

The Preschool Writing Environment

“Teachers promote both phonological awareness and letter-sound connections when they provide frequent opportunities and reasons for children to write on their own.” (From “Learning to Read and Write, Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children” by Susan Neuman, Carol Copple, and Sue Bredekamp).

A Print-Rich Environment

Writing Center	<i>In this area, children should easily find everything they need to write names, design signs, send notes, record telephone numbers, write stories</i>
Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate near other quiet activities • Area is used only as a writing center • Area should be well lighted • Area is accessible (easily entered)
Furniture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table and chairs for 2-4 children and a teacher • Table height for children • Shelves to hold materials • Arrange seating so children can communicate with each other
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materials stored and organized for easy access both visually and physically • Variety of writing instruments (pencils, markers, crayons, chalks) • Upper and lower case letter stamps and letter stickers • Magnetic letters in various sizes and styles (upper and lower case) • Variety of paper and surfaces (envelopes, construction paper, card stock, poster board, lined/unlined paper; dry-erase boards) • Portable easels or slant boards • Models for writing letters (traceable letters, sandpaper or felt letters) • Models of text (e.g., newspapers; magazines; junk mail; familiar product containers such as cereal boxes/soup cans; stationery/envelopes; stamps cut from junk mail; samples of greeting cards/menus/order forms, coupons) • Individual books or journals used for writing • Stapler and tape • Chalk boards/dry-erase whiteboards • Index cards • Folders for children to store writing products • Computer (if used for writing) and software (e.g., “Storybook Weaver”) • Picture dictionary and bilingual dictionary • Word cards • Letter/alphabet books
Displays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of children’s work (drawings/writing) • Documentation of children’s learning (label the collection and state the learning objective using the <i>Guidelines</i>) • Alphabet chart • Word wall • Class-generated picture dictionaries or class books on specific topics

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Functional print	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather chart • Helper chart • Song/poem charts • Morning message • Class rules • K-W-L Charts • Job board • Calendar • Signs labeling interest areas and objects • Word wall • Children's names • Recipes • Class story retellings • Transcriptions of children's ideas/responses to questions • Class-generated lists of materials or steps needed for activities • Messages to family or friends • Alphabet charts in various fonts (placed at children's eye level)
Opportunities to write in other areas	<p><i>Make writing materials accessible in all areas (e.g., writing tools, clipboards with paper)</i></p> <p><u>Dramatic Play:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make play money for a store; write prescriptions for a doctor's office; write orders for a restaurant; make laundry/shopping lists. • Provide newspapers, magazines, telephone books, cookbooks, note pads, forms, checkbooks, address books; phone books) <p><u>Blocks</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poster board for making signs and labels for constructions; books on building themes such as architecture/transportation, etc. <p><u>Outdoors:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write parking ticket on the play ground <p><u>Science Area:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record in observational journals, data charts <p><u>Library:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a system so children can check out and return books

The Teacher's Role in Scaffolding Beginning Writing

Support children's use of environmental and functional print.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate how to find or spell a word using word card, word wall, picture dictionary, or visual aids posted in the classroom. • Use name cards • Provide printed labels to inform children of something new; something to do; something to observe; something to think about; something they need to know - ask children where they think labels or signs should be placed.
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<p>Use questions or prompts to further concepts about print.</p>	<p><i>The kinds of questions adults ask are important... not “what is it” or even “tell me about it” but prompts such as “What’s happening here?” sets an expectation that there is something happening – the beginnings of a story.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Are you writing a list or a message?” • “Who are you writing your message to?” • “How will you send your message?” • “Can you read me what you have written?” or “Tell me about what you've written?” • "That's interesting . . . what about this part?"
<p>Model writing on a daily basis by involving children in saving ideas and sharing them with others using print</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning message • Daily news • Prediction charts • K-W-L charts • Brainstorming knowledge/ ideas • Writing thank you letter to a class visitor
<p>Promote awareness of shape, size, directionality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As children draw or write, call attention to elements of line, shape, directionality (e.g., up/down, tall/short, over/under, straight/curved)
<p>Use children’s names to introduce writing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have children sign in each day. • Write their name on all work. • Chart preferences or votes (e.g., do you like juice or milk better?)
<p>Provide opportunities to draw and use representational and expressive media</p>	<p><i>After children draw a picture...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage children to label their drawings • Don’t write directly on the child’s drawings; write on a separate paper or on the back. • If children want to dictate their words, transcribe the child’s words exactly as spoken. • Read the child’s words back, pointing to each word as you read it.
<p>Provide opportunities for children to dictate stories or narratives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage children to dictate stories/write narratives to accompany classroom photographs. • Transform children’s stories into theater - act out the story and discuss it with peers. • Encourage children to reread their stories to others. • Encourage children to read their “writing” before you try to interpret it. You might say “Can you read your writing to me?” Using the term <i>writing</i> rather than <i>drawing</i> helps children begin to think of themselves as writers. If they choose not to read it, you might point out some of the interesting features that you see in their writing.
<p>Display children’s work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display children’s work - clearly labeled in both English and children’s home language - in the room and in hallways, bathrooms, coatroom, etc. so children can see how print is used to document their experiences and activities.

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Support children's developing awareness of letters and words	<p><i>Use your knowledge of each child's level of development/understanding to structure prompts/questions. Depending on the child's level you may want to...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help children learn to stretch out words: For example, when a child asks "How do you spell ___?" you might respond by encouraging the child to say the word slowly and identify each individual sound and match individual sounds to a letter. Or, when writing a caption for a child's drawing ask, "what letters should I write for this picture?" or say "you can write about your picture – what letters do you need?" • OR... the child may be showing awareness that a "right" spelling exists – and that he wants to know what it is. Rather than asking what the child thinks, write the whole word on a card. Seeing the word in its entirety, rather than hearing individual letter names being spelled out loud helps the child form a visual picture of the word and its configuration.
Create individual journals for children's own drawings/writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place a date stamp in bin with journals and encourage children to use it. • Journals are a place for children to express their ideas, thoughts, and opinions in words. Only children's own writing or dictations should be part the child's journal; no one else should write in the child's personal journal. • Never have children copy letters, words, or sentences into journal.
Use consistent language when talking about print	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All adults (particularly all adults working in the same classroom) should use the same language to describe the strokes and provide children with a description of how to form a letter.
Plan activities that promote concepts about print	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing and drawings convey meaning, thoughts and ideas. • Letters are formed in specific ways and are unchanging. • Letters stand for sounds in the English language. • Anything can that can be said can be written. • Print will say the same thing tomorrow as it did today (e.g., teacher reminder board) • Words are what you read; pictures/illustrations can help us understand the text, but you don't read pictures.
Engage families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send home newsletters with examples of children's stories and narratives • Share guidelines for writing letters. • Encourage families to use upper and lower case letters when writing words. • Share guidance for how families can encourage/support children's storytelling and writing at home.

“Children’s drawing is couched within and shaped by their interactions with paper and markers, with other forms of symbolic expressions and also within appreciative, curious, or collaborating others.”
(Genshi & Dyson, 2009)