensive lavalier microphones.
2. Then there is a clip of my speaking directly into an iPhone 5S (in other words, not very fancy, but by speaking directly into the phone's microphone, it sounds pretty good.)
3. The third clip is in a quieter place in the closet. Again speaking directly into the iPhone it sounds good.
4. The fourth clip is in the shower where the sound bounces all over the place and doesn't sound very good.
5. Finally, in the closet again (best environment) but the phone is moved further away (and the sound degrades with distance quickly).

The bottom line is that **the microphone doesn't matter as much as getting the phone or camera close to your mouth**.

But no one wants to see your mouth from 5" away.



My suggestion is to start with an introduction with you holding a physical book (if you have one), then quickly **transitioning to screenshots of the book itself while reading directly into your phone using the free Voice Memo** app if using the iPhone.

I'm certain that there is a comparable version on the Android system or other types of phones.

The screenshots of the book can be derived from the Kindle versions of selected books. I went through all of the Kindergarten books that we've read and identified those that have a Kindle version available. Of the 240 Kindergarten books, 98 had a Kindle version on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). If you subscribe to Amazon FreeTime (\$2.99/mo.) there were 7 books that you could download as part of the service. And if you subscribe to Kindle Unlimited (\$0.99 for 3 months during a special promotion until tomorrow, April 15th), you could download another 8 of the books on our list. The other 83 Kindle books cost an average of \$3.72 each (prices range from \$1.99 to \$10.99). (It took me several hours to go through all of the Kindergarten books, but suspect that the 1st grade and 2nd grade books will have similar Kindle availability.)

I ended up downloading and preparing screenshots for 16 of the Kindergarten books from the Kindle versions. (Processing those 16 books took less time than scanning *Oh, the Places You'll Go* and cleaning them up.) I'm not certain whether all 16 of them are worth the effort to bring them to life as opposed to other books that I haven't purchased yet, but would be more enjoyable to record. I have also ordered the physical version of the book for *Olympig* that we're preparing right now. The other books that I've prepared are:

Art & Max, by David Wiesner
By the Light of the Halloween Moon, by Caroline Stutson
Harold and the Purple Crayon, by Crockett Johnson
Little Blue Truck, by Alice Schertle
Little Red Riding Hood (Folk Tale Classics), by Paul Galdone
Monkey with a Tool Belt and the Noisy Problem, by Chris Monroe
Pete the Cat: Rocking in My School Shoes, by Eric Litwin
Pete the Cat: Valentine's Day Is Cool, by James Dean
Red: A Crayon's Story, by Michael Hall
Scaredy Squirrel Makes a Friend, by Melanie Watt
SuperHero ABC, by Bob McLeod
The 13 Nights of Halloween, by Guy Vasilovich
The Astonishing Secret of Awesome Man, by Michael Chabon
The Bad Seed, by Jory John
Three Pigs, The, by David Wiesner

I suggest buying a book with a Kindle version and reading the entire book into a voice memo on your smartphone. Suspend the phone with a tripod or some other stand to keep it in front of you at a consistent distance from your mouth. (Listen to the video at the link below to hear that the distance makes a greater difference than the fancy microphone.) Then go back through the book and then ask questions as you would in a normal reading club. The audio on this will be much more difficult to keep consistent as you'll probably move around much more than when just reading the book. When asking questions, your voice is more likely to become louder and your mouth will probably move further away from your microphone/smartphone. This is the most challenging part of recording the book.

Next, read the entire book in front of a camera. (This applies only for Kindergarten through 2nd grade picture books, I don't have suggestions for chapter books yet.) You'll probably need external lighting to make you and the book look lighter than the background. (But you can overdo it and look like a ghost because the light is too bright.) Make certain that your camera/smartphone is on a tripod or some other stationary fixture. No one wants to get seasick watching you read a book in selfie-mode. The camera should not move. Chances are that most of the footage will not be as understandable as showing a screenshot of the page while reading the words separately.

Finally, figure out how to suspend your smartphone/camera above your kitchen table and perform the craft below. (View <https://youtu.be/Q7gAbeFCuwc?t=833> at 13:52 minutes into the video.) You may record the audio separately after finishing the craft. (In iMovie or other movie editing software you should be able to speed up the video during the repetitive parts such as cutting.)