

Learning to Read a Step Counter at an Early Age

I begin using a step counter with students who are 3 years of age. When they are very young, I read their numbers for them. At this age, it is not as important for them to be able to read the numbers as it is for them to recognize the association between bigger numbers and greater fitness.

As my students get older, I begin to help them read their own numbers. By kindergarten, my students are reading their own numbers. Many will not fully grasp the concept of place value, but they are, at least, able to read the number out loud and recognize it as a large or small number.

I use a special method at the chalkboard to help students learn to read the number. We use a step counter that has five spaces for digits 0-9. Therefore, I write the following at the top of the board and place a number below it as an example:

	t	<u>1000</u>	<u>100</u>	t	#
example	0	1	8	6	7

My students learn to insert the numbers from their step counters into the positions designated on the board.

Here are the basic rules that apply:

1. Start reading the number from the left hand side. (Designate left and right on the board.)
2. A space with a zero is silent. If you come to a 0 in the middle of the number, skip over it and go to the next number.
3. Say aloud the number in each position, followed by the number or letter above it. (The teacher must help students learn to recognize the numerals 1000 and 100.) The # sign stands for “number” and means that the number is read by itself. The above example would be read “1-thousand, 8-hundred, 6-t, 7”)
4. If there is a 1 in the last “t” position, then the last two numbers are read together. (Example 1-9 equals nineteen) Afterall, there are no 1-t’s.
5. If there is a 2, 3, or 5 in the “t” position, then the sound of the word changes. (Example – twenty, instead of 2-t)
6. If you are going to use the first column on the left, it would be a “t” column. The number would be said, followed by the letter “t.” Two exceptions – If the number is a 1, then the first two numbers are said together, followed by the word “1000.” (Example – 19 thousand) If the 1000 column has a “0” then the number in the first “t” column is said, followed by the letter “t” then the word thousand. The rule still applies that the sound of the word changes for a 2, 3, and 5.

Suggestions for assessment:

1. Put different number examples on the board and ask the class to read them as a group.
2. Call on students who wish to volunteer to read their numbers.
3. Ask students to turn to a friend and read numbers to each other.
4. The teacher or a strong math student can move among students and ask them to recite numbers aloud.
5. Ask questions like “Raise your hand if you have a number in the thousands” or “Raise your hand if your number is between 500 and 1000.” A step counter is the perfect opportunity to introduce the math concept of greater than or less than.

Teaching hint – When reading the numbers, say the bottom row with a normal voice and raise the pitch of your voice on the top row numbers or letters. This helps children understand place value and recognize when you are moving on to a new part in the number. The need for this will lessen as children improve on reading the numbers themselves.