



Literacy and Writing Support

Literacy refers to the ability to read, write, and express ideas through written language. In school, literacy also includes listening, speaking, and actively participating in classroom learning activities.¹ Literacy development is complex and involves multiple skills working together, including language, attention, motor coordination, visual processing, motivation, and executive functioning.^{1, 2}

From an occupational therapy perspective, reading and writing are meaningful daily activities that support participation in learning, communication, and social interaction within the school environment.² How a student engages in literacy tasks is influenced not only by skill level, but also by the context, environment, and demands of the activity.²

Impact on student participation

Writing is a multi-step process that relies heavily on executive functioning skills, especially when students are expected to plan, organize, begin independently, and revise their work.^{3, 4} Students may struggle with writing when they have difficulty with:

- **Planning/idea generation** (what to write, how to start)
- **Organization** (sequencing ideas, paragraph structure)
- **Initiation** (getting started and following through)
- **Sustained attention** (sticking with the task long enough to finish)
- **Working memory** (holding the prompt, rules, and ideas in mind)
- **Self-monitoring** (editing/revising, checking clarity and mechanics)
- **Time management** (pacing and meeting expectations)

Students may also experience challenges with the underlying skills that support written output, such as handwriting efficiency, typing, visual processing, or stamina.

How school-based occupational therapy can help

School-based occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) support students in accessing and participating in literacy and writing activities by addressing both the skills required and the demands of the school environment.

OTPs collaborate with students, families, and school teams to set meaningful, participation-based goals that connect to the student's strengths, interests, and classroom expectations.

OT may:^{1,2}

- Teach executive functioning skill strategies for writing (planning, organizing, prioritizing, monitoring)
- Support the writing process using tools like graphic organizers, visual outlines, and checklists
- Help students break writing tasks into smaller steps and develop routines for follow-through
- Recommend and teach assistive technology when appropriate (typing, speech-to-text, word prediction)
- Address underlying skills that affect participation (e.g., posture, endurance, fine motor skills, handwriting efficiency)
- Support motivation, confidence, and positive classroom participation during literacy tasks

Contact

If you're interested in learning whether occupational therapy services may be helpful for your child at AIM, please contact supportservices@aimpa.org.

Sources

1. Frolek Clark G. The occupations of literacy: Occupational therapy's role. *J Occup Ther Sch Early Interv.* 2016;9(1):27-37. doi:10.1080/19411243.2016.1152835
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3. American Occupational Therapy Association. Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (4th ed.). *Am J Occup Ther.* 2020;74(Suppl 2):7412410010. doi:10.5014/ajot.2020.74S2001
4. Dawson P, Guare R. *Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Guilford Press; 2018.