

# Get a Grip

## Developing Ideas for Early Writing

Learning  
Improvement  
Service Early  
Years Team



## Creating a language and literacy rich environment

- Provide a language rich environment where children enjoy talking and communicating in a range of ways as a precursor to writing.
- Take mark making and writing into all areas - indoors and outdoors.
- Have a range of resources to support children's role play and acting out their ideas.
- Develop and refresh a high quality, well resourced, mark making and writing environment.
- Develop children's physical skills to support mark making and writing.
- Encourage children's imaginative and story-telling skills by scribing their stories for them.
- Encourage writing for a purpose and an audience.
- Follow children's interests.
- Value mark-making and other pre-writing skills.
- Base your pre-writing / writing activities on accurate assessments of children's development.
- Share your knowledge of early writing with parents and encourage them to support their children appropriately.
- Adults should model writing for a wide range of purposes.
- Provide high quality phonics teaching taking the children's interests and abilities into account.





## Components of writing



**Motivation** – wanting to have a go

**Communication** – speech and language

**Imaginative skills** – role play and storytelling

**Physical skills** – fine and gross motor skills, handwriting

**Literacy skills** – phonics, spelling and grammar

**Purpose and audience** – reasons for mark making and writing

## Stages of writing | birth-11 months

- ❖ Roll over onto stomach.
- ❖ Lift head and chest, supporting themselves on their arms and hands.
- ❖ Use shoulders to pull themselves up.
- ❖ Reaches out for, touches and begins to hold objects.
- ❖ Picks up an object and holds it to their mouth.

## Ideas to support children's development at this stage

- Tummy time.
- Rattles and musical instruments.
- Space for rolling and stretching inside and outside.
- Pillows and cushions for support and crawling over.
- Tents and tunnels to lie in.
- Boxes, large and small for babies to crawl into or place objects in.
- Fabrics to stimulate their senses.
- Heuristic play/ treasure baskets.
- Toys that make a noise.
- Squeezy toys and balls.
- Mirrors.
- Sharing books.
- Singing songs and rhymes.



## Stages of writing | 8-20 months

- ❖ Pulls to standing position.
- ❖ Crawls, bottom shuffles or rolls.
- ❖ Holds an object in each hand and brings them together in the middle, sometimes passing from one hand to the other.
- ❖ Holds mark making equipment using palmer grasp.
- ❖ Picks up small objects between thumb and fingers.
- ❖ Enjoys sensory experience of mark making.

## Ideas to support children's development at this stage

### As above plus...

- Wheeled push and pull toys.
- Stacking objects.
- Finger rhymes and massage.
- 'Edible' finger paints (puree fruit and veg).
- Mark making in food at lunch time.
- Trays of water, cornflour, bubbles to encourage mixing and stirring.
- Easy to hold mark making materials.
- Sand play.
- Printing with sponges and dabbers.
- Large scale mark making e.g. large sheet of paper on floor where babies can squish and explore different fruits.
- Sharing books.
- Singing songs and rhymes.
- Making up stories.
- Role play equipment.



## Stages of writing | 16-26 months

- ❖ Make connections between their movements and the marks they make.
- ❖ Build a tower with blocks.

### Ideas to support children's development at this stage

#### As above plus...

- Construction and building towers (gross motor).
- Wheelbarrows or wheelbarrow walking (gross motor).
- Sharing books.
- Singing songs and rhymes.
- Make up stories.
- Take part in role play.
- Using spades and sweeping brushes (gross motor).
- Provide logs and planks to carry, transport and build with (gross motor).
- Climbing equipment and opportunities (gross motor).
- Parachute games (gross motor).
- Pulling and moving large pieces of lycra material (gross motor).
- Hanging and pegging items on washing line (pincer grip).
- Painting with water (mark making and gross motor skills in large scale).
- Painting with mud (mark making).
- Chalks of different sizes (mark making).
- Gloop (cornflour and water) and Slime (soap flakes and water) (mark making).
- Finger paints (mark making).
- Soft dough or harder plasticine/ clay for older children (strengthen finger muscles).
- Lentils, rice, jelly, cooked pasta - encourage children to explore and make marks, trails and piles with their fingers (mark making).
- Powder paints outside on a wet rainy day – putting small amounts on the ground and allowing the children to use their fingers to mix the paints and paint on the ground. (mark making).
- Hidden objects (Bury or hide objects in the sand or in containers filled with flour, rice or lentils e.g. shiny tiny treasures, beads, coins, shells etc. Ask children to find them – e.g. some pirates have lost their treasure – can you find it in the sand? Children could be challenged further by only being able to use tweezers to pick objects up (fine motor skills and manipulation).
- Prints, rolling and tracks e.g. with vehicles in paint or rolling a ball covered in paint around a tray with paper inside (mark making).





## Stages of writing | 22-36 months

- ❖ Show control in using mark making tools.
- ❖ Begin to use the tripod grip.
- ❖ Imitates drawing simple shapes such as circle and lines.
- ❖ May be showing preference for dominant hand.
- ❖ Distinguishes between marks they make.

## Ideas to support children's development at this stage

### As above plus...

- Opportunities to mark make in role play e.g. in notepads, telephone and address books (mark making).
- Playing with shaving foam (mark making).
- Ribbons attached to hair bands to be put on wrists and twirled.
- Water squirters/ plastic bottles/plant spray bottles (finger and hand muscles).
- Making up stories with puppets and small word.
- Sharing books.
- Singing songs, poems and rhymes.
- Cooking – mixing and stirring (gross motor).
- Raisins from one container to another (pincer grip).
- Water squirters or squeezey plastic bottles (strengthening finger muscles).
- Pegs on a washing line or around an empty sweet tin (pincer grip).
- Large tweezers or tongs to pick up dried pasta or balls of squashed paper etc (pincer).
- Playdough with objects to find and mark with such as small world animals squished into it (or small sticks (strengthening finger muscle and mark making).
- Whisks with water and bubbles (gross motor).
- Threading Cheerios onto string or other lacing and sewing activities (hand eye and fine motor).
- Popping bubble wrap (pincer grip).
- Using chopsticks to pick up objects (fine motor skills).
- Balancing equipment (gross motor).
- Rubbing on different surfaces (mark making).
- Different objects to paint with – different sized brushes, sponges, cotton buds, glue spreaders, string, droppers.
- Self care skills such as buttoning, tying, fastening snaps, zipping, opening and closing jars, dressing (fine motor skills).



## Stages of writing | 30-50 months

- ❖ Sometimes gives meanings to marks as they draw and paint.
- ❖ Ascribes meanings to marks that they see in different places.
- ❖ Draws lines and circles using gross motor movements.
- ❖ Holds pencil between thumb and two fingers, no longer using whole-hand grasp.
- ❖ Holds pencil near point between first two fingers and thumb and uses it with good control.
- ❖ Can copy some letters e.g. letters from their name.

## Ideas to support children's development at this stage

### As above plus...

- Children need to be able to draw pre-writing shapes before they are able to form letters correctly. They first need to learn to go up and down, then side to side, then to draw circles, then diagonals.

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- Making prewriting shapes with scarves and ribbons to music.
- Using large sheets of paper and big movements using a variety of tools such as brushes and marker pens.
- Use brushes and water to paint outside.
- Use a hammer to crush chalks to make poster paint.
- Introducing smaller tools encouraging the tripod grip for a variety of activities.
- Using modelling clay with buttons, matchsticks and tools.
- Large tweezers.
- Skewers.
- Hammer and nails.
- Nuts and bolts.
- Turning keys in locks.
- Introduce a variety of different pens and pencils and introduce new ones regularly.
- Try out different paper and envelopes.
- Explore ways of storing and carrying the writing materials (writing boxes, work belts, backpacks and tubes).
- Follow children's interests and make it exciting for them to make marks and write
- Read stories with children every day.
- Give opportunities for a wide range of high quality role play experiences.
- Make puppets and characters from stories.
- Teach rhymes and songs.
- Make up stories.
- Read and make up poems.





## Stages of writing | 40-60 months

- ❖ Shows a preference for a dominant hand.
- ❖ Begins to use anticlockwise movement and retrace vertical lines.
- ❖ Begins to form recognisable letters.
- ❖ Uses a pencil and holds it effectively to form recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.
- ❖ Gives meaning to marks they make as they draw, write and paint.
- ❖ Using some clearly identifiable letters to communicate meaning representing some sounds correctly and in sequence.
- ❖ Writes own name and other things such as labels or captions.
- ❖ Attempts to write short sentences in meaningful contexts.

### Early Learning Goal

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.

## Ideas to support children's development at this stage

As above plus...

### Writing corner:

- Provide a mark making wall – paper attached to a fence/wall – use pens, chalk...
- Create a 'writing to go box' or hanging pockets, which can be transported indoors and outdoors.
- Make a collection of blank booklets, blank and laminated greetings cards and postcards, small pictures and miniature card decorations so that children can make their own stories, postcards and greetings cards.
- Introduce message boxes/pockets or a post box so that children can post their mark making to their friends.
- Have a collection of laminated photographs of children and practitioners with their names on.
- Have a selection of books including non-fiction, picture books, poetry books, dictionaries, magazines and catalogues that interest the children.



**Construction area:**

- Have a collection of clipboards of different sizes.
- Examples of models and step by step instructions for recreating them.
- Adult scribes for example writing a letter asking for planning permission for a new building.
- Provide off-cuts of card for children to use as labels for their models.
- Create a builders hut complete with writing tool kit and message board for jobs to be completed.
- Scribe a list of building site rules after consulting with children.
- Recreate a building site/tool hire company outdoors. Provide lists of equipment required for various building projects.
- Examples of real plans and annotated diagrams supported by photographs. Poster size paper and drawing boards available for children to draw their own plans.

**Water Area:**

- Mark making using plastic bendy pipes or garden hose.
- Rolling tyres in the water or thin paint to make track patterns on the ground.
- Cut zig zag patterns into the rubber edge of window washers to make patterns when dragged along paper dipped in coloured water or thin paint.

**Small World:**

- Use a digital camera to take photographs and label.
- Incorporate signs, labels and maps when children create imaginary small worlds such as treasure islands, magical lands.
- Create interest based writing boxes to include booklets, letters, lists and writing tools.
- Send letters written in gold/silver from fictional characters such as astronauts, pixies and fairies to the children and encourage correspondence.
- The children can write shopping lists, jobs for the farmer and maps for the buried treasure or routes for the train.
- Collect bottles/containers to make potions using natural resources. Children can draw/write potion recipes and labels.
- Give the children opportunities to play with story boxes linked to current interests to encourage story making and sharing ideas.
- Once children have the opportunity to create and develop stories through their play take photographs, video or produce drawings to recreate the story in a big book.

**Creative Workshop:**

- Provide charcoal, chalks and pastels.
- Have off cuts of folded card available to label their models
- Provide different types of paint and allow the children to mix them at different thicknesses and textures, rollers, massage tools, sponges, potato mashers and scourers – anything that will allow children to make a mark/pattern. The larger scale the better as this will encourage large wide arm movements.
- Weaving – small scale using collage materials. Large scale using ribbons on fencing/netting.
- Create a puppet workshop with paper plates, fabric, buttons, ribbons tubes etc.
- Use papier mache with the children to create a landscape for small world and use this to retell stories.
- Encourage children to make puppets based on characters in their favourite stories and retell stories using them.
- Provide a tool box with joining materials such as treasury tags, sellotape, masking tape, paper clips, paper fasteners, ribbons etc. - all of which encourage children to develop their fine motor skills.

**Mathematics area:**

- Writing tools to produce grids/tracks/hopscotch on a larger scale indoors and outdoors.
- Have a 'writing to go box' available that includes squared paper, blank or partially completed number lines, unused order forms, old calendars and diaries.
- Blank grids/tracks for games. Laminated score and tally sheets.
- Zig zag booklets, lift the flap books, number lines from magazines pictures and postcards to encourage children to make number books/pictures.
- Create number bags e.g. five speckled frogs – include the rhyme, frogs, a dice, laminated writing frames, markers and pens.
- Stampers/objects for printing and paper to encourage repeating patterns.

**Malleable Play Area:**

- Encourage children to squeeze, pinch, poke, smooth and push clay or dough – all support the development of fine motor skills.
- Use under cooked oiled spaghetti to make patterns, shapes and letter shapes.
- Encourage mark making using gloop, crazy soap, cornflour, shaving foam, hair gel, finger painting – taking mono prints of their mark making and discuss them with children.
- Mark making using food substances such as custard, angel delight, herbs and spices.
- Dribble treacle or honey from a spoon to make marks and patterns.



**ICT:**

- Children can use the digital camera to record favourite outdoor places and adults act as scribe.
- Use digital cameras and tape recorders to make talking books/diaries/stories.
- Children can use clipboards or whiteboards to record the items they found using metal detectors.
- Computer programmes involving the mouse to develop fine motor skills.
- Draw routes and grids for 'Beebot' or remote control toys.
- Provide walkie-talkies or old mobile phones in the role play area, along with notepads or paper, pens and clipboards to write messages on.

**Investigation Area:**

- Record observations of change in natural materials, plants and animals in blank zig-zag books e.g. 'My frog log'.
- Make a windy day box that includes ribbons and streamers. Encourage the children to make patterns and letters shapes with large arm movements.
- Provide lolly sticks, sellotape and card off-cuts to label seeds, which the children have planted.
- Make Big Books : ask the children to talk about things that interest them. Provide speech bubbles and record their comments and thoughts. Drawings/photos are then incorporated into a big book to illustrate the learning process.

**Sand and Natural objects:**

- Treasure hunt: hide treasure in the sand.
- Use different vehicles, insects, animals etc to make tracks in the sand.
- Building Site – Children make appropriate signs, symbols
- Use moulds and natural objects to make repeating patterns.
- Encourage children to mark make in the sand or use fingers, twigs, feathers, wooden spoons etc.
- Provide coloured sand in a shaker or ketchup bottle to make patterns on black paper.

**Role Play Area:**

Ensure the experiences you provide either follow the children's interests or are things you have introduced to them by trips out or visitors to the setting for example.

- Provide themed role play boxes – car wash, pizza/take away, AA/mechanic, explorers, emergency services, animal rescue, garden centre, airport – always include pens, paper, clipboards and off cuts of card to make tickets, number plates etc.
- Provide chalk boards and laminated cards for menus, shopping lists and price lists.
- Place an address and message book next to the telephone.
- Include road signs, shop labels, notices for attention and rules.
- Message boards, appointment books, record sheets to show work/treatment carried out, times and dates at the clinic

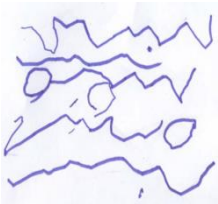
## Stages of writing



Holds the pencil/crayon in the palm of the hand in a fist like grip. Makes early attempts at mark making which feature lots of random marks, often made over other marks. Adults may describe this as scribbles.



May hold the pencil/crayon in a pincer grip between the thumb and index finger. Makes a definite attempt to make individual marks. Attempts to close shapes making an inside and an outside; these shapes are often circular. Combines shapes and lines; these marks will often represent one word.



Has a clearer idea of the marks he/she wants to make. Copies adults and makes marks going across the page; these are often zigzags and wavy lines. May use either hand for writing.



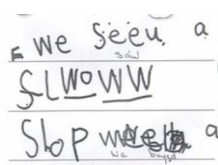
Makes individual marks and uses some letters from own name to communicate a message. Begins to understand that drawing and writing are different. Is becoming aware that print carries a message.



Forms symbols and some recognisable familiar letters that follow on next to each other. Is becoming aware of the left to right direction of print and can point to where the print begins. Is becoming aware that writing conveys meaning and may 'read' their own writing.



Writes a message using familiar letters. Writes some upper and lowercase letters. Writes his/ her name reliably.

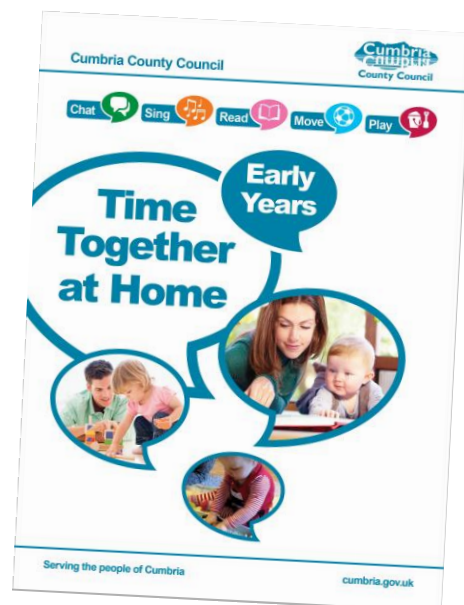


Writes most of the alphabet correctly using upper and lower case letters. Writes the first one or two letters correctly then finishes with a jumbled string of letters. Begins to write capital letters and fill stops at the beginning and end of work. Writes a longer sentence and can read it back.

## Ideas to support parents

- Explain to parents the importance of developing children's gross-motor skills with physical outdoor play and how this supports the development of writing. Go on to explain the stages and components of writing. You could do this at information sessions, one to one or using interesting displays.
- Discuss with parents ideas they could try at home with their child. This needs to be based on the individual child's stage of development and abilities. This could include language activities such as singing, outdoor mark making activities, experiences their child has enjoyed in school and would be keen to continue at home. The child could show their parents what they have learnt. You could use the ideas listed above and more ideas can be found at :

<https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/childrenservices/childrenandfamilies/cfis/homelearning/homelearningandtimetogetherhomepage/homelearningandtimetogetherhomepage.asp>



More ideas can be found in the books, publications and websites below.

- **Mark Making Matters:** National Strategies. No longer available but worth seeing if it is in your setting.
- **The Well Balanced Child:** Sally Goddard Blyth (2005) Hawthorn Press.
- **Young Boys and Their Writing:** Sally Featherstone and Jenni Clarke (2008) Featherstone
- **Getting Ready to Write:** Exploring all the crucial development stages before children even pick up a pencil. Alistair Bryce-Clegg (2013) Featherstone
- **50 Fantastic Ideas for Mark Making:** Alistair Bryce-Clegg (2015) Featherstone
- **www.abcdoes.com**
- **Making Their Mark Children's Early Writing:** Linda Pound. A leaflet from Early Education – available to download for free from [www.early-education.org.uk](http://www.early-education.org.uk)

Cumbria NHS Children's Therapy website

<https://www.cumbriapartnership.nhs.uk/our-services/children-families/our-children-and-families-services/childrens-therapy>



