



# Introduction

Most parents and educators can tell you that a firm grasp on literacy skills equals success in school and beyond. The importance of reading has been well documented; however, other components of literacy, such as writing and storytelling, have garnered far less attention. *Writing Experiences for Young Learners* helps to fill in this gap. Providing activities for emergent and beginning writers, as well as useful information for educators, this book:

- **Defines standards and skills** — Learn what is developmentally appropriate writing, and what the standards are for teaching each age and stage.
- **Explains emergent writing** — See the importance of writing in connection with other literacy skills, and how parents can support the process of learning how to write.
- **Highlights writing basics** — Gather tips for strengthening the mechanics and content of children's writing.
- **Creates a writing environment** — Give children the tools to compose in various ways.
- **Facilitates writing activities** — Offer a variety of writing activities that target the development of beginning to more advanced writing skills.

The lessons presented in this resource cover a range of skills. Beginning writing experiences that include simple ideas for alternative pencil/paper activities and writing words. More advanced lessons address topics such as writing complete sentences, sequencing (finding the beginning, middle, and end of a story), and interviewing to find out information.

Each activity in *Writing Experiences for Young Learners* is broad enough to correlate with multiple curriculum themes, if desired, or works well as a stand-alone activity for writing experiences. Suggestions for expanding or simplifying the activity ideas are also included to help you adapt each idea to a broad range of abilities. Additionally, cross-curricular activities and suggestions have been provided to show the natural integration of writing experiences into other areas of the curriculum.

Learning to write is a process. Preschoolers can strengthen their fine-motor skills with simple activities, such as stringing beads, working with molding dough, cutting paper, drawing pictures, painting scenes, and so on. Kindergartners can be introduced to very basic punctuation, the conventional spellings of a few simple words, spacing between words, letter-sound connections, and simplified story organization. First graders will be ready for more advanced writing skills, such as the conventional spellings of words, correct punctuation of sentences, and independent writing.

Young children can and should learn that writing is a way of communicating thoughts and information, and that writing can be found everywhere. Giving children opportunities to interact with writing in a variety of ways will help foster the development of their writing skills. As you use the activity ideas presented in this book, make sure that you adapt them appropriately for the children. This will help children develop an interest in writing without feeling overwhelmed. Before you know it, you may be surrounded by a whole classroom of great (and eager) writers!



# Developmental Writing

When it comes to teaching children about writing, research has shown that more is better. The more often children are exposed to rich oral language and print experiences, and the more they are given opportunities to compose, the better writers they will become.

Keep in mind that these writing experiences should be appropriate for the age and stage of development of each child. Requiring children to write beyond their developmental capacity does not push them to be better writers. Instead, it may cause those children to become frustrated and avoid writing altogether. It is important to remember that skill development happens on a continuum and is different for each child. While some preschoolers may be able to write their first and last names with ease, other children may not be proficient at this skill until they reach kindergarten. The key is to provide writing opportunities that allow children to write at their own levels—whatever those may be.

Writing success comes when writing is relevant and enjoyable. Choose meaningful topics, such as personal experiences. Have the children write about things they are doing or learning in class. Be sure to include opportunities to write when working on other curricular activities, too, such as recording scientific discoveries. And, above all, remember to express encouragement for the children's efforts, not just their successes.

The development of writing skills follows a predictable path:

- At first, the child scribbles exclusively.



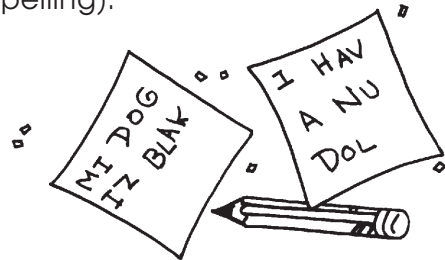
- Next, the child begins to create shapes and then letter-like symbols. These symbols may be drawings that look similar to letters or up-and-down zigzag writing.



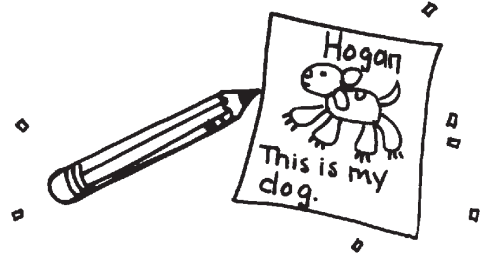
During this stage, children may also start to recognize and copy important words, phrases, and simple sentences, such as their names and the words *Mommy*, *Daddy*, and *I love you*.



- Zigzag writing is now replaced with "words." Those words that the child does not know how to spell will be created phonetically (using invented spelling).



- Finally, the child begins to generate ideas independently and starts to write legibly, using conventional spelling and punctuation.





# Writing Standards

If the amount of time we focus on a subject is indicative of its importance, then it is not difficult to understand the focus of literacy skills. When we speak of literacy, our thoughts generally turn first to reading skills and rightly so, because reading is a key component of literacy. However, writing is also an important aspect of literacy, and it is intertwined with reading in a complex web of skills.

Learning that speech can be written down, that print conveys

messages, that letters make words, and that words make sentences are all ways that children learn how print and spoken words are related. This process of learning to write and read is a challenging and magical time. As children progress through these skills, it is important to foster their independence. This will result in some spelling and grammatical missteps along the way. You may find the letters to parents on page 7 helpful in explaining this process to families.

The following list of standards offers a guideline of what to expect at each stage of a child's development:

## Preschooler

- Begins to recognize that print conveys a message
- Begins to understand the conventions of print (i.e., text flows from left to right; letters make words; words make sentences)
- Scribbles and uses shapes or letter-like symbols for letters
- Experiments with a growing variety of writing tools and materials
- Writes his or her own name and other important words (*Mommy, Daddy, etc.*)
- Writes the alphabet in uppercase letters
- Dictates messages and stories for others to write

## Kindergartner

- Writes his or her own name and other important words
- Writes both uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet

- Uses invented spellings or phonetic spellings to create words
- Understands that print conveys a message
- Understands the conventions of print (i.e., text flows from left to right and from top to bottom on a page; letters make words; words make sentences)
- Has increasing control of penmanship, uses spaces between words, and makes letters similar in size
- Retells a story as heard and can generate ideas for stories

## First Grader

- Writes each uppercase and lowercase letter of the alphabet using correct formation and adequate spacing
- Uses text and illustrations to express thoughts
- Uses capitalization (first words of sentences and proper names) and end punctuation
- Begins to use descriptive words and writes in complete sentences
- Generates ideas, develops drafts, and makes revisions