

Creating Confident Writers in the Early Childhood Classroom

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What Young Writers Need to Figure Out About Writing

- **How print works**
 - Thoughts and conversations can be written down
 - Squiggles and pseudoletters grow into intentional symbols through developmental writing
- **How the alphabetic system is related to written language**
 - Sounds are represented by letters and letter combinations
 - Knowing sound patterns makes writing easier
- **How writing is used**
 - Writing is used for real purposes
 - Writers have something to say (developing a writer's voice)
- **How to control a pencil well enough to make desired marks**

General Categories of Independent Writing Development

1. Writing by drawing
2. Writing by scribbling
3. Writing by making letter-like forms or shapes
4. Writing by reproducing well-learned units (letters in name) or letter strings
5. Writing by using invented or hypothesized spellings using correct letter forms (includes letter reversals)
6. Writing by using conventional spelling

Adapted by Margaret Immel for the School Literacy and Culture Project from *Literacy Development in the Early Years* by Leslie Mandel Morrow. (1997, third edition) Boston: Allyn & Bacon.



Conventions of Writing Developmental Scale

Name: _____

Date: _____

Level: _____

RECORD THE HIGHEST LEVEL AT WHICH MORE THAN HALF OF THE DESCRIPTORS APPLY TO A WRITING SAMPLE OR COLLECTION OF A CHILD'S WRITING. REFER TO THE ANCHOR PAPERS FOR EXAMPLES OF WRITING AT EACH LEVEL.

Anchor Papers

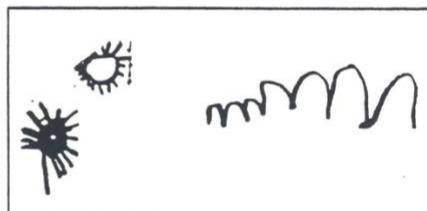
Level 1—Emerging

- Makes uncontrolled or unidentifiable scribbling



Level 2—Pictorial

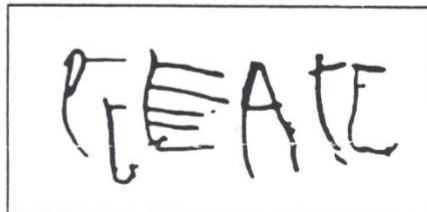
- Imitates writing
 Draws somewhat recognizable picture
 Tells about picture



The flower is growing.

Level 3—Precommunicative

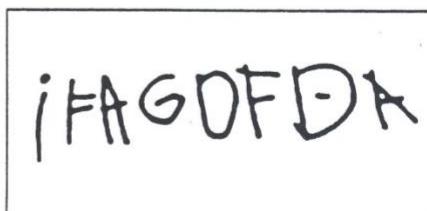
- Writes to convey a message; attempts to read it back
 Uses letter-like forms and/or random letter strings
 Prints own name or occasional known word



There are webs in Spidertown.

Level 4—Semiphonetic

- Correctly uses some letters to match sounds
 May use one beginning letter to write a word
 Usually writes left to right (may reverse some letters)



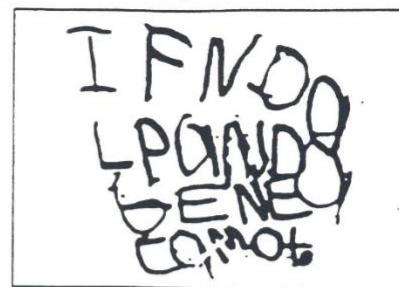
I have a goldfish called Arielle.



Conventions of Writing Developmental Scale (continued)

Level 5—Phonetic

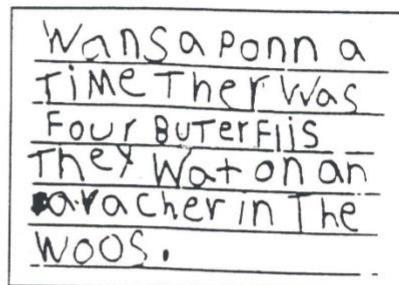
- ___ Represents beginning and ending consonant sounds
- ___ Spells some high-frequency words correctly in sentences
- ___ Includes some vowels (often not correct ones)
- ___ Writes one or more sentences



I found a lamp and a genie came out.

Level 6—Transitional

- ___ Correctly spells many high-frequency words in sentences
- ___ Uses vowels in most syllables (may not be correct ones)
- ___ Begins to use simple punctuation (periods, question marks—may not be correct)
- ___ Writes more than one sentence



Once upon a time, there was (were) four butterflies. They went on an adventure in the woods.

Level 7—Conventional

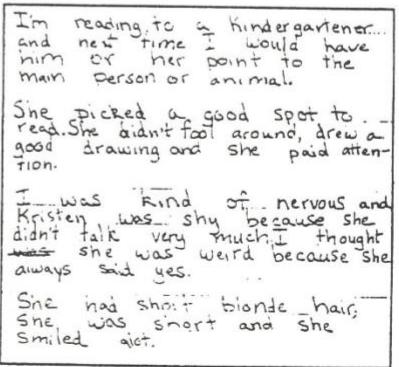
- ___ Correctly spells most high-frequency words (more than one sentence)
- ___ Uses larger correctly spelled vocabulary; may use phonetic spelling for advanced words
- ___ Uses more complex and varied sentence structure; capitalizes beginning word in sentence; uses lowercase appropriately
- ___ Usually uses periods and question marks correctly
- ___ Spaces words correctly



Dear Blue Ranger,
Why do you fight? I see you on TV. You are the best. Why do you go to the command center? Why are you on Fox Kids? I like your show. Are you my friend? Love, Alex

Level 8—Advanced

- ___ Has accumulated a rich body of written vocabulary
- ___ Uses advanced print conventions accurately (quotation marks, commas, apostrophes)
- ___ Organizes writing into appropriate paragraphs



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I. What do children need to grow and develop as writers?

According to Ralph Fletcher,

"Children need mentors to look up to, an environment that encourages risk-taking, and a love of words."

Don Holdaway (1979) described the cycle that helps children to develop as readers and writers:

- Children must see adults reading and writing and be immersed in a print-rich environment
- Children need to collaborate and interact socially with adults or peers, an invitation into the “literacy club” (Smith, 1988)
- Children need opportunities to practice in an environment that is risk-free and somewhat private
- Children demonstrate their mastery to others in any of the ways we celebrate and “publish” their work

The “aha” moment when a child realizes that writing is speech written down
Children must come to the understanding that

“If you can say it, you can write it.

If you can write it, you can read it.”

Writing development takes place in three arenas

- Physical act of writing (fine motor control, stamina, etc.)
- Knowledge of how print works (left to right, top to bottom, letter/sound correspondence, etc.)
- Creative expression (what child is thinking, what is important to the child, communicating feelings, etc.)

All of these need to be considered when planning for writing activities in the classroom.

II. How can we create a supportive writing environment for children?

- Provide routines and opportunities that involve writing for real purposes in the classroom (daily news, lists, sign-in, labels, notes, recipes, invitations, etc.)
 - Children see their words in print, later share the pen and take over more of the writing task.
- Create an attractive writing center with a wide variety of supplies and open-ended activities with different levels of support
- Encourage writing in other areas of the room (blocks, dramatic play, science, math, etc.) that mirrors what children observe in the outside world



- Write extensions and innovations of familiar stories
- Create class and individual books, use “power writing” to inspire groups stories, free-verse poetry
 - Can be celebrations of classroom events
 - Each child contributes, teacher can take dictation or allow child to assist with writing
 - Store in classroom library so children can revisit often
- Include nonfiction writing related to children’s interests
 - Can be a source of motivation for reluctant writers
- Do interactive writing individually or in small group settings
 - Teacher “shares the pen” with child, helps put his/her ideas own on paper
 - Allows for challenging individual children to move along the continuum
- Create portable writing baskets with props centered around popular themes to motivate children’s writing

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NOTES:



Writing To, For, With and By Children:

Writing TO Children:

- The teacher writes a message to students (not necessarily in front of them) for a variety of purposes.
- Most often, we see writing “to” children in the classroom in the form of the teacher-written Morning Message.

Writing FOR Children:

• Modeled Writing or “Write-Aloud”

- The teacher writes in front of the children for a variety of real-life purposes.
- The teacher talks through the different phases of the writing process with the children: thinking process, choices, decisions, problems faced, etc. (“What should I write about today? I know, I’ll write about...”) Children can respond and offer advice.
- At the emergent level lessons should be brief and include many environmental genres that children see in their everyday lives.
- The process can be used with morning message, lists, labels, notes, signs, instructions, recipes, captions for illustrations, facts related to content area studies, etc.
- Should also include drawings and modeling how to put the spoken word down on paper. This “fosters the creative urge of the child to write down his own ideas” according to Marie Clay.
- Can be done whole group, small group, or individually depending on your purpose. Can be used as a tool for re-teaching or to scaffold children in their own writing.

• Shared Writing

- Teacher and children work together to compose stories and other writing; the teacher scaffolds the process with questions and supports the process by acting as scribe.
- Supports children’s understanding that print has meaning, serves different purposes, and must follow certain rules to be understood by others. (Temple et al. 1993)
- Provides children with feedback about their thinking in writing.
- Allows teacher to informally assess children’s development as writers.
- No expectation of mastery, sometimes referred to as “hand-holding stage”; should be structured in such a way that every child can be successful.
- Can include News of the Day, class books, group stories, charts, story responses or innovations, and any other genre teacher has modeled previously.

Writing WITH Children: Interactive Writing

- Looks much like shared writing, except students are doing as much of the writing as possible. (Teacher “shares the pen” with children.)
- Teacher still providing teaching points regarding conventions of print and structure of sentence writing in a highly supportive way. Concepts of print skills are reinforced.
- Teacher may continue to ask open-ended questions or use other scaffolding strategies that help children structure the message of their writing (intentional teaching related to development of a writer’s voice as well as concepts of print).

Writing BY Children: Independent Writing

- Children write messages of their own choosing using developmental spelling.
- This may occur in a more structured format at the writing center or involve free exploration of print on a notepad in the pretend center. Children with less writing experience often feel more comfortable exploring print within the pretend play setting.



Writing in the Early Childhood Classroom

Modeled Writing (Writing TO Students)

The teacher demonstrates the writing process, and style / or strategies.

Shared Writing (Writing FOR Students)

The teacher and children work together to compose messages and stories; teacher supports the process as the scribe.

Interactive Writing (Writing WITH Students)

Teacher and children compose messages and stories that are written using a “shared pen” that involves children in the writing.

Independent Writing (Writing BY Students)

Children write on their own for a variety of purposes, including retellings, labeling, lists, letters, etc.

Using Children's Names to Encourage Writing

(abbreviated) Adapted from Margaret Immel by Sharon Dworaczyk and Judy Rolke, School Literacy & Culture, 2001

- Display children's names in many places throughout the room (put children's pictures by their names at the beginning of the year, then use names only as the year progresses)
- Encourage the children to write their names on papers, artwork, etc.
- Make a class book, "The Letters in our Names," with one page devoted to each letter. Let children who can write their own names correctly write for themselves. For the others, the teacher writes the name. Each child's name appears on all pages for letters in their names (e.g. Ethan would write his name on the *Aa, Ee, Hh, Nn*, and *Tt* pages and circle the correct letter on each page)
- Use magnetic names. Give each child a baggie with magnetic letters that are in his/her name. After children have spelled their own names, let them spell each other's names.
- Make initial charts by targeting one child each week and creating a graph with that child's first/middle/last initials. After brainstorming the identity of the child, add other words that begin with each initial and list those words under the appropriate letters. Use other names (principal, favorite author, etc.) in addition to student names.
- Letter sorts
 - Sort #1: Give children a pile of letters (plastic, foam, or magnetic). Have them sort according to "Letters in my name" and "Letters NOT in my name" If they have all the letters that are in their names, they should spell it. You might need to let the children have name cards with them when they are doing this.
 - Sort #2: Give each child the letters that are in his or her name. Have them sort according to some set criteria. Examples: a)holes or no holes, b) letters with straight lines, curves, or both, c) letters with tunnels or no tunnels, d) tails or no tails, e) tall or short, f)fat or thin, g) lines that cross or no lines that cross, etc. (See Word Matters by Gay Su Pinnell and Irene Fountas for more ideas.)

Writing Center Supplies in Preschool and Primary Classrooms

Markers

- Pencils (thin and thick lead, colored pencils, with and without erasers)
- Markers (fine-tipped in a variety of colors—scented markers are especially fun)
- Alphabet letter stamps (upper and lower case), design stamps and ink pads
- Pens like the teacher's pen
- Chalk
- Crayons

Surfaces

- Paper (plain and colored typing paper, white and colored construction paper, lined paper, pads cut in shapes like cats or apples, paper in a variety of sizes)
- Stationery (especially school stationery with names the children know)
- Envelopes
- Index cards
- Notepads
- Post-it notes
- Chalkboard and sock to put over hand to use as eraser
- Magic slates
- Write-on, wipe-off board
- Paper bags
- Paper plates
- Steno pads
- Accounting ledgers
- Receipt books
- Restaurant order pads with carbons
- Carbon paper
- Carbon and writing paper stapled together so children can write their stories the way the teacher does
- Blank books made by stapling several folded pieces of paper together with a colored paper cover

Supplies

- Baskets, desk trays, folders for organizing the paper and materials
- Tape
- Stapler
- Brass paper fasteners
- Hole-punch.
- Stick-on labels
- Letter and design stencils (with openings large enough for a fine-tipped marker)
- Picture dictionary
- Beginning dictionary
- Cards with children's names and other words they want to write.
- Erasers
- Scissors
- Glue or gluesticks
- Pencil sharpener
- Wallpaper samples
- Yarn
- Potential sources for free materials—copying companies, like KwikCopy; offices where the letterhead is changing; donations from office supply companies; printing or publishing companies that have ends from their rolls of book paper; parents; local businesses

Prepared by: School Literacy and Culture, Rice University
With acknowledgments to Judith Schickedanz, Sharon Edwards & Robert Maloy



The Writing Center - Getting Started

Here are a few simple ideas to get your writing center started. Remember to spend time introducing materials so children understand expectations for how materials are to be used, where they are to be stored, etc.

- Mailbox with a personal letter for each child inside
- Wet chalk on dark paper
- Writing on cookie sheets using various substances (sand, shaving cream, salt, gel)
- Gel pens on dark paper
- Writing on personal notepads
- Writing on blueprints with markers, good in block center
- Shape books of any kind (use die cuts for front, back, and pages, then staple together)
- Banner writing on butcher paper on floor
- Mystery writing with white crayons on white paper (reveal by painting with water colors)
- Writing on dry erase boards with wipe-off markers
- Name cards, themed word cards, or picture dictionaries to copy words
- Writing on individual blackboards with chalk
- Magnetic letters on cookie sheets (great with word cards)
- Magnadoodles
- Playdough with alphabet cookie cutters
- Playdough roll in ropes to form letters
- Flannel letters on flannel boards
- Stamp pads with letter stamps on sentence strips (names or alphabet)
- Alphabet cookie cutters, dip in paint and print on paper
- Alphabet stickers on paper
- Paper and carbon paper on clipboards
- Write around the room, with clipboards and paper
- Writing in wet sand in discovery table, with fingers or popsicle sticks
- Writing on blank cash register tape
- Dictated or interactive writing of pages for class books
- Simple child surveys on clipboards

Sue King, Karen Capo, and Sharon Dworaczyk, School Literacy and Culture Project, 2006

Writing for Real Purposes

- Shopping lists or wish lists
- Memos or reminders to others for events, appointments, etc.
- Signs (Wet Paint, Please Don't Clean Blocks, Quiet!, etc)
- Invitations to friends, parents, etc.
- A diary of a trip or event to share with another person
- Instructions for playing a game, operating a machine or toy, constructing something or cooking a treat
- Class "phone books" for use in pretend play
- Phone messages, marking on calendars, writing checks, recording restaurant orders, etc. in pretend play
- 'Blueprints' of block center creations
- Class science journals recording day-to-day progress of longer term science experiences
- Class dictionary of names and meaningful words
- An account of a personal experience, an expository text on a well-known subject, or a fiction story
- Communication with a distant friend, relative, or pen pal (Pen pal could live far away or be a child from another class)
- Record of the scores of sporting events
- And the list goes on...

Resources

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