

# Environmental Print

What exactly *is* Environmental Print? Simply put, it is the print that surrounds us in everyday life – the print within our environment. Traffic signs, maps, newspapers, storefront signs, T-shirts, food containers, and box labels are just a few examples of environmental print. There are several reasons why this form of print is such an effective tool to use when introducing toddlers and preschoolers to reading text.

First of all, environmental print is everywhere and its constant presence makes it easily recognizable. (Try to find one preschooler that doesn't know what the McDonald's® sign means!) The availability and variety of environmental print makes it easy to squeeze in quick reading opportunities. Point to, and name, the sign on your grocery store when you pull into the parking lot. Give your child the store flyer to look through as you shop. As he or she names the pictures within the flyer, point to the print that identifies the pictures as well. Give your little one a box of cereal or a can of soup to hold. Say the product name together as you run your finger under the word. All of these pre-reading experiences during a routine shopping visit help your child to see that he or she is becoming a reader!

Secondly, environmental print is real, “on-the-job” literacy training. Reading books is an *abstract* activity for very young children. Toddlers aren't yet aware that it's the words in a book that convey the meaning. (I've read stories to young children who think I'm making the words up as I go!) However, environmental print is meaningful because it's attached to tangible objects. If Cheerios® cereal is your child's favorite food, for example, then the words on that box (the environmental print) are **conveying** meaning to him or her. Environmental print is literacy's manipulative, or hands-on learning tool!

Lastly, environmental print is comprised of small chunks of text. Children experience instant success when they read the phrases and words that surround them. They do not feel overwhelmed by too many words on a page.

The best way to utilize environmental print is to be aware of it and its effectiveness as a teaching tool. Notice the print that surrounds you and your child as you move throughout the day. Grab those *teachable moments*, share what you see, and exclaim to your child, “You're reading!”

## Examples of Environmental Print

1. food labels on cans and jars (soups, vegetables, pickles, etc.)
2. food containers (cereal boxes, oatmeal canisters, waffles, eggs, etc.)
3. coupons
4. hand-written grocery list, hand-written reminder notes

5. signs (traffic, storefront)
6. food wrappers/containers from take-out/fast food
7. game boxes
8. junk mail
9. hand-written notes and letters
10. directions/instructions
11. toy boxes, labels
12. greeting cards
13. T-shirts
14. signs that label (sale signs, library sign that says "book returns")
15. older child's homework
16. books, magazines, newspapers
17. business cards, post cards, flyers
18. product labels
19. school notices, parents' work papers
20. phone books, catalogs