



What is this document about?

This document is about how we help children learn to read and write. Reading and writing are closely linked. Learning to read and to write are the most difficult tasks children have to learn. For them to be successful now and later on we have to offer them the right experiences and teaching.

Beginning at the beginning

Reading and writing develop together and in parallel

Reading and writing are closely interwoven. They require slightly different sets of skills, but as the skills of reading develop and strengthen, so do the skills of writing. So think of them together.



The process of making sense of those black marks on the page, and beginning to make your own marks on paper that other people can read starts early. It starts with talk. It is talk that helps literacy skills develop and provides the raw material for written communication.

"Reading and writing float on a sea of talk."

James Britton, educationalist

Children start school with a vocabulary which has been learned mainly from their family and the literacy environment at home, as well as from their experiences with the wider world. A child's spoken vocabulary will be much larger than their reading or their written vocabularies at first. They will use words they have heard and understand in their everyday life. They will gradually acquire the beginnings of a reading or writing vocabulary from their immediate surroundings, their family and friends. There are so many words in the world – for a young child, they must be both useful and connected to a memorable experience.

Words, words and more words

Having a low vocabulary will trap children in disadvantage.

When they start school, relatively high performing children know an average estimated vocabulary of 7100 words. In contrast, relatively poor performing pupils know 3000 words, acquiring only one word per day compared to the three words per day acquired by children with the largest vocabularies. This gap widens as children get older. And the wider the gap, the harder it is to bridge.

The statutory curriculum

Communication and language

Communication and language is a “prime” area of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Literacy – reading and writing – depends on communication and language.

The characteristics of effective learning

Language is related to movement. This is one of the reasons why we place the early learning of literacy within children's self-chosen activity, and to make sure these activities happen in real and meaningful contexts. Opportunities for early reading and writing should be “real” and available everywhere - notebooks, whiteboards and pens, shopping lists, print in the environment and so on.

Here are some examples of “real” writing:

Chloe covered the whole paper and said, 'I'm writing.'

'What an interesting drawing,' the practitioner said as she joined Aftar at the easel. 'That's my dad, and that's our flat,' Aftar replied. 'And that's me standing outside.'

Joshua makes a mark on his dad's birthday card and says, 'That says Samuel.'

Mia is playing in the café and writes customers' orders on her notepad. She tells the chef, 'They want pizzas.'

Children need to see adults reading and writing in their everyday lives. They need adults to draw their attention to important print, for example in the street and in shops.

Here are some of the ways we teach reading and writing to young children:

- ❖ High quality book corners that are accessible, owned and loved by children;
- ❖ Using core books to plan for children's interests and class topics;
- ❖ Valuing non fiction books;
- ❖ Having enthusiastic staff who share their excitement of books with children;
- ❖ Having books available in all areas of the classroom;
- ❖ Having opportunities for independent writing in all areas of the classroom;
- ❖ Using story props, sacks and boxes to enhance core books;
- ❖ Opportunities for children to learn 'reading behaviours', for example, the recognition that print conveys meaning, the left to right directionality of English text, the purpose of punctuation;
- ❖ Opportunities for high quality adult- child interactions and sustained shared thinking to give children the extended vocabulary with which to write creatively;
- ❖ Listening to a variety of genres, for example, non fiction, poems, taped stories, rhymes;
- ❖ Opportunities to retell and to act out stories using props and story maps;

- ❖ Activities to help develop a sense of rhythm.

Writing

The early stages of emergent writing



Opportunities, support and teaching

Opportunities

These are planned indoors and out so that mark-making happens using a rich variety of different resources, materials and equipment. Here are some examples of opportunities for children to use to help them develop. It is important that these experiences respond to the child's individual needs.

Indoors

- ❖ Messy and malleable play – i.e. corn-flour and water, sand, shaving foam provided in a flat-bottomed container, so children can feel the bottom and move their hands and fingers through the materials. These experiences appeal because of the rich, sensory element and may also link to children's current interests, for example '*making magic potions and spells*' using soap flakes, food colouring and water.
- ❖ A well-organised range of paper, card, pencils, crayons and felt-tips in each room, which children can find easily and use independently.
- ❖ Notebooks, address books, old diaries, magazines, forms to fill-in from the post office, in role-play areas together with telephones, walkie-talkies, and pretend microphones to encourage talk and conversations.
- ❖ Clipboards and pencils available near construction and block-play, so children can draw or record their constructions, write a list for the 'builder's yard' etc.
- ❖ ICT – for example the whiteboard for drawing and mark-making, interactive stories, children's names/first letter of their name written big.
- ❖ The arts also provide lots of possibilities for children to engage in mark-making – i.e. paint, brushes, runny glue, collage, clay and sculpture, together with small tools.

- ❖ Indoor displays of children's writing and drawings with captions and print, and examples of children's home languages as well as English.

Outdoors

Outdoors provides different but complementary opportunities for mark-making, particularly large scale. Simply moving an activity better done indoors to the outdoor environment is not effective. The outdoors, used for writing, should connect with the important aspect of supporting children's physical development.

- ❖ Puddles and paint brushes, sticks or leaves, small branches, bubbles in water.
- ❖ Mud and other malleable materials, coloured ice-cubes for painting on paper/fabric on a warm day etc.
- ❖ Paint on the ground or on large sheets of paper, either on the floor or upright against a wall or fence.
- ❖ Sand – children will mark-make with their hands, fingers and feet, and a variety of small tools, i.e. rakes, spades etc.
- ❖ Large paint-rollers, chalk and mops with water or paint, plant sprays.
- ❖ Pattern rubbing, taking images through paper of different textures and equipment outside.
- ❖ A well-resourced writing and mark-making area: large magnetic board with whiteboard pens, and magnetic letters, envelopes, paper for letter writing and a post-box. Parents are able to see the mark-making area and children can be encouraged to access these resources to support their self-chosen play.
- ❖ A selection of small resource bags, with pencils, notebooks, torches etc that link to children's interests in superheroes/popular culture themes. This also makes an important link to children's home cultures, TV programmes, comics and books.
- ❖ Throwing sponges at paper or fabric, footprints and handprints, paintbrushes tied to the end of bamboo poles.
- ❖ A large blackboard outdoors with chalks can be utilised for games or mark-making.