



Learning to Write in the Early Years

A guide for parents and carers

Introduction

This guide will briefly explain *learning to write* in and how you can further support your child with writing at home.

Learning to write is exciting and can be fun and enjoyable for you and your child

- It is an important stage in children's development
- It is a skill which helps children to learn and live their lives
- It helps them to communicate effectively

As with other aspects of their learning, children need to develop and practise many of the skills they need to write over a long period of time. Some of these skills are needed before a child ever holds a pencil.

Practising the skills of learning to write is through a variety of activities, some of which might seem like they have little or nothing to do with writing!

Providing your child with opportunities to be physically active, throwing and catching and to develop fine motor skills through threading and scribbling will prepare them for school and for handwriting.

Literacy involves encouraging children to link sounds and letters and to begin to read and write. Children must have access to a wide range of reading and writing materials to ignite their interest in reading and writing.



Look out for some top tips on how you can support your child at home



Be Physical



Before we ever put a pencil in a child's hands, those hands should dig, climb, press, push, pull, squish, twist, and pinch in a wide array of environments and with a variety of materials.

Amanda Morgan

- ✓ Limit the time that babies and children are in car seats, baby chairs and carriers
- ✓ Opportunities for 'tummy time' for babies to develop upper body strength and stability
- ✓ Encourage children to be bare foot wherever possible indoors and outdoors. Shoes and socks can limit children's movement
- ✓ Encourage children to keep physically active, outdoors whenever possible.
- ✓ Play ball games, rolling, throwing, catching, and kicking.
- ✓ Running games and dancing activities, hold a 'Dough Disco' (<https://www.spreadthehappiness.co.uk/dough-disco/>)
- ✓ Encourage your child to dress themselves, do up and undo buttons, zips, and fasteners. Put their own shoes and socks on and off.
- ✓ Provide Malleable activities, such as slime, playdough, and plasticine.
- ✓ Roll out pastry and use pastry cutters to make shapes and letters. Roll it into balls, twist, press shapes, objects, and letters into it. Squeeze it through garlic press and sieve. Use scissors to cut it into strips etc.



- ✓ Make gingerbread characters and place currants to make the face and buttons. Pipe with icing for the detail.
- ✓ Peeling fruit and vegetables
- ✓ Wash bicycles and cars
- ✓ Pegging clothes onto a washing line
- ✓ Peg puzzles, jigsaws, cutting out, threading, and sewing cards help develop fine motor skills
- ✓ Cut out old birthday cards, catalogues, and magazine to make collages.
- ✓ Make letter and shape collages with natural materials
- ✓ Threading beads, pasta shapes
- ✓ Drawing, tracing, colouring, and painting activities
- ✓ Paint outside using decorators paint brushes or yard brushes with water. Fill empty washing up bottles with water to make marks, drawings and letters on the ground or walls.
- ✓ Use chunky pavement chalks to make patterns and draw on the ground

Getting a Grip

Writing is a physically and intellectually demanding activity

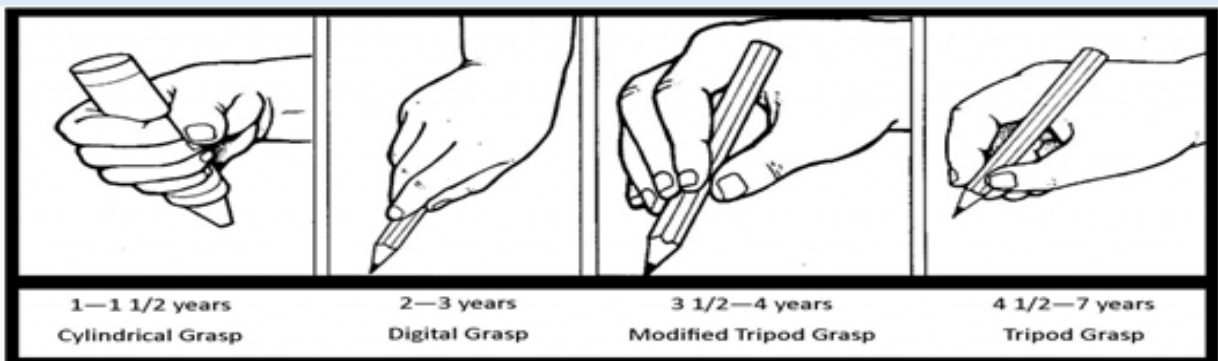
Children should be given a range of opportunities to develop their motivation to write.

Expressive language underpins writing and should be prioritised.

Do not force children to write letters too soon as this may put them off writing and affect their self-confidence!

Children develop the hand skills needed to hold and control a pencil as they make everyday movements around the house rather than with paper and a pen.

Folding clothes, wiping up spills and learning to dry up cups all strengthen their hands and build hand-eye coordination as well as making children feel part of the family. Look out for other everyday opportunities such as putting on coats, pouring out drinks and cooking, as these also help children's hands to develop



The Development of the correct pencil grip (The tripod grasp)

As children get closer to school age, you will probably notice their drawings, painting and mark making becoming more purposeful. This is the time to encourage a three fingered 'tripod' pencil grip and introduce activities to help them learn pencil control such as dot to dots, tracing, and colouring activities.

Back to front letters: Children must rely on their memory to write letters until they become good readers. This means that nearly all children will reverse their letters early on or miss letters out of words.

Something to Write About!

'If you can't say it, you can't write it' Alistair Bryce Clegg

Before children write, they need to be able to think about what they want to say, how to say it and to think about the words and letters that they need to use

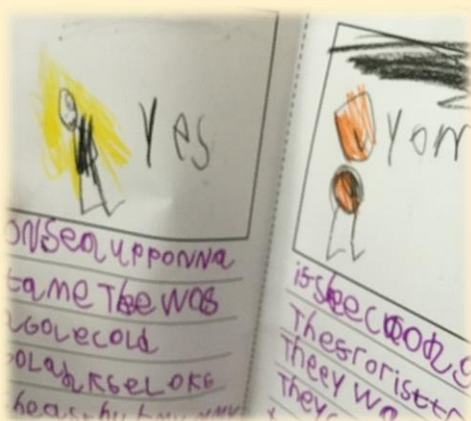
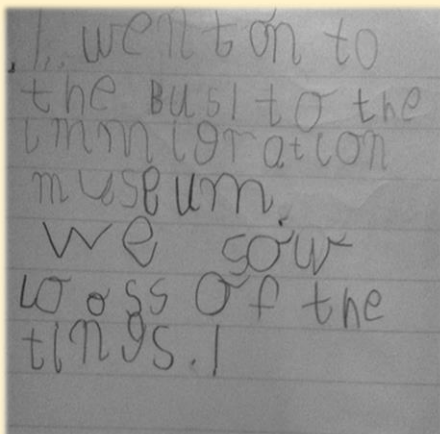
Children need communication and language skills

They need developed visual and spatial perception

They need physical skills (gross and fine motor)

They need an understanding of letters and sounds.

Children need to be MOTIVATED TO WRITE!



Emerging Writers

- ✓ Read books and rhymes and talk about the pictures, what can children see, what is happening? Encourage your children to make up their own **stories** and **characters**. Support them to make their own books: Illustrate their stories, **label** pictures, write some character names, words, and simple sentences if they are can, or scribe their stories for them if not.
- ✓ Respond to children's interests for example, write **messages** to superheroes, or favourite book characters, make treasure **maps** and write messages in bottles.
- ✓ Make simple **information leaflets** of days out, such as a trip to the zoo
- ✓ Keep a reading or **travel journal** or **scrap book** which your child can add to.
- ✓ Make simple non-fiction books about pets, dinosaurs, or wild animals,
- ✓ Write simple **instructions** such as how to make a model
- ✓ Make simple **comics** with speech bubbles/such as **BOOM, CRASH, ZAP** and **BANG!**

PHONICS

To become competent readers and writers, children need to remember: the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent.

To write, they must be able to know what they want to communicate, articulate this, and understand the meaning of the words they want to write.

They need to be able hear the sounds in words and form the letters to write words and sentences.

Phonics is learning about the sounds and letters which make up the words we speak, read, and write.

A phoneme is the smallest part of a sound in a word for example 'm'. There are 44 phonemes in the English language.

- ✓ Play with **magnetic letters** to make their own name and that of family members, build simple words on magnetic trays or the fridge.
- ✓ Play **musical instruments** (maybe make your own shakers and drums)
- ✓ Play **memory games** such as 'I went to market and I bought taking it in turns to write the words on a list.
- ✓ Point out the **child's own name** and simple words such as **mum, dad, and family names, make these with magnetic letters, pastry cutters and playdoh.**
- ✓ Play games where you **blend sounds** to read words such as **c-a-t cat** or, **chop words up cat** into **c-a-t**

Talk to your child's school or pre-school about how they teach phonics, reading and writing.

BE A WRITING ROLE MODEL!

In an increasingly technological world, children may not see adults writing by hand as often. Instead of texting or sending an email for example, let your children see you and join in writing cards, letters, lists at home.



Let children see you writing....

- ✓ **letters** and **cards** and to family and friends and encourage them to reply
- ✓ post it **messages** and reminders for family members
- ✓ a **diary, journal**, or scrap book of family days out
- ✓ shopping and to do **lists**
- ✓ **recipes** and instructions
- ✓ **crosswords** and **Sudoku**
- ✓ **colouring** and **calligraphy**

Technology

Technology can provide good opportunities for children with diverse needs or experiences.

Children with delayed motor control or special needs might benefit from using word processing for example.

When choosing websites and apps for your child consider:

- ✓ Is it age appropriate and suits their abilities?
- ✓ Is choosing technology the best choice of activity, fit for purpose?
- ✓ Is it enjoyable?
- ✓ Does it reflect what your child sees around them or is interested in?
- ✓ Check out the apps yourself before sharing with your child. Watch gameplay footage of the app on 'YouTube' so you know what your children will be doing.
- ✓ Make sure children are also spending time offline and involved in physical exercise and outdoor opportunities
- ✓ Avoid apps and websites with violence, gender, or racial stereotyping, pop up adverts and sales promotions
- ✓ **Avoid using apps or screen time at bedtime.**

Some Useful Apps and Websites for Children



Chatterpix – Add voice and animation to any photograph or drawing.

Puppetpals App - Create your own unique shows with animation and audio in real time! Simply pick out your actors and backdrops, drag them on to the stage, and tap record

Phonicsplay – play phonics games online

Magnetic letters App for alphabet and spelling

Draw and Tell App – free art set

Kaligo – handwriting and spelling app

Rainbow App – create your own online colour book, collage, photography, and animation

Information for Parents and carers

What to Expect When – A guide to your child’s learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage. https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/what-to-expect-when-1.pdf?utm_campaign=836415_Foundation%20Years%20Newsletter%20December&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dotmailer&dm_i=3WYE,HXDR,4VYS18,1XX02,1

Happy Tiny People <https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>

Small talk (hand in hand with Hungry Little Minds) is the National Literacy Trust website supporting parents to play, talk and read to their children <https://small-talk.org.uk/>

Words for Life is the National Literacy Trust’s literacy website for parents and carers: www.wordsforlife.org.uk

Learn to Read and Write with Phonics – Information for parents about phonics and the sounds (phonemes) in the English language <https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk/reading/learn-to-read-phonics/>

Tales Toolkit – used in many Stockport schools and settings to engage children in story telling and to support vocabulary. Ask your child’s school or setting for an access code for the Parents Area. <https://talestoolkit.com/>



Websites for Children

<https://www.phonicsplay.co.uk/>

www.phonicsbloom.com

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/games> - Stories, games and Alphablocks.



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