



Professional Learning Module
Emergent Writing for Early Learners

Writing Routines

Providing opportunities for children to write and to learn about print is beneficial to their development as writers as well as readers. Children will develop increased knowledge about the forms of letters through their experiences in a classroom that is rich in emergent literacy skills.

As children learn how to write more letters, they will begin to experiment with different forms and functions of writing. Authentic writing opportunities allow children to choose their writing topic and encourages them to write for an actual “real life” purpose and audience.

For example, children are encouraged to write grocery lists and take phone messages when they play at housekeeping or write stories at the writing center or write captions and labels for their paintings and block creations. Young children learn about print and how to write messages when they are provided ample opportunities to experiment as writers and plenty of coaching by their teachers.

A daily variety of enjoyable and engaging encounters with writing enables young children to experience writing as important and useful. Here are a few examples:



Experimenting with writing

When children experiment with writing, they are consciously thinking about what they know about print and how it works. Since writing begins with letter formation it's important to provide a wide variety of opportunities for children to practice letter formation. Children may enjoy writing on things other than paper which may make the writing process more engaging for reluctant children. For example, children can use their fingers to “write” in a sand tray or use a paintbrush to write on an easel or use large chalk or water brushes to practice writing letters outside on the sidewalk or building.

The act of writing engages children's fine motor skills. Fine motor skills involve the use of small muscles that control the hand, finger, and thumb and are important as children perform self-care tasks such as feeding themselves buttoning and zipping their clothes. Children strengthen small hand muscles when they use tools such as scissors, silverware, crayons, pencils, hole-punchers, etc. during play. Noticing a child's fine motor development will inform teachers about their emerging writing skills.



Name writing

Children should have many opportunities to practice writing their names, but they should not be expected to write on lined paper nor should they be expected to practice their whole name all at once. Name writing practice can be encouraged by meeting each child at their current ability level and supporting their progression from writing the first letter of their name to writing their full name.

Find meaningful opportunities throughout the day for children to practice writing their names so that the writing process is relevant and functional like signing-in for attendance, signing-up for a new learning area or signing their artwork. This is the first step in children figuring out the

mechanics of writing (procedural knowledge) i.e. their name is made up of letters and sounds and they can write those letters to represent themselves (conceptual knowledge).

Writing around the room

A print rich learning environment sends the message that writing has a purpose and print carries meaning. When teachers generate classroom management charts (e.g. class rules, daily schedule, attendance, jobs) with their children and post them around the room children will begin to understand the function of writing (conceptual knowledge).

When charts are displayed at a child's eye level, they are able to interact with the charts and will often imitate their teacher's instruction. Teachers are also able to use the charts for review at the end of the week or unit of study to check children's understanding of a concept or skill. Charts make learning visible for other adults in the room as well as parents. They serve as documentation of learning goals and can be used to monitor progress and instructional planning.



Learning Areas

Children spend a good portion of their day in learning spaces around the room to play, explore and interact. Each learning area (i.e. learning centers, work stations, computers, art, construction) should include a variety of paper and writing tools to motivate children to generate stories, notes, or messages. There are many ways to include writing in every center and every activity:

- Grocery lists and menus in dramatic play
- Address books and message pads in housekeeping
- Drafting plans for the block area
- Labeling and captioning in art centers
- Observation logs in the science center.

A well-stocked writing center will support children in creating self-directed writing experiences. The center should include a variety of writing tools and paper to motivate children to write. This would be a good place to store their journals and provide mailboxes so children can write messages to each other. The writing center should be a dedicated area (other than the art area).

* See [Instructional Resources: Setting up a Writing Center](#) for additional information about how to set up a writing center.

Messaging

How often children write, how often they observe you writing, and how often you coach them in their writing will influence how much they learn about communication through writing.

Messaging is a writing collaboration where children contribute ideas about a topic with the teacher and the teacher writes down their ideas in a sentence or paragraph form (Generative knowledge). Any kind of messaging throughout the day is encouraged both in whole group, small groups, outside, during learning centers, etc. using any of the writing practices for a variety of purposes.

