

English

6: Writing

Main ideas

- Hand writing
- Written expression
- Guided writing

Outcomes

On completion of this session teachers will:

- understand the importance of pre-writing motor skills in young children.
- have an overview of important features of teaching handwriting.
- have an overview of the different forms of written expression.
- be able to conduct a successful guided writing session on practicum.

Content

Handwriting

Ages 4-5: The importance of pre-writing

Before children start to write letters, they need to develop fine motor skills. This can be assisted by activities to exercise the fingers and wrists, such as finger plays and dough modeling. Children also need to start copying patterns before they start copying letters.

See the following website for free pre-writing patterns. These can be printed out for the child to copy, or drawn by the teacher on a board for the child to copy.

<http://www.preschoollearners.com/Prewriting.php>

<http://www.senteacher.org/Print/Literacy/>

It is important that young children are given thick pencils or crayons beginning writing activities, (large diameter to help them grip). Otherwise a pencil grip can be attached to a regular pencil.

It is important that teachers 'teach' the children how to hold the pencil. Model the pincer grip over the pencil, with thumb and first finger, then add the second finger.

Before beginning to form letters, children need to:

- Have sufficient concentration to complete desktop tasks for at least 10 minutes at a time.
- Be orientated to written language.

- Be positioned well with feet on floor, sitting square onto a work surface which is the correct height.
- Maintain a steady wrist position that will enable controlled finger movements.
- Have a good ability to control pencil strokes.
- Be able to form some basic shapes that are required to form all letters: a circle, vertical and horizontal lines and diagonal lines.
- Be shown how to form the shape, before being able to copy pre-drawn shapes, as children learn to imitate shapes first before copying them.
- Be able to remember the movement patterns associated with forming shapes, to replicate the actions when copying.
- The following are some activities and advice on how to facilitate pre-writing skills in children with special needs.

Developing control of pencil strokes

- Use pre-writing/ drawing activities to develop stroke control, where the child has to draw between two lines (i.e. mazes or follow the trail activities). You can increase the difficulty of the task by decreasing the width of the lines.
- Practice drawings of defined shapes and patterns on a large vertical surface, such as a blackboard, easel or paper pinned to the wall.
- Use activities where the child has to free draw to join the items, e.g. joining lines to match items that are the same, or crossing or making a circle around pictures that are the same.
- Give lots of opportunities for drawing, tracing, painting and copying shapes and patterns to gain practice in controlling the pencil.
- Use puzzle books and worksheets with activities such as connecting objects (e.g. matching), mazes and dot to dot games that require accuracy. Gradually increase the level of difficulty and accuracy required.

<http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/PDF/Paed%20OT/School%20work/Pre-Writing%20Skills.pdf>

Ages 5 and above: Formal handwriting

1. Get a Great Grasp

If you hold your pencil at the top near the end and try to write your name it is very difficult to write. But when you hold your pencil the correct way, writing is much easier. The best way to hold a pen or pencil is to let it rest next to the base of your thumb. Hold it in place with your thumb, and your index first, then the middle finger.

2. Let the Lines Be Your Guide

Use lined paper. Dotted thirds are excellent for lower and middle primary.

3. Slow Down

If your writing is hard to read or you erase a lot, try slowing down a little. For

some students, going slower solves the problem. If you rush, it's hard to control where you stop and start your letters.

4. Lower the Pressure

Don't grip the pencil too tightly, and let your pencil mark the paper without going all the way through.

5. Play Games to strengthen finger muscles

Games like Jenga, Pick up sticks or Don't Spill the Beans will help strengthen finger muscles. You can make up your own games such as trying to pick up objects with a spring clothes peg.

6. Observe rules for letter formation

vertical strokes – 'top to bottom' (l, h, k etc)

anticlockwise circular movements – 'start at 1 o'clock' (o, c, d)

7. Good posture

Children learning to write and type need to be able to sit in a stable way, with their feet on the ground. Left-handers need space to slant their paper to the right, and right-handers to the left.

Tips for the classroom

- Ensure that all the parents of students in the early years of schooling know the letter formation each year. Print out the letter formation and place it in the child's reading take-home folder.
- Make alphabet strips in the appropriate font to stick to the children's desks.

Written Expression

Written expression is putting our thoughts into words, and those words into print. This is an important skill, the teaching of which is often neglected.

As with reading, the key to writing is motivation. A child may not be motivated by being presented with the task of coming up with a story in the next half hour in which to write a story. Writing is an art form. We can say to a painter, "Paint me a picture of a beautiful scene, and I would like it in half an hour." Unless the painter is motivated he will not produce his best work. He will not enjoy the work and will find it difficult. The same goes for writing. Writers have to be bursting with their own original ideas and feeling full of creativity before they can set to writing their best work.

Writing stages in the Early Years

Children begin writing at an early age by experimenting with making marks, pretending to write messages, and by school age begin to write formal messages. See appendix for notes.

The second year of school and beyond

How do we get our children motivated to write? We could:

a) use a topic based approach

This does not simply mean asking the student to write on a topic and leaving the rest to them. Work *with* the students at the introductory stage.

b) Offer a list of interesting topics from which the students can choose

c) Present a collection of pictures or photographs from which students can gain inspiration.

For students who lack confidence in writing, begin by giving them the sentence beginnings, and ask them to complete the sentences. When they are more confident, write ideas in point form for them to expand. Write a word bank of words they may need for the exercise.

The writing process

1. Prepare: select ideas

2. organize the ideas

3. draft

4. revise and proof-read

5. publish

Four Components of teaching writing in the classroom

Modeling

This is where the teacher demonstrates by writing on chart paper, whiteboard or chalkboard. The teacher models aloud by thinking, rethinking, rereading, and revising the draft

The teacher talks to the class about the text type and organization. The teacher points out skills such as spelling, conventions, punctuation, word choices, sentence structures, and revision techniques

Example of modeled writing: A morning message

Each day the teacher can write a message that is relevant to classroom life, e.g. a child's birthday, an event that has just happened or is going to happen, a topic of interest being studied by the class. After the message has been modeled, students can copy the message as a hand writing exercise.

Teachers of students in lower grades should:

- Tell students to write from left to right.
- Say each word, then sound out the letters as each is written.
- Tell: Where to place each line of writing.
- Count sentences, count words in sentences.
- Show: Capital letters, punctuation.
- Clap the sounds you hear (to-day, is, Mon-day).
- Talk about: How you start and end a message.

Shared writing

This is a class or group session where the teacher and class compose a piece of writing together. The teacher writes on a large sheet of paper, or on the

whiteboard. Children interact with the teacher and with each other and contribute to the writing by sharing the pen / marker.

The teacher asks questions and guides the direction of the writing, encouraging creative thinking and providing support with organization, language use/conventions and writer's craft.

The teacher guides the children in the writing conventions and leads the class in exploring ways to write various text types, constructs more complicated sentences and checks spelling and grammar.

It takes some time for children to really understand what a sentence is. It can be explained that a sentence is an idea. Each idea must start with a capital letter and end with a full stop. Sentences should not be joined by too many 'ands'. The convention of writing speech needs to be discussed: how to use speech marks and interesting alternatives to 'said'. You can make a list of interesting words to use instead of 'said'. For example: 'answered', 'replied', 'shouted'.

Parts of speech can be taught incidentally, e.g. "Who can think of a good *adjective* to describe this?"

Guided writing

This is a class or group session where the teacher models writing. The teacher writes on a large sheet of paper, or on the whiteboard, using suggestions from the children. The teacher guides the children in the writing conventions.

There are certain grammatical rules that can be discussed for general writing. For example, children must first know what a sentence is, and must write in complete sentences. It can be explained that a sentence is an idea. Each idea must start with a capital letter and end with a full stop. Sentences should not be joined by too many 'ands'. The convention of writing speech needs to be discussed: how to use speech marks and interesting alternatives to 'said'. You can make a list of interesting words to use instead of 'said'. For example: 'answered', 'replied', 'shouted'.

Through guided writing the teacher can demonstrate correct grammar and punctuation. Parts of speech can be taught incidentally, e.g. "Who can think of a good *adjective* to describe this?"

Guided writing involves individuals, pairs or small groups of children writing a range of text types. The teacher may provide short mini lessons to demonstrate a particular aspect of a text type, grammar, punctuation or spelling. Children may use writing frames or templates as a scaffold for writing. (See appendix)

Independent writing

This gives children an opportunity to express their own ideas. Once a story is complete, it can be proof-read by the teacher, who will discuss improvements to be made with the child one-on-one. Corrections to spelling and grammatical errors can be lightly written above in pencil, not red pen. In cases where the text needs major work, the teacher could type or hand-write the story for the child in its correct form, after which the child can format it.

The story can then be published, making it into a book or wall story. A cover can be created, the text re-written neatly without mistakes, or typed. Attractive headings and illustrations can be added.

Once children have published their stories they can be put on display for the rest of the class to read in silent reading times.

Text Types / Genres

Genre is a word used in functional grammar and is also often called Text Type.

Text Types may be fictional (made up) or factual (information reports).

The main text types or genres are:

1. Recount—a recount may be personal or factual but is generally a story or report that is known to be true. Examples may include news paper reports and stories about people or events that have happened to them.
2. Procedure or Instruction—in a procedural or instructional text the writer is usually trying to tell the reader how to do something. This may include the resources or tools needed to make something and the steps on how to make it. Examples of this include cooking recipes.
3. Narrative— In a narrative text a story is being told to the reader. It is a bit like a recount but is usually a made up story. It usually has a number of events that take place and a problem that needs to be solved by the characters. It usually has a crisis in it and then is resolved at the end. An example of this is a fairytale.
4. Report— A report is usually an information text such as an information report that you may do for a school assignment about an interesting topic or subject. It can also be a news report. A report is usually about something that is real and has different parts to it that can be described.
5. Explanation—An explanation text is used to explain a process such as how something works. It may involve explaining a series of steps involved in why something happens and what happens. This is sometimes called 'cause' and 'effect'. An example may also include using a picture or a flow chart.
6. Argument— An argument text is used when the writer wants to persuade the reader to agree with them. The writer usually includes their opinion on something that has happened in the world for example. This can be seen in a news article when the writer has expressed what they things of what has happened and gives reasons for what they have said.
7. Play writing

8. Poetry

Each of these text types are used for different purposes and follow a different style or structure when you write. If you would like to try writing your own text, then go to [Writing Activities](http://www.inetword.com/mc10617316/Grammar%20Website_files/page0007.htm) on the following website:

http://www.inetword.com/mc10617316/Grammar%20Website_files/page0007.htm

1. Recount

We use a recount or retelling to speak or write about an event that has occurred in the past. Because it has already occurred, it is always written in the past tense.

Different types of recounts:

- a personal recount, telling of an activity that the writer or speaker has experienced. It may be a diary entry, a letter or an oral story.
- a factual account records the details of something that has happened. This may be a historical account, a science experiment, a traffic report or a sport report.

Writing a letter

A home-made letter box can be a source of motivation for this. The letter box can be checked regularly and 'mail' delivered. This can take place within a classroom or within a family. Children can choose who they would like to write to and place it in the letter box. General conventions of writing letters can be discussed. Posted letters require an address at the top, while e-mail letters do not. Look at conventions for starting and finishing letters.

2. Procedure

Procedures can instruct on how to do a particular activity. It is a set of directions. The focus is on systematically explaining a sequence of actions, e.g. a recipe, instructions for playing a game, instructions for conducting a scientific experiment.

In the classroom, this type of writing session is best done following an activity. Cooking is a good example. Firstly, make the dish with the class. You can either read the recipe *to* the children as you go, or else just tell them what to do, step by step. Once the dish is made, say, "Now let's write the recipe."

With the class, write a list of ingredients. Explain that a list goes down the page. Now write the 'method'. Explain that this is a description of 'how to make it' but it does not need to be detailed. You can write things in short. You don't even need whole sentences in this case, e.g. list instructions such as 'beat eggs, add flour'.

Another excellent writing activity is to write the instructions for playing a game. First you will need to play the game. '*Old fashioned games and toys*' is a good topic in this age of computer games. You could talk about the difference between games 100 years ago, compared to today. You could look at the

differences in the materials available, the way action toys were powered or not powered, different games and rules for the games.

Examples of old fashioned games: hopscotch, marbles, knuckle bones, spinning tops, dominoes, skittles, stilts, skipping games, and cat's cradle.

After playing the game write a set of instructions. Ask: "If you were going to tell someone how to play this game, what would you tell them first?"
Once you are sure all the steps are in the right order you can number them.

Other ideas for writing a list of instructions could come from seed packets. Write instructions on 'how to grow carrots', for example.

You could also follow instructions on how to put something together, such as a toy glider, or how to blow up a balloon for someone who had never seen a balloon before.

Writing instructions can either be done as a group, with each member contributing an idea, or the teacher can write key words for the children to build upon. For children who are not confident, a list of steps may be presented out of order, and the children can be asked to sequence the steps.

3. Narrative

A narrative relates a realistic, imagined or fictitious story. It is written to entertain, amuse and interest the reader but at the same time, teaches, explains and informs.

Types of narrative:

- Traditional fiction, including folk tales, fairy tales, parables, moral tales like Aesop's Fables, myths and legends
- Modern fiction and fantasy

The narrator usually tells the story. The narrator may be outside the story, or one of the characters involved in the story.

Retelling a story

Young children are very motivated by story books. For children who are just starting out in writing, you could begin with retelling a favourite story. For example, let's tell the story of 'The Little Red Hen'. This is a great story by the way, because it teaches us about serving.

Begin by reading the story *to* the children. Then say, "Now we are going to make our own book about the Little Red Hen. How could we start our story?" In the early years, most children will love to start all stories with "Once upon a time". Later on they may graduate to "One day" or other familiar starting phrases. Allow children to contribute sentences as they think of them. Write them up on a large sheet of paper.

Try to encourage sequencing by asking, "What happened first in the story? What happened next?" If a child gives the ending too early, say, "That's a good sentence, but that happened later. Let's put it in at the bottom of the page".

Encourage reading by pausing every so often to say, "Let's read what we have written so far."

Writing fiction

Children usually do not respond so well when they are forced to write on a particular topic. For example, "The amazing time machine." While it may interest some, it will not motivate everyone.

The writing of fiction works well when given as a free choice activity, *within certain boundaries!* A good way to create the boundaries is to provide a free choice topic box. You can collect interesting pictures and make 'story starter cards'. These cards may contain a picture, the beginning of a story, or just a title.

4. Report

This is reporting information, as you would when doing a project on a particular topic.

To motivate students, find out what they are interested in. e.g. whales, elephants, Antarctica, dinosaurs. Begin by finding library books on the topic, beautifully illustrated where possible.

To introduce a group writing session you could present an illustrated non-fiction book to the children, talking about the pictures and being careful not to present too much information at one session. After reading to the children, encourage discussion, and then give some starting points for a piece of writing.

Working with writer who are not confident

Say, "We are going to write a piece of information about this topic, e.g. 'Tasmanian Tigers'. What can you tell me about them?"

Then on a large sheet of paper, write a draft of ideas as a group. If students have been motivated well, they will contribute enthusiastically. Write student contributions in point form using dot points.

Example:

Tasmanian Tigers

- many think they are extinct
- Some people say they have seen them
- Brown with black stripes
- Killed farmers sheep and chickens
- People shot them
- can run long distances
- not fast runners

After all contributions have been made, the student's task is to take the points and present them in a logical order. They must use complete sentences and

must be reminded that the points above are not all full sentences. It may be good to go through and pick out the points that are not full sentences. For some students, you may have to do some preliminary exercise such as: How would we make the point: 'can run long distances', into a full sentence?'

The students should be encouraged to write some of their own ideas, their opinions and feelings as well. For example, "Do you think the farmers should have killed the Tasmanian tigers?" "How do you feel about the fact there are few or maybe no Tasmanian tigers left?"

Students should also be encouraged to find their own information, in books, encyclopaedias or the internet. Whenever information is found, students must be encouraged to read it through, (with an adult if the reading level is difficult), and retell the information in their own words. They should not copy whole sentences from the original text, but can be encouraged to copy the spelling of words.

After writing their piece of information, students should be encouraged to read it through carefully, listening to their own sentences. Are they complete? Do they all start with capital letters? Once the first copy has been corrected, then the piece of writing can be published, presented as a poster or stuck in a special book. Illustrations can be added.

5. Explanation

This type of writing activity can be linked with 'thinking skills'. Children may be asked to invent something, and then describe how their invention works. It links well to science topics, where children can describe how a piece of equipment works, or a scientific law, e.g. 'how an aeroplane flies'.

6. Argument

Other names for 'an argument' is 'an exposition' or 'persuasive writing'. The audience is being persuaded to a particular point of view. It may be justifying an action, or a view point. Persuasive writing is used to advertise and sell goods. Advertisements may use eye catching slogans and tunes to draw people in.

An argument can change the attitude people have. It is used in newspaper editorials, political speeches, letters to the editor, legal defenses, debates and sermons.

Example of a topic: 'Don't waste water!'

7. Play writing

In dramatic scripts we learn about the actors' roles from what they do, what they wear and what they look like. A radio play relies on the actors' dialogue and sound effects. There may or may not be a narrator.

Before setting the task of writing a play, read some plays to see the convention for writing. Children *love* to read plays, taking different parts. You could start by converting a favourite story into play format. Play writing is often

best done in pairs or groups. The play can be performed once written. Puppets are good for those who lack confidence.

8. Poetry

Types of poetry:

Quatrain

4 line rhyming poems

Dr. Seuss books could be used as inspiration for rhyme. Older children could create rhymes for younger children.

EXAMPLE 1: AABA

Fox in Sock
Lives in under the rocks
Eating popcorn
From a box.

EXAMPLE 2: AABB

Milly the mouse
Hides in her house
Away from the cat
That sits of the mat.

EXAMPLE 3: ABCB

I like to dance
I like to run
I like to skip
I think it's fun.

Limericks

5 line nonsense verse – AABBA

Often humorous

Line 1: 7-10 syllables

Line 2: 7-10 syllables

Line 3: 5-7 syllables

Line 4: 5-7 syllables (rhymes with line 3)

Line 5: 7-10 syllables (rhymes with line 1 and 2)

The last line is the punch line!

EXAMPLE:

There once was a man from Crew
Who found a large mouse in his stew
Said the waiter, "Don't shout,
and wave it about,
or the rest will be wanting one too."

Haiku

3 line poem – does not rhyme

17 syllables – descriptive

Originated in Japan – usually about a part of nature

Line 1: 5 syllables

Line 2: 7 syllables

Line 3: 5 syllables

EXAMPLE:

Wings spread for first flight
Nervous shuffles beforehand
Soars high to freedom.

Song lyrics

Children can create their own songs to express praise to God.

Concrete poem

This is a picture or shape poem

Words create the shape of the subject of the poem.

These poems may or may not rhyme.

EXAMPLE

(Draw a star shape around the words.)

I
like
to watch
stars, shining.
Around the earth, they shine at night
and stay until morning light.
God made every star,
burning brightly
twinkling
afar.

Cinquain

5 line poem – does not rhyme

Line 1: One word title (noun)

Line 2: (2 word title describing the title (adjectives)

Line 3: 3 words expressing actions (verbs)

Line 4: 4 words expressing feeling about the subject

Line 5: one word, a synonym for the title

EXAMPLE:

Rain
Torrential downpour
Tumbles from above
Saturating the parched land,
Flood.

Acrostic Poem

Visual poem

Subject of poem written vertically down the left side.

The first letter of each line is emphasized.

Words describe the subject of the poem.

Each line may contain one word, a phrase or a sentence that lines with the next line.

EXAMPLE:

FRIENDS

Faithful
Ready to help each other
Interesting times together
Enjoying each other's company
Never breaking promises
Discovering new things to do together
Supporting one another

Discussion

Compare the two methods of teaching grammar and punctuation:

1. Using formal text books where students do exercises to identify nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs? And exercises that give formal practice in punctuation.
2. Guided writing sessions where the teacher explains grammar and punctuation in context.

Is there room for both?

Experiment with the following activity, then make up a game or interesting activity for the teaching of grammar.

Game: *Change the sentence*

Children sit in a semi-circle in front of a board containing a large sheet of paper.

The teacher writes a sentence.

e.g. *The dog ran across the road.*

The children take turns in changing the sentence one word at a time. Adding a word is allowed. Each child must say what they are going to do, come out to the board and write the change underneath the original sentence.

e.g.

"I would like to change the noun 'dog' to 'cat'"

"I would like to put an adjective in front of 'cat' and make 'furry cat'"

"I would like to change the verb 'ran' to 'walked'".

So the sentence so far has become: *The furry cat walked across the road.*

Assessment tasks

1. Prepare a collection of pre-writing activities that could be used in the classroom. Include finger plays and writing patterns.

2. On practicum:

- a) Conduct a handwriting session.
- b) Conduct a guided writing session.

Appendix

Reading 1

<http://www.brevard.k12.fl.us/portals/teachers/documents/Developing%20the%20Craft.pdf>

Reading 2

Stages of writing development in the Early Years

adapted from the Western Australian "First Steps" early literacy program

Phase 1: Making marks

Children begin to make random marks. These marks are experimental as the very young child explores with drawing or writing tools. More complex arrangements of lines, dots and shapes appear. Representational drawings gradually emerge. Marks that look like letters may also start to appear.

The child enjoys the experience and gradually improves in their ability to control the tools. The child may tell a story about the markings.

Major teaching emphasis:

- Provide a range of writing tools and materials including pencils, paper, crayons, brushes and paper.
- Acknowledge children's enjoyment of drawing and making marks.
- Observe their drawings closely and make comments on what you can see: "I can see you are making a big picture" or "you are using lots of colours" but avoid saying "What is it?" or guessing what the marks represents. You could also say, "Would you like to tell me about your drawing?"

Phase 2: Role Play writing

Children are beginning to understand that written symbols are related to language. They experiment with marks on paper with the intention of communicating a message, or try to copy adult writing. They understand that there is a connection between writing and reading, and aware that print carries a message. They use known letters or approximations of letters.

Major teaching emphasis:

- Demonstrate the connection between oral and written language.
- Demonstrate that writing communicates a message.
- Use correct terminology for letters, sounds and words.
- Encourage children to experiment with writing.

Phase 3: Experimental writing

Children are aware that speech can be written down and that written messages remain constant. They understand the left to right organization of printing and experiment with writing letters and words.

The child reads back their own writing, e.g. lists, letters, recounts, stories, messages. The child realizes that print contains a constant message and uses left to right and top to bottom orientation. The child demonstrates one-on-one correspondence between written and spoken word and relies heavily on the most obvious sounds of a word.

Major teaching emphasis:

- Demonstrate the connection between written and oral language.
- Focus on the way print works, (conventions)
- Demonstrate that writing is purposeful and has an intended audience (e.g. Big Books)
- Encourage children to experiment with writing.

Phase 4: Early writing

Children write about topics which are personally significant. They are beginning to consider audience needs. They have a sense of understanding what a sentence is, but may focus on spelling without punctuation. They choose topics that are personally significant. They experiment with words used in literature, the media, their peers and others.

Major teaching emphasis:

- Talk about the differences between oral and written language.
- Read, write and discuss a range of different forms of writing.
- Show how sentences can be linked to form paragraphs.
- Show how paragraphs are linked to form a whole text.
- Teach strategies for spelling.
- Help children develop word banks.
- Discuss how words can enhance meaning.
- Introduce proof-reading and guide children in using it.