

Writing Activities for Young Readers



Getting involved

Most parents know that reading to children is important, but many pay little attention to their children's early attempts at writing. In fact, reading and writing go hand in hand. When children practice writing a letter or word, they recognize that letter or word when they see it somewhere else.

But writing does not start with real letters or words. It begins earlier when, playing with a crayon or pencil, your toddler first connects marks made on paper with an idea in his or her mind, even if the marks are just scribbles that can't be read.

At this stage you can actively encourage an interest in writing. Show how to hold a pencil or shape a letter. Talk about the word or story your child is writing. Make clear that writing is a skill worth learning, that it gives your child a new way to express what he or she is thinking and feeling, and that you take the process seriously.

Writing milestones

Here are a few milestones to recognize as you encourage and support your child's early writing:

- Around the age of 2, children begin to play with crayons, markers, and pencils.
- After that, they start drawing things. The pictures might not be clear, but your son or daughter can describe them to you (a house, a doggie, a family, a flower).
- Children gradually learn to see language as isolated shapes in a row of letters. They become aware of the different shapes that make up printed words.

- Your 3- or 4-year-old will start "writing" by making linear scribbles that include some recognizable letters. These scribbles are a form of expression. "Remember to accept and affirm children's attempts to write, even if what they produce doesn't look like adult writing," recommends Dr. Renée Casbergue of Louisiana State University and coauthor of *Writing in Preschool: Learning to Orchestrate Meaning and Marks*.
- Urge your child to tell what his or her picture or writing says, advises Lori Jamison Rog, an educational consultant in Toronto, Ontario, and author of *Marvelous Minilessons for Teaching Beginning Writing*. "At this stage, oral language development is even more critical than the ability to use letters and sounds."

Activities for preschoolers

Stimulate your child's curiosity with these activities:

- Read alphabet books together, then make your own. Help your child trace the shape of each letter (upper case is easier). If he or she has trouble, draw the letter on another piece of paper, describing each movement of the pencil.
- Diagonal lines, as in *R* or *K*, are difficult for children. Try placing dots for your child to connect.
- After reading a story together, ask your child to tell his or her favorite part or imagine a different ending, using his or her own words while you write them down. Then bind the pages with staples or ribbon to make a book.
- Help your child keep a journal of what books he or she reads. Include the book title, author, what your child liked or didn't, and a simple rating system (make it fun with stars or stickers).
- Inspire your child with a story starter, such as, "Julia thought it would be fun to be an astronaut."



She would....” Then ask your son or daughter to make up the rest.

- Include writing in pretend games, suggests Casbergue. When your preschooler pretends to run a restaurant, hand over a note pad and pencil and ask, “Will you take my order?”

About spelling

As children begin to sound out words, they often invent spelling. For example, your child might write *kat* instead of *cat*.

Don't panic and go overboard correcting the spelling. “Invented, temporary, or phonetic spelling is absolutely critical for young writers, as it helps them construct their knowledge of how our language goes together,” says Rog.

Research shows that children who use invented spelling become better spellers later on than children who are pressured to be “correct” from the start.

Writing for life

Support your children's literacy development by making writing a part of everyday life: Have them print their names on cards and letters, write or draw thank-you notes to a family member, and help write the grocery list.

Look especially for opportunities to link writing activities to reading. Proficiency in both improves each time your child grips a pencil and strives to print his or her name.



Internet resources

Find cool ideas and great story starters geared for cultivating children's literacy skills:

- ReadWriteThink.org: www.readwritethink.org
- Story It: www.storyit.com
- Chateau Meddybemps Young Writers Workshop: www.meddybemps.com/9.700.html
- Reading Is Fundamental: www.rif.org/educators/advicetips/emergent_writing.mspix
- PBS Teachers: www.pbs.org/teachers/earlychildhood/articles/emergentwriting.html

Sometimes having a pen pal can get a child interested in reading and writing. Pen pals are available through safe sites for free or for a small fee:

- Student Letter Exchange: www.pen-pal.com (minimum age, 8 years)
- KidsCom.com: www.kidscom.com/friends/friends.html
- ePals Global Community: www.epals.com
- World Pen Pals: www.world-pen-pals.com
- Circle of Friends PenPal Club: members.agirlsworld.com/index.html

If your child enjoys writing stories, submit one to an online magazine written for and by children:

- Kids' Space: www.kids-space.org
- Stone Soup: www.stonesoup.com
- Young Writer: www.young-writer.co.uk



Writing Activities for Young Readers is one in a series of brochures produced in response to questions that parents frequently ask about their children's reading instruction. Single copies may be downloaded free at the Association's website, www.reading.org. Bulk copies may be purchased online or by telephone at 302-731-1600.

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