

## CORE SKILL: COMMUNICATE

# Early Writing



### What You Need to Know

Young children’s early writing involves the coming together of three skills: the mechanics of handwriting, the language to create a message to an audience, and the knowledge of how the writing system works (e.g., letters/sounds). Even when it seems that a young child’s writing is simply marks and scribbles, there is a lot being explored, and learned, through the process. Across the preschool years, children’s writing increasingly reflects their knowledge of different types of writing (e.g., lists, story, labels), their skills to know and form letters, to connect letters to sounds within words, and to internalize the rules that govern print (e.g., directionality, spacing).

### Things to Consider

Looking at a child’s writing as having ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ words does not leave a lot of room for learning. There are many mistakes that children make in writing that are very predictable and consistent with where their print and sound skills may be at that time. Move feedback away from perfunctory praise (“Great!”) or overly corrective (“Let me show you how to spell this,”) to support the “next step” in writing development. For example, if a child is scribbling, work on getting the child to write the letters of their name and use those letters in other writing. If a child is writing letters but not connecting letters to sounds, help make that connection and then guide children to ‘listen to the first sounds of the word’ and make that letter-sound connection as a way to start writing.

### Development of Early Writing Skills

Between 36 and 48 months, children may:	Between 48 and 60 months, children may:
Engage in writing activities that consist largely of drawing and scribbling that begin to convey meaning.	Progressively use drawing, scribbling, letter-like forms, and letters to intentionally convey meaning.
With modeling and support, write some letter-like forms and letters.	With support, may use invented spelling consisting of salient or beginning sounds (e.g., L for elevator).

### Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of early writing:

- ◆ Select books that feature interesting print features (e.g., words in pictures, words stretching across the page, words in colorful or different font). As children notice print in books, they are taking in information that they can “try out” in their writing.
- ◆ Provide child-friendly writing materials (e.g., pencils, colored pencils, thin and thick markers, crayons) and props (e.g., graph paper or observational journals in Science and Math centers, menus and order forms in Dramatic Play).
- ◆ Encourage journal writing throughout the day (e.g., as a quiet time, to make observations of growth, to illustrate a story).
- ◆ Name-writing routines (e.g., have children sign their name to every product they make, create a sign-in process in the morning).
- ◆ Infuse large writing displays (e.g., use of chart paper or a whiteboard) into your whole group routines, activities, and discussions. Join your writing with something you are discussing/teaching (e.g., a story chart when talking about a book after reading it during morning circle).
- ◆ Display child writing across the room. Make sure the writing is displayed at eye-level for children to return to their writing products and continue to consider and discuss them. Encourage children to sign their writing before display.



# Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Early Writing

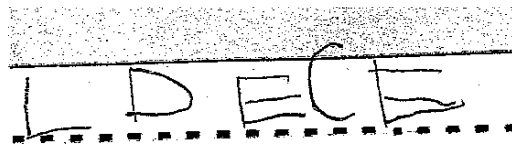
OBSERVE	<p><b>OBSERVE</b></p> <p>Observe what children are writing and consider the extent to which knowledge of print rules, knowledge of letters, and knowledge of how to break words into sounds is coming together within their writing. Are words represented by letters? Do the letters represent key sounds within the words, or even beginning/ending sounds of words? See Additional Resources for further information on the stages and observational examples.</p>
FOCUS	<p><b>Label and Narrate Your Writing</b></p> <p>Make the act and purpose of writing visible to children as you reflect on your own writing in the classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “I’m writing down all of your suggestions here on this paper so we can remember everyone’s ideas.”</li> <li>◆ “I’m writing your name, A-d-e-l-e, on your paper so we know this is your work.”</li> </ul> <p><b>Discuss the Form and Function of Different Types of Writing</b></p> <p>Discuss the form and function of different <i>types</i> of writing such as signs, lists, and letters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Signs:</b> “Today we are going to have a visitor. Let’s make a welcome sign! With a sign, we don’t have to start at the top of the page. We may put the words right in the middle to get everyone’s attention.”</li> <li>◆ <b>Lists:</b> “Each line in this list represents one thing we need to find outside.”</li> <li>◆ <b>Letters:</b> “Here at the top is where you write who your letter is for, so I am writing, ‘Dear Ms. Baker.’ Down here at the bottom is where we sign who it’s from, so I’m writing our class name.”</li> <li>◆ “I traced my hand. Now I am going to write my five favorite foods, one on each finger. This tells 5 things about me, just like I have 5 fingers!”</li> </ul>
SCAFFOLD I	<p><b>Take Dictation</b></p> <p>Help children connect their ideas and words by writing down what they say and explicitly connecting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “Oh yes, I can see that this is a huge rocket going to the moon! Can I write down what you said so everyone can read about your drawing? Now let’s hang it!”</li> <li>◆ “Let’s write our schedule down to help us with our morning. First, we will sing our... Yes, our song! I will write ‘song’ (<i>write the word ‘song’ as you say it</i>). Then we will...”</li> </ul>
SCAFFOLD II	<p><b>Encourage Children’s Writing</b></p> <p>Encourage children’s independent writing. This can include writing their names, writing letters or individual words, and writing longer pieces (that may include some nonsense letters or scribble but that’s okay). When possible, make their writing products visible, commenting on the value of their effort, and prompting continued exploration of writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “Will you sign your work?”</li> <li>◆ “Write your name on the sign in sheet. Put an ‘L’ in the box if you brought a lunchbox. Put a ‘B’ in the box if you will buy your lunch.”</li> <li>◆ “You may use your journals during centers. Today’s journal question is: What is my favorite place to visit? It can be a real place or an imaginary place.”</li> </ul>
KEEP IT GOING	<p>Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines.</p>

# Additional Resources

Phases of early writing literacy development:

1. Scribbling and drawing: Children can show left to right directionality or word spacing and top to down orientation, but no real letters.
2. Letter and letter-like forms: Children move from using a few isolated letters over and over, such as those from their names, to more varied 'strings of letters' (even if it's nonsense).
3. Phonological Awareness and Print Knowledge start to combine: Children might use initial sounds or other 'loud' sounds in the word to represent a full word (e.g., writing M for mama).
4. More full blending of Phonological Awareness and Print Knowledge, where multiple sounds (usually first and last, and eventually some middle sounds and vowel sounds) are represented by letters. This is usually not until kindergarten or even first grade for some kids.

A young child's early writing shows us that they know something about how print works. Very young children scribble and draw. However, as children develop print knowledge, their awareness of letters shows in their writing. At first, the child may infuse letters into drawings. Over time, a child will begin to write strings of letters. These strings represent words, but the letters have no connection to the sounds within the words.



As children begin to merge their alphabet knowledge with their phonological awareness (i.e., ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words), their writing also shows this connection. Here, a girl represents key sounds within the words "I love Pennsylvania." A more sophisticated level of integrating letter knowledge and phonological awareness in writing can be seen as children start representing beginning and ending sounds of words and, eventually, beginning and end sounds as well as a middle vowel.

