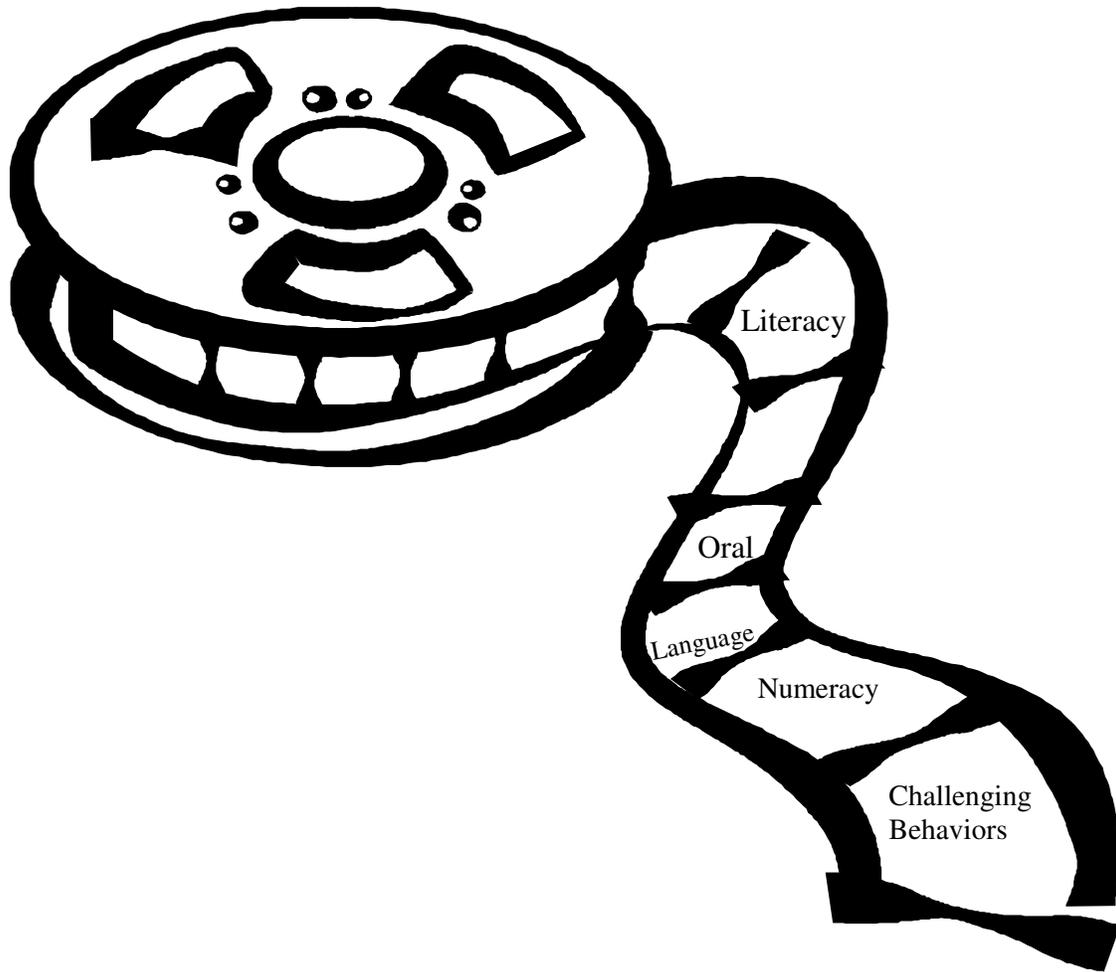


Project REEL



Resources for Early Educator Learning

EMERGENT, FAT IDEAS

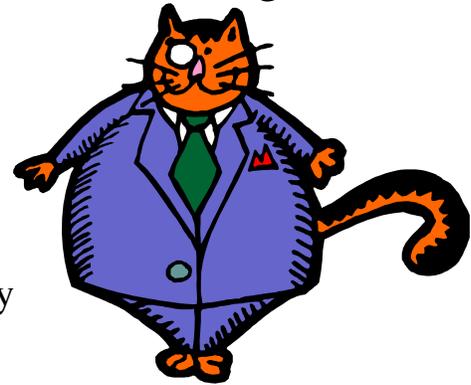
to remember about young children's learning:

1. Children learn best in a social setting.

Therefore, avoid independent seat work.

2. Children learn best through play.

Therefore, immerse them in a richly active play and avoid worksheets.



3. Children learn best when they are allowed to approximate adult behaviors.

Therefore, demonstrate adult practices and accept children's attempts at those adult practices **as if** they were already conventional efforts.

4. Children learn best in an atmosphere of respect where their dignity is protected.

Therefore, establish appropriately high expectations for children, focusing on positive guidance instead of punishment.

5. Children learn best when they have daily opportunities to use diverse social, language, literacy, and numeracy practices and receive extensive feedback from the caring adults in their classroom.

Therefore, offer children time to use new ideas and respond to them in ways that enriches their understandings.

A FOCUS ON EMERGENT WRITING

“For young children, knowledge of functions of print is important because it provides the foundation for all literacy exploration. When children know what written language can do for them, they want to use it, and they want to learn to use it conventionally. If children do not understand why we use written language, then there is little reason for them to read or write.”

from Owocki & Goodman (2002), p. 78



“Children who feel the power of writing and feel positive about themselves as writers are likely to want to write, and to make an effort to learn to communicate effectively in writing. Children who come to see their writing as something that is not neat enough, not conventional enough, not connected to their lives, or not meaningful in the real world are likely to be unmotivated to write, and if their experiences are negative, they may avoid taking the risks that are requisite to their growth.”

from Owocki & Goodman (2002), p. 88

Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Aligned with The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5	
Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Section 2: Early Literacy Component: Print Awareness	The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5
LEARNING EXPECTATIONS:	
Demonstrates interest in books and what they contain	See #45
Understands how books work and the way they are handles	See #45
Begins to attend to print in the environment, especially own name	See #47
Shows awareness that print conveys a message, that print is read rather than the pictures	See #45
Understands concept of spoken and written word and that alphabet letters have individual names (ages 4-5)	See #s 45 & 46
Shows interest in purposeful writing (ages 4-5)	See #49
Shows good understanding of conventions of print (ages 4-5)	See #45
Demonstrates good word awareness, calls attention to print in the environment, and recognizes some common words (ages 4-5)	See #47
Routinely engages in purposeful reading and writing (ages 4-5)	See #s 44, 49, & 50

Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5	
Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Section 2: Early Literacy Component: Visual Discrimination Component: Visual Whole-Part-Whole Relationships Component: Visual Sequencing (Patterning)	The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5
LEARNING EXPECTATIONS:	
Discriminates likenesses/differences in real objects	See #s 27 & 28
Discriminates likenesses/differences in pictured objects	See #s 27 & 28
Develops awareness of parts and wholes and how the parts relate to the whole	See #s 32 & 47
Uses left-to-right and top-to-bottom scanning and observes and reproduces each element in a patterns of a 3-dimensional objects	See #s 30 & 45
Discriminates likenesses and differences in black & white shapes, figures, and designs with subtle differences in detail or orientation (ages 4-5)	See #s 44, 49, 50
Discriminates likenesses and differences in symbols (ages 4-5)	See #s 27, 28, & 47
Further develops awareness of relationships of parts and wholes using more abstract figures (ages 4-5)	See #s 32 & 47
Uses left-to-right and top-to-bottom scanning; observes and reproduces a pattern with 3-dimensional objects by using a 2-dimensional paper model (ages 4-5)	See #s 30 & 45

Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Aligned with The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5	
Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Section 2: Early Literacy Component: Letter Recognition	The Creative Curriculum© Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5
LEARNING EXPECTATIONS:	
Begins to recognize beginning letter of familiar words or environmental print	See #46
Attempts to "write" his/her own name	See #s 49 & 50
Begins to recognize letters (ages 4-5)	See #46
Begins to recognize frequently occurring uppercase and some of the most frequently occurring lowercase letters (ages 4-5)	See #46

TRAINING OBJECTIVES:

Early childhood educators will

- ✓ offer infants and toddlers opportunities to be “writers” (make marks on paper)
- ✓ value the reading/writing approximations made by young children by praising their efforts as if they are already in the adult conventional form
- ✓ model throughout the day how writing is both necessary (for information) and entertaining
- ✓ show children that reading and writing are connected by reading a wide variety of texts and supporting children’s efforts to write similar texts (labels, signs, letters, notes, menus, lists, original books, etc.)
- ✓ support children’s narrative writing by helping children expand their own oral storytelling, then offering to write the stories down on paper
- ✓ demonstrate their knowledge of the developmental continuum of children’s writing by accepting children’s efforts in initial scribbling, letter formation, spacing, and sound-letter correspondences
- ✓ model the writing process for children through writing aloud and shared writing demonstrations
- ✓ support young children’s efforts at independent writing by praising their efforts and guiding them to more complex understandings
- ✓ create a rich writing center (if none exists) or improve a writing center by integrating a wealth of writing materials and supplies, along with books for modeling purposes



A bit of history of writing instruction/support in the early childhood setting:

“Recognition of the reciprocity of reading and writing has been a fairly recent occurrence (Clay, 1991, 2001; Morrow, 2001). For many years, beginning writing was taught in the elementary school only after children learned to read, which was toward the middle of first grade. Educators believed that children could not be expected to use letters, words, and sentences until they had learned how to read (decode). The essential component of expressing thoughts and ideas was not addressed.

Fortunately, this belief changed during the 1980s and 1990s when [researchers] began to examine and reconstruct early reading and writing behaviors and teaching methodology (Clay, 1991; Morrow, 2001). The term *emergent reading and writing* signaled a new way of looking at the capabilities of young children as they started to take on literacy skills.

... Teachers and researchers soon found that by experimenting with the writing process—by trying to encode with letters and symbols—children became more able to decode as well as write. Thus, the reciprocity of reading and writing behaviors in young readers was recognized as an essential component of early literacy instruction.”

(Venn & Jahn, 2003, p. 99)

This workshop will focus on supporting young children’s writing. One critical understanding of preschool literacy is the importance of emphasizing the functions of print over the particular form of the writing. Too often in preschool and early grades education we see children practicing letter formation (at the insistence of a teacher) before they have a concept of the multiple reasons **why** they need to write and why it is enjoyable to write.

Studies suggest that children “first begin to explore with a pencil or crayon between 18 and 24 months of age” (Schickedanz, 1999, p. 98).

Learning to write for a young child involves understanding

- the purposes for writing the text
- the multiple conventions associated with the purposes
- the way print is organized on the page
- the sounds of speech that alphabet letters represent
- that the writer must consider his/her reader



Schickedanz (1999)

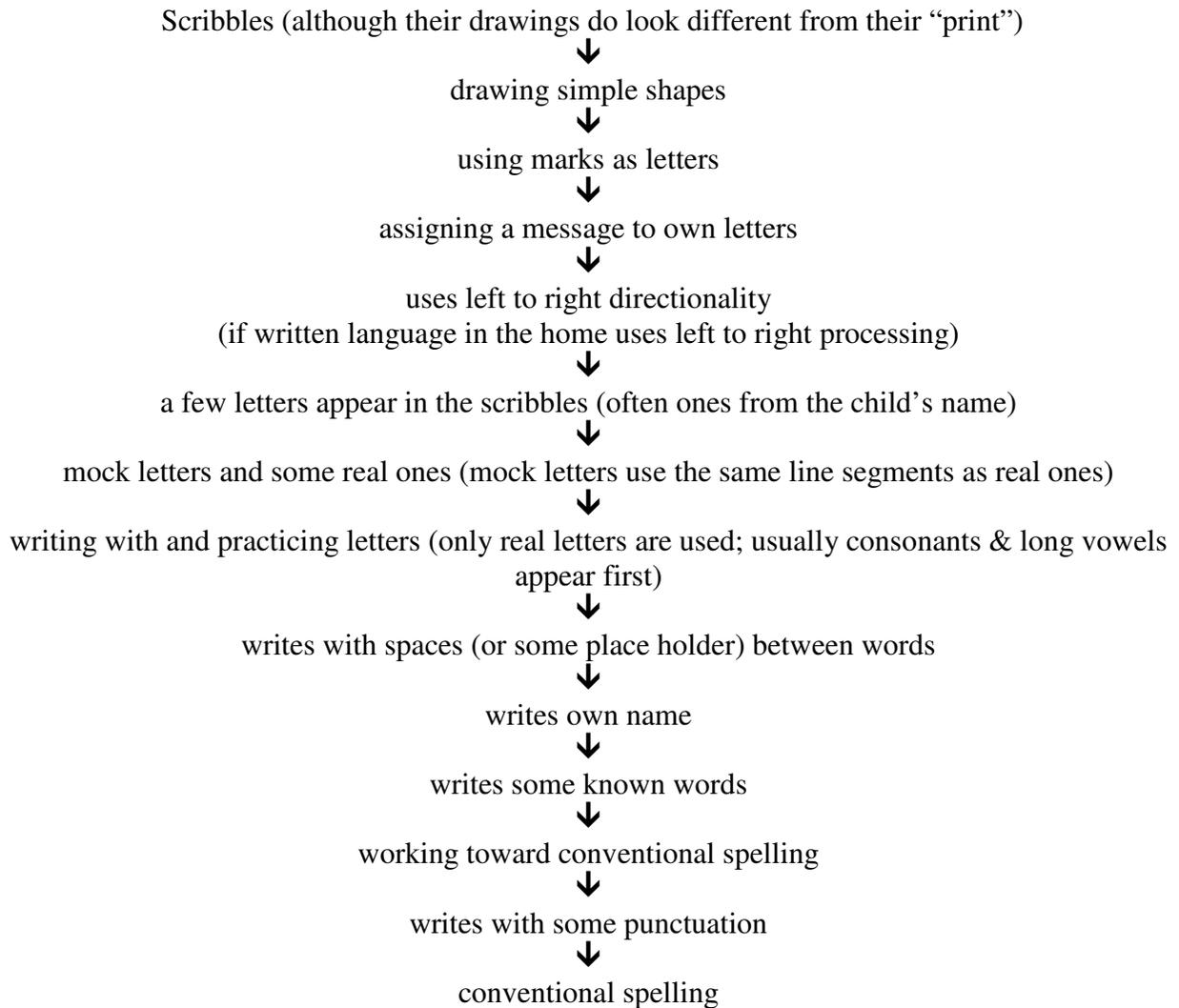
Perhaps the most important thing for early childhood teachers to remember is that writing is **NOT** handwriting. Too many children in the early years of exploratory writing perceive that writing is accurate letter formation. Writing is communication in print for a particular purpose and audience. We need to expose children to all the reasons to write, all the ways to do it, and all the different audiences those different kinds of print may have.

What we know about children's writing, both in letter formation and usage:

- “The child uses oral language skills to express ideas or thoughts that he or she wants to communicate to others” (Venn & Jahn, 2003, p. 99).
- “The child must have phonemic awareness [and alphabet-sound awareness] to produce a speech sound and attach a symbol or letter to that sound” (Venn & Jahn, 2003, p. 99).
- “Young children have great difficulty making controlled movements and precise lines” (Schickedanz, 1999, 112)
- Even children who have a lot of knowledge about letters and words may have difficulty constructing them (Schickedanz, 1999).
- It takes significant visual skills/spatial coordination to make their writings “fit” the space (Venn & Jahn, 2003).
- Children experience the challenge of having only 26 letters but 44 sounds.
- It's hard to remember what side of the stick the ball should be on! *b*'s and *d*'s, *p*'s and *q*'s are a challenge. There are many other letters, too, that are quite difficult to reconstruct from memory or even from example. Don't be concerned about transpositions and “backwards” letters. This only means that children need more experience, and they could even be experimenting with their writing.
- Children need to see teachers forming the letters in their own writing. When you do a language experience chart or create a sign or a list, stop to talk about some of the letters and how you form them. You may sometimes want to teach a mini-lesson in the writing center on forming a particular letter as children need it. When you see a child using a “comb” for her *E*, this would be a good time to show how the letter is formed with three lines coming out from the “stick.”
- When you are demonstrating how to write a letter (in the context of real writing), you might want to create chants for the formation. You might say in a rhythmic way when writing an S, “curve to the left, curve to the right, curve to the left again!” or with a B, you might chant: “Straight line down. Half circle at the top! Half circle at the bottom.”
- Many children learn best by using their whole bodies. You might want to experiment with “air letters,” in which children practice their letters in the air with their hands or even with their feet lying on their backs, and it becomes nearly a total body experience. It's also a good suggestion that on the playground children could “walk, walk, walk” over the shape of a letter.



Children will exhibit some or all of the following characteristics on their way to conventional writing. This is NOT a sequential list, as individual children will take their own unique path to matching the characteristics of adult writing:



(Schickedanz, 1999; Venn & Jahn, 2003)



***Important point to remember:** “It is rare for preschool children to move beyond the beginning stages of semiphonemic spelling [some ability to match letters with the sounds of the oral words]. Most will not progress to fully phonemic spelling until kindergarten, and many children will persist with semiphonemic spelling even into first grade. Preschool teachers should be aware of the full progression of early childhood writing development so that they can support the continued growth of all children in their classrooms, wherever they fall on the developmental continuum of emergent writing” (Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2004, p. 40).

Semiphonemic spelling might look something like this:

NE SRS MOG

Child’s reading: “And he saw some ghosts”

Although the example below is from Daniel’s kindergarten year, he likely would not have composed these texts over a five month period without his strong preschool experiences in writing:

- 9/3 WT PRT DANIEL
 (“Once upon a time Daniel”)
- 10/29 WS Put thi WZEFW
 (“Once upon a time there was a werewolf”)
- 11/10 WS PN TM A TM Th WS A YLO EG
 (“Once upon a time there was a yellow egg”)
- 11/12 Wa PN TM TH WS TH RKT IT BISu OF.
 (“Once upon a time there was a rocket. It blasted off.”)
- 11/17 WS Ept N TEM the WS I Gost N the Gost WS KEVR
 (“Once upon a time there was a ghost and the ghost was covered [with slime].”)
- 1/6 WUS U PUN U Tim ThAR WS U GOST. iN YOU no Wut TA GOST
 DiD. HE CiD N U TRE.
 (“Once upon a time there was a ghost. And you know what that ghost did? He climbed in a tree.”)

(Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2004, p. 53)



“One day, after finishing an alphabet puzzle, a child who was almost five years old asked his teacher, ‘Are these all the alphabet letters in the whole wide world?’ She asked what made him think that this might be all of them. ‘Because,’ he said, ‘I see the same ones everywhere!’

Once children have attained the insight that there are just a few letters, not an endless number, mock letters seldom appear in their writing, except perhaps during dramatic play, where it is sometimes necessary to generate a lot of writing in a short amount of time.”

(Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2004, p. 20-21)

We need to use the multiple ways to write in a setting when working with young children who need to see a great deal of modeling:

- **Writing aloud** (in which the teacher demonstrates to children her thinking that is involved in writing a list, note, set of directions, label, menu, etc.) is a foundational strategy in supporting young children’s writing awareness of 1) a variety of reasons to write, and 2) the thinking that leads to writing. Children have the opportunity to watch and listen to an expert writer talk through the mental process of writing.
- **Shared writing** (in which the teacher writes down what the children say) is a foundational strategy in supporting knowledge of writing conventions. The teacher pauses during the writing process and calls children’s attention to
 - › beginning writing at the top of the page
 - › beginning writing at the left side of the page
 - › progressing across the page from left to right
 - › beginning sentences with capital letters
 - › ending sentences with periods
 - › identifying beginning letters that match beginning letters of children’s names etc.
- **Guided writing** (in which the teacher is supportive of children’s early attempts at writing) is a foundational strategy in supporting young children’s perceptions of themselves as writers. Teachers praise children’s approximations of both letter formation (*b*’s for *d*’s, “combs” for *E*’s, and backward *s*’s) and writing genres (lists, menus, prescriptions, phone messages, etc.)

STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES FOR SUPPORTING EMERGENT WRITING WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS



“Crawlers and walkers can hold and use fat crayons to scribble. **Introduce crayons and paper to babies.** Begin by showing them how to use crayons to make marks on large pieces of paper. Tape the paper to the table so that it will stay flat. If babies try to color on walls, floors, and tables, gently redirect them back to the paper. They will soon learn that crayons and paper go together.”
www.ed.gov/Family/RSRforCaregvr/crawlers.html

“Sit with babies while they scribble, to help and **show your interest in their efforts** and accomplishments. ‘Azim, look what you did. You made those marks on the paper.’ Allow babies to decide when they are finished. Then put away the crayons and paper. Bring them out later for another scribbling session.” www.ed.gov/Family/RSRforCaregvr/crawlers.html



STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES FOR SUPPORTING EMERGENT WRITING WITH PRE-KINDERGARTNERS

 Remember that preschoolers may create many writings that have no specific message. Many teachers report of children’s lengthy original books (14 pages long!), but when the child is asked what the writing says, they report, “Nothing.”

 **Children’s temporary spelling**, also known as “invented” or “developmental” spelling, has been a topic of concern for teachers for years. Here’s how one respected early childhood educator weighs in on the issue:

“Children learning to read need to grasp the concept that words are composed of a series of sounds, and they benefit from many opportunities to practice detecting these sounds in the order in which they occur. Trying to spell words presents children with one of the best opportunities to learn to segment words into their constituent phonemes.” (Schickendanz, 1999, p. 125)

We must find a balance between encouraging and accepting children’s approximations, and responding to their query of “Is this right?” This is one of many instances in which you must individualize instruction. For the child who is just beginning to take risks in communicating on paper, you will want to encourage his most remote approximations. For children who are already experienced at many letter-sound relationships, you will want to scaffold them to more conventional writing. You might say to the more experienced child who asks, “Is this right?”: “This is very good kid spelling. I can see that you were working hard to find the right letters for the sounds in this word. Would you like me to write that word in adult spelling?” We will still want to encourage this child to work through finding letters that match the sounds he needs to use in his writing. There will be times, however, when a child KNOWS her word is spelled incorrectly and will insist on knowing the conventional form. She will deserve your respect and your high expectations.



When children are still in the scribble stage in which their drawings look a great deal like their writings, we should be cautious about how we respond to their work. Instead of asking them, “What did you draw, Hakeem?”, we need to request instead: “Tell me about your work, Hakeem” or “Describe what’s on your paper, Hakeem.” We could be in error if we assume that something is a drawing or a piece of text, and we need to avoid disappointing them with our misunderstandings!

 **Preschool is not the place to begin editing** children’s work or attempting to elicit their revisions. Young children are not equipped to respond positively to “errors” circled with a red pen. If we are to convince children that they are competent “do-ers” of this business called writing, we must be accepting at face value what they have constructed. Again, if they are prepared to move forward into more conventional writing forms or more conventional spelling, and if they ask us for guidance, then we can gently provide suggestions for them. However, if we in any way propose that what they have done is not “good enough,” they may become frustrated and shut down their experimentations in communicating in print.

Teacher Demonstrations

 **Writing aloud** is an excellent demonstration to children of all the reasons we have to write. You read about several strategies in this manual in the “Concepts about print” section, and you might want to refresh your memory by going back to that section. Writing aloud is like thinking aloud: you simply need to bring your thoughts as you’re writing to oral language! For example, you might want to show preschool children how to write in their daily journal by writing in your own (keep your daily journal on chart paper, so all can see):

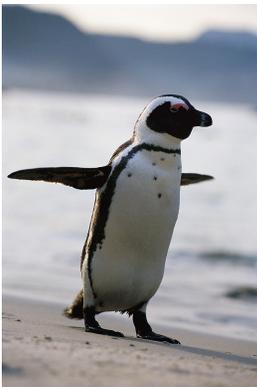
Teacher: (thinking out loud and writing on chart paper) I want to write in my daily journal now, and I’d like to write down some of the thing we did today so I’ll be able to remember what happened, even if I don’t read this again until next year! I think today was a happy day, so that’s what I’ll write. (Teacher writes.) “Today was a happy day.” Oops! I almost forgot to write the date. Journal entries need a date. If you can’t remember the date or how to write it, it is always written above our calendar. (Teacher draws out the sounds of the letters as she writes, “January 8th, 2003”). Okay, now I want to say what we did as a class that made me happy. I know! I’ll write about Thomas’s mother bringing in their new puppy. “Thomas’s mother brought Max the puppy to meet our class.” Now I want to say something about Max. “He was wiggly and very soft.” Now I want to end my journal entry with something that Max did when he was here. “He licked us all and made us giggle!” Do you see this mark I made here? Instead of using a period, I used an exclamation mark. An exclamation mark shows that I was surprised or excited or really happy. Do you think I was surprised that Max licked us or do you think I was really happy? Yes, Max licking us made me happy, so that’s why I used an exclamation mark there to end the sentence.”

Your demonstrations to the children of your own writing process, while you talk about what you’re doing and why, will greatly benefit your preschoolers. Show them your thinking as you write grocery lists, inventories, directions, signs, labels, instructions, setting/playground expectations, letters, invitations, email messages, phone messages, reminder notes, notes home, setting newsletters, etc., etc. “This gives [children] an opportunity to use writing and reading in the real world, which helps them to see the purposes of both” (Hill-Clark & Cooley, 2002, p. 10).

Shared writing (also known as creating “language experience” charts) is the strategy you are using when you write down the children’s language. You read about several strategies in this Manual in the “Concepts about print” section, and you might want to refresh your memory by going back to that section. Any time you write the children’s words on chart paper for all to see and re-read together is a shared reading, or language experience chart. After you have read a book about penguins, for example, you might want to do a shared writing entitled, “What is important to know about penguins?” in which you write each child’s name first and then write what they said

As you write each sentence, read the sentence back to the child to make sure you captured her words accurately. Then ask that child to join in with you as you read the sentence, then ask all children to join in the reading. This is a fun and educational experience of the children.

The following might represent one of the charts you would create using the shared writing strategy:



What is important to know about penguins?

Kandice said, “They live at the bottom of the world.”

Tristan said, “They can’t fly cause their wings don’t work.”

Tivoli said, “They are black and white and have feathers.”

Shania said, “They have to keep their eggs on their feet or they’ll freeze and die.”

Monique said, “The father throws up into the baby’s mouth! Eeouuu!”

Etc.



Anytime you write what the children say onto paper (chart or otherwise), you are using the shared writing strategy. Remember that the value of writing the children’s words is both in developing concepts of print and gaining reading experience as you point at the words and reread the charts multiple times.

Let’s make sure that the children don’t think that we write for them on language experience charts because they can’t. Let’s remind them that there are lots of ways to write, and this is just one of them.

In **guided writing** teachers consider all the different opportunities that they can offer to children as reasons to write. Of course, first we demonstrate, and then children will have the freedom and the knowledge to create their own “approximations” of these adult writings.

- After rich teacher modeling the children write their own **labels and signs** for the classroom.
- After watching the teacher write **descriptive captions** for their artwork, children write their own explanations of their drawings.
- After the teacher has read aloud multiple texts by one author, a child (or children) decide to borrow ideas from that writer to **craft their own stories**.
- After the teacher has read multiple books on one topic, a child (or children) decide to share what they’ve learned in an **original informational book** or poster.
- After the teacher reads aloud multiple alphabet books, children help create a **class alphabet book**.
- After showing multiple examples of advertisements, children are invited to write an **advertisement** for something the class has done, for something they’d like to buy, or something they’d like to sell in the setting. Perhaps they helped bake cupcakes that they can advertise, or they’re opening an art gallery of their work for family viewing, or they want to advertise a book they’ve read.
- When a new baby is born to a sibling in your setting the children could craft **birth announcements**.
- After viewing multiple examples the children **create greeting cards** for multiple occasions in the setting.
- Children contribute to the writing of a **newsletter** to let parents know of the literacy activities occurring in the setting.

There are dozens more reasons to write; just demonstrate thoroughly and show the children examples of the format:

_____ autobiographies	_____ instructions	_____ nonfiction from theme study
_____ bills	_____ invitations	_____ pamphlets
_____ book jackets	_____ journals & logs	_____ phone messages
_____ comics	_____ labels	_____ plans for events (parties, etc.)
_____ charts	_____ letters, notes, cards	_____ poems and songs
_____ checks	_____ lists	_____ price tags
_____ coupons	_____ maps	_____ programs
_____ diagrams	_____ menus	_____ receipts
_____ restaurant orders	_____ book reviews	_____ recipes
_____ rules	_____ schedules	_____ reports
_____ signs	_____ stories	_____ tickets

-from Owocki & Goodman (2002), p. 116

This is not an exhaustive list, but it will get you started in planning your demonstrations of writing functions and formats. It will also help you look for children’s diverse uses of print in their social interactions in your setting.

Independent Writing Time for Children

Provide lots of materials, and then **give children time to explore their writing** using these tools. Recognize all the opportunities when you can suggest to a child: “Logan, why don’t you go write a note to your mother and remind her that you need to get some Fruit Roll-Ups at the store this afternoon?” Have these materials available:

Drawing pencils (regular & colored)
 magic slates
 acetate sheets/wipe-off cloths
 stencils
 stapler
 scissors
 pencil sharpener
 stationery (w/ stickers)
 white boards w/ dry erase markers
 laminated alphabet strips or cards



markers (wide & fine tipped)
 alphabet stamps
 paper (white & colored, lined & unlined)
 index cards
 hole punch
 paste & glue stick
 book of wallpaper samples for book covers
 envelopes
 chalk boards & chalk



Offer the opportunity for children to use **letter cards or letter stamps** to help them in their spelling. The act of creating a letter is often difficult for children because of unrefined small muscle control. Having letter cards out on the writing table that children can use will help them spell familiar words without having to worry about the physical act of writing the letters.



One way to bring letter formation into the block area is to create large (6” to 12” high) letters on laminated paper for Race Car Letters (Venn & Jahn, 2003). Teachers model how to “drive” the race cars over the shapes of the letters.

Another tactile way for children to “rehearse” the formation of letters is with sandpaper letters. Children can trace the rough surface with their fingers in the writing center or do crayon rubbings of the letters by placing a sheet of white paper over the letter and then coloring like crazy until the image of the letter forms.

All good painters begin by copying a famous painter, and **all good writers begin by copying** a favorite author. Encourage children’s imitations of favorite books. “Borrowing” characters and plots from well-known authors is a great way to give children control over constructing a story. Changing a familiar book pattern to something the class or the child has created gives confidence and pleasure to a young child.

For example, we could take the predictable language from Bill Martin, Jr.'s Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?, and the children could select the animals and colors explored by the text. So instead of a yellow duck and a blue horse, the children might choose a green bird and a purple worm. Perhaps you could suggest the categories, like "Things With Wheels," and you could write a text that explores different vehicles: "Red jeep, red jeep, what do you see? I see a green tractor looking at me. Green tractor, green tractor, what do you see? I see a yellow motorcycle looking at me." The children will treasure the version that you create together.



Again, model, model, model to children how we can borrow ideas from other writers, and then let them loose in the writing center to make their own magic.



As we suggested earlier, having a **post office** near/in your writing center will create a real reason for children to write. Cut the top off of half-gallon cardboard milk containers and you have your post office boxes easily prepared. This post office opportunity will make even more sense to children after you've taken them on a field trip to the post office. They are well prepared for educating even the very young about the how the postal system works, Plan this trip right before you intend to introduce the post office boxes, and then model, model, model! Every day try to write three or four very brief letters and place them in children's boxes. This will inspire them to write back to you and to one another (make sure that all the staff has mailboxes, too!).

The "**plan-do-review process**" is a three step process that helps children think through their plans for the day. First thing in the morning children take paper and pencil and make a plan for the day, then sharing with the teacher and their peers. The teacher helps them with the content of the plan, but the children are responsible for drawing or writing what they will do. They are challenged to take responsibility for their own actions and make choices. In this way children can have some predictability and control over their lives. Simultaneously that are using writing for a very real and personally important purpose.

A few words about the pencil/crayon/marker grip of young children:

"When children use pencils, markers, or crayons to make letter formations, we help them to grasp their tools correctly. This means helping each child have a three-point grasp on the writing instrument so the tool is held between thumb and forefinger and rests on the middle finger. If the child grips the pencil with all four fingers, a simple way to change this behavior is to provide very short pencils or chalk, and a three-point grasp will naturally evolve. While writing, the child should rest his or hand on the table, although many young children will turn their writing hands so they hover above the table. This hovering is very tiring and difficult to maintain. We help the child hold the writing instrument by the bottom one third of the tool and place dots or lines on it, if necessary, to help the child see where to grasp it. In addition, if a teacher observes children curving their hands into a hook position, it is advisable to provide inclined or vertical surfaces, such as chalkboards, for each child to write on. The incline will naturally bring the child's wrist down into its proper position."

(Venn & Jahn, 2003, p. 116)

A final nifty quote about young children and writing:

“Writing’ may be so much fun for children because they get to change something. They get to take pristine white sheets of paper and cover them with color and designs—in exactly the way they like. Now, this is pretty powerful stuff for children who may be used to hearing ‘no’ all the time. They get to set the agenda and do as they wish (as long as they don’t get too exuberant and start using the walls as their palette). They are also learning (albeit slowly) about how much pressure they need to use (Remember all those first-grade papers that came home with holes? That’s from pressing too hard.), how to hold their fingers and hand, and how to create straight versus curved lines. These are obviously all things children will need to know for school.”



(Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003, p. 119)

Suggestions for evaluation:

☞ “Records of children’s writings at various stages, kept in writing folders, may be used for many purposes. Teachers can examine children’s understandings of stories, their spelling development, and their developing concepts of print. They can also ask children about their personal reflections about any piece they have completed. These materials provide the basis for teacher/child conferences on individual needs and progress over a period of time” (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000, p. 106).

☞ Another good idea: have your children sign in every day from the first day of their attendance at your site. Post the date clearly, and put each day’s sheet in a folder. The children’s progress will be eye-opening for them when you show them their progress over weeks or months, and their name writing will indicate their progress to you and to their caregivers.

☞ You might wish to create checklists that you complete regularly (perhaps monthly) on the children to note their progress over a period of time. For example, a writing checklist might look something like this:

Child’s name: _____	Age: _____	Date of observation: _____	
(circle one)			
Can grasp/manipulate writing tools	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet
Uses drawing for writing	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet
Uses pictures & scribbles for writing	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet
Uses scribbles for writing	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet
Uses letter-like forms for writing	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet
Uses letter forms randomly	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet
Uses invented spellings	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet
Uses conventional spellings	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet
Puts spaces between words	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet
Experiments with punctuation	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet
Writes/recognizes own name in print	Usually	Sometimes	Not yet

Strategies for ESL learners:

🌐 ESL children’s oral language will develop before their academic competency. This means that children who are fluent speakers of English may not be able to write in English or perform other written tasks in English. Just because a child is speaking a language does not make him/her proficient in the language. Vocabulary skills, auditory memory, problem-solving skills, and the ability to follow sequenced directions in English may be challenging to the ESL child, which can result in over-referrals to special education (“Responding to linguistic and cultural diversity,” NAEYC, 1995).

Working with parents:

🏠 Share the following information with parents about their involvement in their child’s writing: “Make writing materials available to your child and encourage their use. Help your child learn to write his/her name and other important words or phrases. Gradually, help the child learn to write more and more letters. At first, most children find it easier to write upper case letters” (<http://ericec.org/ptips.html>).

🏠 Suggest to parents that they involve their child in writing letters to absent family members, thank you notes for gifts, lists of all kinds, memos to household members, etc. Children need generous opportunities to connect what they are doing in school to their home environment, and vice versa.

