
No-Fail Software Gifts for Kids

by Warren Buckleitner

1995 was a great year for children's software, with more than 600 new titles (compared to 400 the year before). Of these, you can find some wonderful choices for your children, for both fun and learning. To help you narrow your choices, we've selected some of our all-time favorites for a variety of computer platforms. These programs are recent releases, pack in a lot of great content for the price, and are entertaining and educational. Keep in mind that your computer will need at least 8 MB of RAM and a CD-ROM drive in order to make these programs run.

Preschool and Early Elementary

Fun 'N Games. If you enjoy quality non-violent games like Pac Man, you'll appreciate this collection of five activities designed by Williams Entertainment, makers of video arcade games. Includes a well-designed painting program, a music making activity, and a mix-and-match style dressing game.

Distributed by GT Software
(203) 949-0381 — \$38
MS-DOS, CD-ROM — not Windows friendly
Ages 4 and up

Putt-Putt Saves the Zoo. Fifth in a series (and perhaps the best), this title has the proven staying power that makes it an excellent choice for a preschooler. Children use the mouse to steer Putt-Putt around a zoo in search of six lost baby animals. Along the way, they play matching and logic games and learn animal facts.

Humongous Entertainment
(800) 499-8386 — \$39.95
Windows 95, Windows 3.1,
Mac OS (CD-ROM)
Ages 3-7

Big Job. Packed with no less than 12 playable logic games and seasoned with live video from job sites such as a fire rescue station, this title combines child appeal with learning potential. Games include a multi-level maze through a burning building. In order to make the rescue in time, children must plan carefully — for example, by picking up a fire ax to break down a door that blocks the way.

The Discovery Channel
(800) 762-2189 — \$49.95

*Windows 95, Windows 3.1,
Mac OS (CD-ROM)*
Ages 5 to 9

JumpStart First Grade. This is an affordable variety pack of 15 multi-level activities that playfully introduce a range of typical school lessons. Children learn to use money by counting out the correct change to operate a snack machine in the school cafeteria, or read clocks to advance on a board game. Parents will especially like the way this program tracks a child's progress from day to day. We also recommend both JumpStart Preschool and Kindergarten.

Knowledge Adventure
(800) 542-4240 — \$33 (street)
Windows 95, Windows 3.1,
Mac OS (CD-ROM)
Ages 5 to 7

Read, Write & Type! Ideal for your older kindergartner or first grader who is learning to read, this program turns what used to be boring phonics practice into play. Children are asked to save the letter people from the invading "Vexar the Virus" by winning at 55 progressively more challenging exercises that include picture/letter matching, keyboarding, and writing "e-mail" messages.

The Learning Company
(800) 852-2255 — \$60
Windows 95, Windows 3.1,
Mac OS (CD-ROM)
Ages 6 to 8

Warren Buckleitner is editor of Children's Software Revue in Ypsilanti, Michigan. To subscribe to this 24 page, bimonthly consumer's guide to children's software for \$24, call (800) 993-9499, or write to CSR, 520 North Adams Street, Ypsilanti, MI 48197. (buckleit@aol.com)