



Professional Learning Module
Emergent Writing for Early Learners

Writing Practices

We know that early writing is a key predictor of children's later reading success. Just as children grow in their ability to name and recognize alphabet letters, they also gain skills in using letter-like shapes, symbols and letters to convey meaning. In a classroom that is rich in purposeful and authentic early literacy and writing opportunities, children will develop increased knowledge about the forms of letters. Through their experiences they learn that writing conveys a message. The three writing practices, shared writing, interactive and dictation, support children in becoming readers and writers. Each of these writing practices are intentionally used by teachers to model the writing process as well as provide instruction in emergent reading skills.

Shared Writing

Shared writing is a strategy for teachers and children to work together to write a message either in whole group or small group settings. Shared writing is an opportunity for you to show children different reasons for writing and how to record messages on paper. In addition to showing children how to form letters and how to put letters together to write words, you are helping the children understand that we write those specific words to communicate a message. During shared writing, you write on chart paper or another surface something that is large enough for all children to see. Model the writing process by *thinking aloud* while writing.

For example, you could start by saying, "That was so nice of Jill's mom to send us cupcakes for snack-time today. Let us write her a thank you note. Let's see, a thank you note always starts with 'dear'. I need to start at the top of the page. What letter sound do I hear at the beginning of 'dear'? Hmm.... /d/ /d/ /d/ Oh, that's /d/ so it's a 'D'!"

Interactive Writing

Interactive writing is similar to shared writing except that you are "sharing the pen" with the children. As you "share the pen," you will pause and think aloud and ask children questions like:

- "What letter should represent that sound?" "How many sounds do you hear, and so how many letters do you think we will need to write?"
- "How do we spell the word dog?" "What should we do when we finish a word?" "What mark should we put at the end of this sentence?"

Notice how many of these questions help connect the writing process to children's developing print knowledge and phonological awareness skills. Teachers who have carefully observed each child's writing development will be able to select questions for each child that match their current level of skill and understanding. As you ask these questions, children will tell you what they think and you will offer them the pen to write it down. Because interactive writing gives children more control over what is written and how the letters are formed, it may be best in small group or one-one-one settings.

Taking Dictation

Dictation is a writing practice a teacher can use for modeling the writing process to young children. Dictation supports the composition process and children's language skill development at the same time. Typically, you will use dictation when working with a child one-on-one; however, sometimes you can use dictation with small groups, as children take turns telling you what to write. When using the strategy of dictation, your job is to:

- Write exactly what the child says.
- Use prompting and questioning techniques to try to expand the child's language.
- Be sure the child can see you writing.

Over time, children learn to pace their speech to your writing speed. Be sure to coach children to do this by saying things like, "Oops, wait for me—I can't write that fast." You might also try to repeat the child's message word for word to demonstrate how you can pace your speech to writing. Be sure to read what you write back to the child and ask the child to point to the words and read them with you.

Each of these writing practices:

- Point out that print is organized from left to right and top to bottom
- Demonstrates that writing conveys meaning
- Models writing for children by leaving spaces between words
- Show children how letters are formed
- Demonstrate the connections between letters and sounds
- May support learning the spellings of some commonly used words (like "dear", thank you, to do, shopping list)

Children observe how to plan, organize, and record their thoughts by watching your writing demonstrations. Most importantly it demonstrates that we can *read what we write*.

When young children write, they are learning...

- That print carries a message
- That print moves from left to right and from top to bottom
- That there are spaces between words
- That letters are formed in specific ways
- That letters represent sounds
- That print conventions (punctuation, capital letters, size of print) help the reader interpret the writer's meaning
- That what is written can be read

Teachers can help children become writers by

- Providing many experiences with print
- Showing them how with daily modeling
- Expecting them to write
- Providing materials for writing
- Providing meaningful opportunities for writing
- Encouraging them by giving feedback
- Focusing on the process of writing—not the finished product
- Scaffolding instruction by modeling, taking dictation, guiding children's efforts, and providing opportunities for children to write independently.