



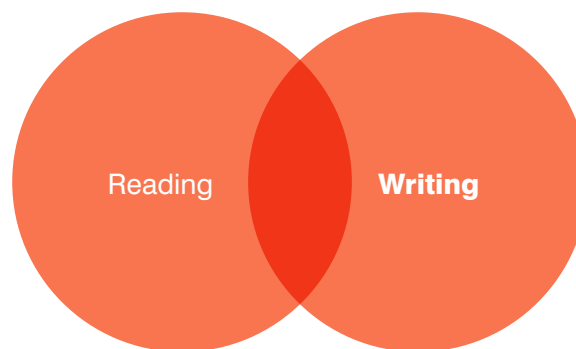
Literacy: Writing

Introduction

Literacy (L) is one of the **four specific areas** of learning in the EYFS framework. It has been separated from the other aspects of Communication and Language (CL) – listening, speaking and understanding – which are all considered to be **prime areas** of learning.

Literacy development involves encouraging children to read and write, both through listening to others reading, observing them writing, and beginning to read and write themselves. Children must be given access to a wide range of reading and writing materials to ignite their interest.

In the EYFS framework, **Literacy** is made up of two aspects:



Prime and specific areas of learning

- The **three prime areas** of the EYFS are Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED), Physical Development (PD) AND Communication and Language (CL).
- The **four specific areas** are Literacy (L), Mathematics (M), Understanding the World (UW) and Expressive Arts and Design (EAD).
- The **three prime areas** should be the focus for practitioners working with the youngest children as these form the basis for successful learning and progress in the **four specific areas**.
- As children become older the emphasis will shift towards a more equal focus on **all areas of learning** as children's confidence and abilities increase.

Supporting young children's development in writing

Literacy covers several areas of learning and development which were found within 'Communication, Language and Literacy' in the original EYFS framework; these are now found in Reading and Writing, as well as in aspects of Linking Sounds and Letters and Handwriting.

To help children develop their writing skills, practitioners should plan an environment that is rich in signs, symbols, numbers, and words. They should allow children to see adults writing who then encourage children to write for themselves, through making marks, personal writing symbols, and conventional script.

Progress in L: Writing

Under 3s

'Practitioners working with the youngest children should focus on the prime areas, but also recognise that the foundations of all areas of learning are laid from birth – for example literacy in the very early sharing of books.'

[Tickell Review of the EYFS, 2011]

Early Learning Goal for Reading

'Children use their phonic knowledge to write words in ways which match their spoken sounds. They also write some irregular common words. They write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others. Some words are spelt correctly and others are phonetically plausible.'

[Statement from revised draft EYFS Framework, 2011]

What quality looks like in practice

The three scenarios described describe how a nursery offering full daycare for children from six months to five years of age have made provision for developing children's writing skills.

Under twos

In the area of the nursery set aside for the under twos, the well experienced staff are aware of the importance of babies and toddlers being given many opportunities to develop the communication and physical skills which they will need as they develop their writing capabilities.

The staff are happy to play games with the babies which involve toys being dropped repeatedly for the adult to retrieve. When they are engaged in this playful way the babies are learning how to grip and how to let go of things at will – both important factors in gaining pencil control when they are older. The older babies enjoy sitting and crawling on the carpeted floor area; they are developing the co-ordination skills which help them to stabilise and balance their bodies, and are beginning to be aware of feelings of pressure on the palm of the hand and fingers which are necessary for mark making.

The practitioners introduce activities which give the babies and toddlers opportunities to mark make – finger and hand painting, using malleable materials, and investigating crayons and pencils.

Two- to three-year-olds

The two- and three-year-olds in the nursery enjoy singing finger rhymes, even though developing the ability to match sounds and movement is not easy. The children are given time to move their fingers into position for the rhymes as they gradually gain more and more control over their fingers.

The practitioners provide many opportunities for the children to develop their gross motor skills which, along with the fine motor skills developed by finger rhymes, are essential for developing writing skills. The gross shoulder movement controls the fine motor movements of the fingers and makes pencil control and mark making possible.

The practitioners have made good use of the outdoor environment, as well as indoors, to create areas where children can mark make on a large scale. A large blackboard area has been created along the rear wall of the nursery where the children can use chalks and water to engage in large scale mark making, developing their gross and fine motor skills. The staff have made outdoor 'furnishings' using recycled cable rolls which are a perfect height for the two and three year olds to work at when they are mark making.

Four- to five-year-olds

The practitioners working with the older children have created an environment which is rich in print, by using traditional labels for names and resources and by valuing a range of presentational techniques when displaying the children's learning. They are also aware that for many children the most important word is their name and this is often the first word that the children learn to write. Once the children have become familiar with the string of letters in their names, the practitioners build on their knowledge by encouraging them to find other words with letters which are the same.

Gradually the children will begin to use their problem solving skills to help them work out ways of writing down words and expressing what they want to say. The practitioners encourage the children to combine picture drawing with their early writing.

The staff of the nursery are aware that, generally speaking, the boys do not respond in the same ways to mark making as the girls. They recognise the importance of providing mark marking opportunities which are attractive and interesting to the boys as well as those which the girls enjoy. Whilst the girls usually enjoy engaging in table top activities where an adult is present, the boys seem to prefer mark making on a larger scale, not at a table and often where there is no adult. The boys often prefer to be out of doors, using chalks on the blackboard or patio and often lying flat to write. The practitioners have set the indoor writing area up to be as attractive to boys as it is to girls with different sized pieces of paper, a range of mark making tools including superhero pens, pencils, and pencil cases, and with surfaces appropriate for sitting down or standing up.

How to help young children develop their writing skills

Use these reflective questions to think about how you might support young children in developing their writing skills.

Under twos

- Do all practitioners working with the under twos have the professional knowledge they need about how movements made by babies and toddlers are an essential part of development in the area of writing?
- Are all staff aware of what we mean by writing, understanding the differences between the transcriptional aspects of writing – handwriting and spelling – and the compositional aspects where the writer is communicating an intended message?
- Do we give babies multiple opportunities to explore and learn to manipulate the range of materials that they encounter every day?
- Are we good at making sure children have the necessary time to explore a wide range of materials, encouraging them to make marks as part of their exploration?
- Is our environment planned to give children opportunities to use both the gross and fine motor skills needed in order to write?
- Is our environment set up to offer a range of paper, pens, pencils, chalks, paint brushes, paint or plain water for the under twos to choose from?
- Could we improve, or extend, the ways in which we provide children with mark making opportunities?

Two- to three-year-olds

- Do all staff have an understanding of how finger rhymes and action songs help children develop the skills they need for writing?
- Do we make good use of the outdoor environment to give children the opportunities to use their gross and fine motor skills to mark make on a large scale?
- Can we provide a variety of writing surfaces, both indoors and out of doors, at a suitable height for the children to mark make – sitting down, standing up, or kneeling?
- Are resources for mark making freely available for the children to access?
- How often do we model writing for real purposes in the course of our work?
- Are the children involved in writing notes and letters to their families, lists, or instructions on a regular basis?
- How well do we observe and interpret what we are seeing when children's intentional mark making occurs?
- What opportunities do we take to explain to parents how their children's movements and mark making are fundamental to learning and development in writing?

Four- to five-year-olds

- Do we provide an environment which is rich in print at the children's height?
- How well do we show that we value the children's work by displaying it beautifully, labelled with the child's name and, perhaps, photograph?
- Do we provide opportunities for individuals or groups of children to make books, so that they begin to see the link between what they read and what they write?
- Does the role play area provide the stimulus for writing in context – paper and envelopes in the office, clip boards and checklists in the garage, notepads and 'specials boards' in the café?
- Have we given a lot of thought to how we cater for the interests and behaviours of both boys and girls in mark making?
- Can we combine the use of ICT and mark making to encourage writing?
- Is the outdoor environment set up to provide opportunities for mark making on a large or small scale?

Ideas for parents

Helping your child to develop their writing skills

There are lots of easy ways you can help your child to develop their writing skills. You could use the ideas below as starting points to help you do this.

Under twos

- Encourage your baby to develop her gross motor skills as she reaches, sits upright, and crawls.
- Play games with your baby which involve her dropping things and you picking them up, to help develop the grasp and letting go skills which are necessary when writing.
- Give your child opportunities to explore and manipulate the range of materials that he encounters every day – water, fabrics, paper, and his toys.
- When possible, allow him to explore his food with his hands and watch carefully as he makes marks in his yoghurt or pasta sauce.
- Try placing a small pile of flour in front of your baby when she is in her high chair and see what she does.
- You could have a pile of flour of your own and act as a role model gently drawing your fingers through the flour or moving it with your whole hand.
- Try offering a range of paper, crayons, pens, pencils, chalks, paint brushes, and paint for your toddler to choose from.
- Take a bucket of water and a two inch paintbrush outside and encourage your child to paint with the water on the paving stones or the wall of the house or shed.

Two- to three-year-olds

- Play action songs and games out of doors to develop your child's gross motor skills, which are needed to move the shoulders in the early stages of mark making when children make large, sweeping movements.
- By singing and acting out finger rhymes, you will help children develop the co-ordination and fine motor skills they need for learning to write.
- You can encourage your child to enjoy mark making on a large scale out of doors by pinning up large sheets of paper for her to paint or draw on.
- Encourage your child to mark make in different ways where they are most comfortable – girls are usually happier to sit at a table than boys, who often like to stand or lie down when they are writing or drawing.
- As your child develops an interest in writing or drawing, give them some special writing and drawing materials of their own – they will often prefer things which have a theme which interests them.
- Comics often provide children with a focus for writing and drawing which interests them.
- Let your child see you writing for real purposes – making lists, writing notes, or filling in forms.
- Involve your child in making and writing cards for family members, writing party invitations, or making a list of things you need at the shop. Don't forget to take the list with you and ask your child to remind you what you need.

Four- to five-year-olds

- Where possible, provide a space where your child can write and draw independently using his or her own writing materials.
- Show your child how you value their drawing and writing by putting their efforts on your fridge or notice board or taking them to work with you.
- Help your child to make a book about your family so that he can begin to see the link between what he reads and what he writes.
- Encourage your child to write his own greetings cards for family and friends.
- Try to vary the opportunities your child has to mark make, for example using a blackboard, easel, an outdoor fence, or wall covered with paper.
- When your child is involved in role play at home you can provide writing materials to enhance their play – notepads and menus for a café, paper and envelopes for an office, or a clip board and checklists in the garage.
- Boys are often less keen to draw or write than girls. Girls are usually much happier to sit at a table to draw and write. Often giving boys pencils, a pencil case, rubber, and pencil sharpener with a superhero theme, as well as a clipboard and notebook, and allowing them to mark make outside solves the problem.
- Try combining the use of ICT and mark making to encourage your child to write.