

Early Years Library

READ THE
INTRODUCTION
TO THIS SERIES

Part of the **Language and Early Literacy** Series

EARLY WRITING

What do we
mean by early
writing skills?

As children develop, they begin to give meaning to the marks they make. Young children use fingers and tools to make marks on different materials such as paper, in sand and in paint. As children develop in skill and confidence, they learn to copy, trace and recreate letters of the alphabet using their fingers and writing materials like crayons and pencils. These activities help children to understand they can communicate through writing, and alongside the physical development of gross motor skills like balance and control, children develop the fine motor skills and control they need to begin their writing journey.

Why is it
important

Being able to write allows children to communicate in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. By having lots of early opportunities to produce letters and words for meaningful reasons (such as making signs or writing a shopping list) children understand that what they write can convey their ideas, thoughts and feelings to others.

Mark making for meaning

Children learn to communicate and develop writing skills through early mark making. By incorporating mark making into their play, children can give meaning to the marks they make, and begin to understand how those marks, letters, numbers, pictures and words communicate meaning to others.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Show children how you use mark making and writing in a variety of ways to communicate with different people about different things
- Support children to draw and mark make to communicate ideas and experiences that are meaningful to them and show the power of communicating through the written word

Inspiring Ideas

- Shopping List! During a role play activity, prompt children to make a list to take to the shops, making marks or drawings to represent their favourite foods or ingredients to bake a cake.
- I'm here! Have children 'sign in' each morning by choosing a card with their name on it, arranging magnetic letters on a whiteboard or supporting them to write their name in a register.
- Perfect Postcards! Support children to draw and write a postcard for someone they love. Write 'Dear' and 'Love' out for children to copy and support them to make other meaningful marks, writing and drawing pictures. When children have finished their postcard, add an address to the envelope, talking about how the numbers and words help the post office to know where to take the letter.

Tip

Creative activities, like art and craft projects, give children opportunities to share their thoughts and experiences in different ways, preparing them to share their ideas through writing.

Tip

When you ask children to write about something, use set topics to help children scaffold their ideas (example topics include farm animals, dinosaurs, modes of transport, favourite foods, seasons, space or nature). Sensitive focus on topics and experiences that all children might have the opportunity to take part in, like park visits rather than holidays or expensive toys.

Forming letters

Children begin to form letters of the alphabet.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use visual tools that you already have in your setting such as playdough, sand, slime or wooden letters to help children to see and form letters of the alphabet
- Write letters during activities with children, describing and naming the letter, and talking about how you move your hand or hold the tool you're using
- Use lots of different materials to copy and form letters
- Play letter games and activities, reinforcing the names and shapes of the letters

Inspiring Ideas

- When children are mark making in dry sand, show them how you might write the first letter of their name using your finger, a stick or a paint brush. As children become more experienced, introduce different letters and different tools.
- Letter hunt! Gather together pages from magazines and newspapers, choosing a letter that the children can hunt for, cut out and stick onto paper. Once children have shown each other their wonderful pictures, support them to finger paint or write the letters they have found onto a big piece of paper
- Using wooden or plastic letters, or even scrabble tiles in a bag, have each child pull out a selection of letters, supporting them to name and copy the letters onto a piece of paper. Read out all the funny words they have written and ask what they think the words might mean!

Tip

Children might need time to develop control over pens, crayons and paint brushes. Accept scribbles and drawings that can be difficult to interpret, and allow children to tell you about their creations.

Writing your name

Children practise writing their names as a first step in learning how to write whole words.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Support children to draw and write their names using a variety of different writing tools
- Show children how you write the individual letters of their name, pointing out the upper case letter at the start
- Use visual tools that you already have in your setting such as wooden or plastic letters or their names on their pegs to help children to recognise and copy the letters from their name

Inspiring Ideas

- Using wooden or plastic letters, support children to find the letters that make up their name and put them in order, naming the letters as you go. Using brushes, sticks, the wheels of toy cars or pencils, support children to write their names in paint, sand or on paper.
- Ask children to find their name label next to their peg. Show children how you can copy their names onto paper, and support them to do the same. As children become more familiar with the activity, talk about the difference between lower and upper case letters, pointing out that their name has an upper case letter followed by lower case letters.
- Teddy is coming for a visit, but he doesn't know any of his new friends' names! Support children to write their names on stickers to help Teddy get to know everyone.

Tip

Children may find it easier to write their full name using upper case letters. As their writing skills develop, introduce the lower case letters that they will need to use.