

Evaluating Apps and New Media for Young Children: A Rubric

The rubric is divided into two parts:

- the technical/user experience criteria for both story and toy apps (Part 1)
- the additional content criteria specific to either story apps *or* toy apps (Part 2)

Award one point for each question answered with a 'yes'. There are 22 questions for each app if both parts of the rubric are considered. A perfect score is ideal, for example 11/11 technical elements and 11/11 content elements, but some apps may not get a perfect score and still have a valuable place in a program or a child's learning experience.

Part 1: Story and Toy Apps

Both story (book) apps and toy (game) apps should be evaluated according to several similar technical and user experience criteria. **About all apps, librarians and caregivers should ask these eleven questions.**

Yes (1)	No (0)	11 Elements Found in High Quality Story <i>and</i> Toy Apps (Technical/User Experience)
		1. Is the app's navigation clear for the intended audience? Does it have intuitive way-finding?
		2. Does the app work free of glitches?
		3. Do sound effects, if included, enhance the app experience? Are there settings for turning on/off music and other sound effects, if they are not crucial to the story or play?
		4. Does the app feature a clean, uncluttered display?
		5. Is the necessary equipment available to offer a positive experience? For example, is a large monitor needed to best view the app? Or is the tablet screen appropriate? Does the app require additional physical hardware?
		6. Is the app free of links to social media and the internet? If not, can access be disabled in the app or device settings?
		7. Does the app developer state it will NOT collect data about you or your child within the app?
		8. Are there developmentally appropriate cues for interactivity?
		9. Are there parental tips, restrictions, and settings within the app and/or within the device's settings to customize the child(ren)'s experience?
		10. Do the app's technical features encourage joint media engagement?
		11. Is the app free of in-app purchases or in-app ads? If not, are they easily ignored and hard to access by young children? For example, can in-app purchases be disabled in the device settings? Can a password be required for in-app purchases?

Part 2: Story apps

Story, or book, apps have unique content and provide specific user experiences. Some of the qualities are similar to those found in high quality children’s picture books, while some are specific to the digital format. Many book apps are in fact, print books transformed for the digital environment. **When evaluating story apps consider these additional eleven questions.**

Yes (1)	No (0)	11 Elements Found in High Quality Story Apps (Content)
		1. Does the app feature a great story with high quality images and a narrative that entices the reader to read again and again? (Repetition deepens a young reader’s understanding of the story.)
		2. Is the story original or is it a previously published story that is strongly enhanced in the digital form?
		3. Does the app include accurate information and grammatically correct content?
		4. Are the story’s characters culturally and ethnically diverse and include experiences that reflects today’s diverse families?
		5. Is the content appropriate for the targeted age group?
		6. Are opportunities to strengthen the Every Child Ready to Read early literacy skills, where appropriate, included?
		7. Does the app include meaningful interactive elements that maintain the story’s flow and add to the story instead of being only for interactivity’s sake? (Elements should engage the reader and should help the reader better understand the content instead of distract from the story.)
		8. Is the font plain and highly-readable, both of which are beneficial for the learning reader and for groups who are experiencing the app on either a small or big screen?
		9. Are read-to-me and read-to-myself options available, allowing families to read and listen together? (Narration should be well-spoken and expressive.)
		10. Does the app include multiple language options and a voice record option to foster literacy in home languages?
		11. Does the app’s content encourage joint media engagement?

Part 2: Toy apps

Toy apps, also known as game or creation apps, include activities, puzzles, and/or games, usually without the narrative found in a story app. Along with the technical and user experience features mentioned above, **consider these eleven important elements specific to toy apps.**

Yes (1)	No (0)	11 Elements Found in High Quality Toy Apps (Content)
		1. Does the app offer open-ended play?
		2. Does the app's content encourage joint media engagement and collaboration?
		3. Do the activities, games, or puzzles foster creativity?
		4. Is the content appropriate for the targeted age group?
		5. Does the app strengthen one or more of the Every Child Ready to Read early literacy practices where appropriate?
		6. Are the activities, puzzles, or games customizable depending on the child's interest and experience?
		7. Is the app sufficiently engaging to warrant multiple uses?
		8. Are the app's concepts presented clearly?
		9. Does the app reflect diverse users by including culturally and ethnically diverse characters, environments, and experiences?
		10. Are STEM/STEAM concepts addressed?
		11. Are the images and/or graphic details high quality?

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Claudia Haines
nevershushed.com