

Activities for Supporting Early Writing Development: Level I

Activity One: Making a Writing Box

Children who are allowed to experiment with writing during the preschool years will later learn to compose more easily and with greater confidence than children who do not have this early encouragement.

This activity helps to:

- motivate children to experiment with writing
- further children's fine motor development
- encourage children to explore various writing tools
- promote an awareness among children of the value and importance of learning to write
- let parents know about the importance of writing during the preschool years

Directions: Fill a box with writing materials for young children to use at home. You might include items such as the following:

a pencil and pencil sharpener
colored pencils
scented washable markers
crayons
small spiral notebook
plain, unruled paper
several plain white pages stapled together to make "books"
several envelopes
colored construction paper
small bottle of glue
cellophane tape
small stapler
child-sized scissors with rounded point
a piece of white poster board, laminated (about 6x8") with wipe-off pen and cloth

If teachers are preparing Writing Boxes for at-home use by children in the program, a sheet with information about the importance of writing during the preschool years, and ideas for encouraging writing might be included.

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Activity Two: Setting Up a Writing Center

One of the most important things you can do to spark children's natural interest in writing is to provide plenty of materials.

This activity helps to:

- motivate children to experiment with writing
- further children's fine motor development
- encourage children to explore various writing tools
- promote an awareness of the value and importance of learning to write.

Directions: Locate a place with a table or other writing surface, and storage area for writing supplies. In a classroom, you will probably want a place where three or four children can sit comfortably together to use the writing materials. Gather as many of the materials listed below as possible and arrange in an attractive way, within easy reach of the children. Small plastic tote boxes and storage containers, cans covered with brightly colored contact paper, baskets and boxes make excellent storage containers!

Writing Center Supplies

Pencils (regular and chubby)

Colored Pencils

Colored Markers (washable; may also include scented ones)

Crayons (regular and chubby; wide variety of colors, glitter crayons and scented crayons are fun, too!)

Paper (variety of sizes and shapes, lined and unlined, newsprint, white and colored construction paper, old forms, "junk mail," outdated letterhead, envelopes, blank books made by stapling several sheets together)

Small or large chalkboards and chalk (colored and white)

Magic slates

Magnetic board and letters

Letter stamps and ink pads (washable; various colors)

Acetate sheets and wipe-off pens and cloths

Laminated poster board pieces and wipe-off pens and cloths

Letter and design stencils

Hole punch and yarn or ribbon for binding "books" made with hole-punch pages

Stapler

Glue, paste and tape

Scissors (good quality, child-sized with rounded points)

Pencil sharpener

Book of wallpaper samples for making covers for homemade "books"

Old magazines and catalogs

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Activity Three: Modeling Writing

Children need to see adults modeling writing for real-world purposes. Adults can help support writing development by letting children see them write notes, grocery lists, recipes, friendly letters, business letters, and so forth.

Through seeing adults modeling writing, children:

- learn how useful writing is
- learn that spoken words can be written down and read
- begin to see how letters and words look
- begin to learn concepts about print, such as: writing goes from top to bottom and from left to right, and words are separated by spaces
- understand that writing is a “grown-up” thing to do

Directions: Serve as a good written language model by calling attention to the writing that you do on a daily basis. Consider the following ways of modeling writing for young children:

1. Post a calendar on the wall within eye level of your young child. Record daily happenings, appointments, birthdays, and so forth, on this calendar. When a new activity is learned about, make a point of saying “We need to write that on our calendar” and then let your child see you do so.
2. Keep a pad of paper and pencil handy for jotting down needed supplies and food items. Whenever you notice something else that is needed, let your child see you add it to the list.
3. Keep “to do” lists and write down tasks that need to be done, who is to do them, and when. As suggested before, let the children see you adding to these lists.
4. When you get ready to send greeting cards for birthdays, holidays and other special occasions, let your child watch as you write the message, sign the card and address the envelope. Point out the information included in an address. You might also encourage your child to add his or her name or special drawing on the card next to your name!
5. When possible, let your child see you fill out forms (for mail order, surveys, etc.) Tell your child what information you need to write on each line. For example, you might say “Here’s where I write letters in my name. I’m supposed to write my last name first: S-m-i-t-h.”

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Activity Four: “This says _____.”

Children need to see an abundance of print, and their natural attempts to imitate this print through tracing and copying should be encouraged. Children who have begun to scribble should be encouraged to do so each day.

Through daily exposure to print, and daily opportunities for writing, most children will:

- Move through the stages of writing development without undue delay
- Come to understand that print conveys a message
- Eventually progress to writing the alphabet letters and to invented spelling.

Directions: Tell the children that there are many ways to write a message or story. Draw a simple picture of a dog on chart paper and say “If I wanted to write about my dog, I could draw a picture of my dog so you could see what he looks like.” Then, write using continuous wavy lines, similar to cursive writing and explain that some children write this way. Next, draw a few mock letters, or letter-like forms, and explain that some children write this way. Continue by writing a string of mock conventional letters across the paper as you explain that some children’s writing looks like this. Finally, use words and explain that this is the way writing looks in books. Let the children know that all of these different forms of writing are acceptable to you. Also let them know that the child who did the writing is the one to ask if you want to know what it says. Following are suggestions for encouraging daily scribbling and writing:

- Place a date stamp and ink pad in the Writing Center and ask children to stamp the date on each of their writing papers, and then to place them in a specially designated place, or bring to review time on the rug to share their writing with each other.
- Add new materials to the Writing Center, such as glitter crayons, scented crayons and markers, colored paper, “shape books,” stickers, and cancelled stamps, to renew interest in using the Writing Center.
- Start a “sign-in” procedure by having children sign their own names as they arrive each day. (As always, personal script is accepted.)
- Make “turns lists” for heavy demand items, such as certain playground equipment, computers, and so forth. Ask children to sign up for a turn. Once children have their turn, they cross their name off of the list and call the next child whose name is on the list.

- Place little pads of paper and pencils in various areas of the room to encourage children to use writing in their play. Children can make grocery lists in the housekeeping area, write in the appointment book in the play doctor's office, and write notes and messages to friends and teachers.
- Use a spiral bound notebook for children to record information about the care and feeding of a classroom pet. A plant diary may also be used by the children to record information about a plant's growth.
- Whenever children tell you something you need to remember, ask them to write it down for you. Chances are good that when you find a "note" from a child, you'll remember the situation—and what it was you were supposed to remember—even if you can't read the note!