

Family Focus

Building a Foundation for School Success

Getting Ready for School Writing With Your Child Everyday

Writing is one of the most complex skills children will develop! Learning to write requires children developing knowledge about print, the alphabet, and how sounds are represented by letters. It also requires fine motor skills to hold a pencil and to control how it moves. Writing is a very complex skill, but you can support your child to become a writer!

Why is this important for school readiness?

“Early writing is one of the best predictors of children’s later reading success.” But writing is complicated and involves understanding how print works and the names and sounds of the alphabet. Writing also requires “phonological awareness” which is recognizing that language is made up of sounds. Children also need to grasp the “alphabetic principle” and understand that oral language is made up of sounds and letters that represent these sounds.

Writing is developmental; it starts with toddlers’ early scribbling, and then moves to “controlled scribbling”. As children notice print in books and signs, they begin to use “letter-like forms” often mixed with drawing. Although this is not real writing, the letter-like forms stage shows they understand that print represents language. Before and about the time they are in kindergarten, most children start to write letters that represent words they hear. They write their name and know those marks say their name.

Children learn writing by playing, being read to, and being a writer. Here are some ideas of how you can support your child’s development in this critical area of kindergarten readiness.

What can families do to help?

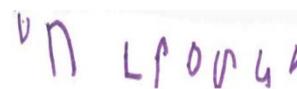
- ❖ To help children understand that writing is used to communicate, write in front of your child and explain what you’re writing. Use everyday activities such as writing shopping lists, e-mails, to-do lists, thank you notes, etc. Involve your child by asking what to write and letting him or her write on the list or send a thank you note.
- ❖ Display your child’s writing in a special place and/or share it with people who are important to your child (ex. grandparents). This tells your child his or her writing is important and displaying it will encourage more writing.
- ❖ Create an “office” for your child. Gather up different types and colors of paper, small notebooks, envelopes, stickers, crayons, pencils and pens in a basket, container or box. Place this on a shelf near a desk or a table that can serve as your child’s office. Your child can take this “traveling” office to other places in your home.
- ❖ Recognize what early writing looks like:

Letter-Like Forms (3-5 years)



Letter & Symbol

Relationship (3-5 years)



- ❖ Writing can happen outside as well. Let your child use chalk or an old paintbrush with water to write on the sidewalk. When going on errands or a car trip, pack a backpack of writing tools and paper for your child.

Activities to do with your preschooler:

❖ Use a Salt Tray to Teach Your Child to Write His or Her Name: *Sensory Salt Tray*

Use a cookie sheet or the lid from a shoe box to make a salt tray for your child to practice “writing” his or her name or other words, or for just swishing the salt around.

Here’s what you do:

- Use a cookie sheet or the lid from a shoe box as a tray.
- Write your child’s name in marker or crayon on a sheet of unlined paper that will cover the bottom of the tray. Use all capital letters first and then go on to using upper- and lower-case letters. Place the paper on the bottom of the tray.
- Pour a layer of salt and shake gently so the salt covers the bottom of the tray. You child can still see the letters on the paper underneath the salt to use as a guide. Your child then uses his or her finger to trace the letters and write his or her name. If your child makes a mistake, a gentle shake lets him or her start again!
- Sand and corn meal can be substituted for salt. They work well too!



❖ As Your Child to Dictate a Story You Write and Your Child Illustrates: *I Am An Author*

Your child can be an author and illustrator with your help. While being an author, your child is learning about print, words, letters. Children have lots of stories to share, especially if you read books to your child regularly.

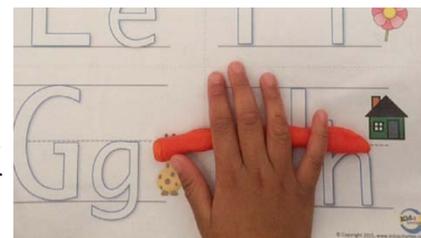
- Fold 3-5 unlined 8 ½ X 11 sheets of paper together to make a booklet. Staple on the fold.
- Ask your child to tell a story for you to write down. Some children prefer drawing the story and tell telling you what words to write, and others like to illustrate the story after all the writing is done.
- As you write what your child says, say each word as you write it and talk about what you’re writing.
- Don’t forget to write the author’s name (or your child can write his or her name) on the cover near the title!



❖ Make and Shape Play Dough Letters: *Make Letters*

Using play dough to learn letters and how to practice making letters is a fun hands-on activity for children. You can make no-cook play dough with your child and then use it to make long “snakes” to create letters. If you like, you can download and print these free [alphabet mats](#) to create the play dough letters on.

- Begin by making the no-cook play dough. Write down this recipe so that your child can see it. Make the play dough with your child pointing to each word as you follow it. It’s a great literacy activity too! Here’s the recipe:
 - 1 ½ cups plain flour, ½ cup salt, 2 tsp cream of tartar, 2 Tbsp vegetable or canola oil, food coloring (gel food coloring creates brighter colored play dough)
 - Mix all dry ingredients in a bowl (let your child measure, dump and stir)
 - You add the boiling water to the bowl and mix well.
 - If you want all the dough one color, add the color to the water. If you want small amounts of different colors from one batch, add the color to the dough after making it and knead it well.
- Roll the play dough into long strips and make letters and shapes. Your child can use a plastic knife to cut the play dough. Store the play dough in a plastic bag. It will keep for a long time.



Resources used for this tip sheet: [Support Writing at Home](#) National Association for the Education of Young Children
[How Do I Write...? Scaffolding Preschoolers’ Early Writing Skills](#)

Resources for families: [Center for Early Language and Literacy Parent Handouts](#) [15 Pre-Writing Activities for Preschoolers](#)
[Practice Name Writing in 12 Fun Ways for Preschoolers](#) [How Writing Develops](#)