



Language and Literacy
in the Foundation Stage



Writing

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Introduction

Children's writing develops best when they are engaged in authentic written language tasks for a variety of purposes that are clear to them.

To enable children to become independent learners adults must allow children to make decisions and take responsibility for their learning. We therefore need to plan situations and activities which facilitate this and also capitalise on opportunities which arise during the day.

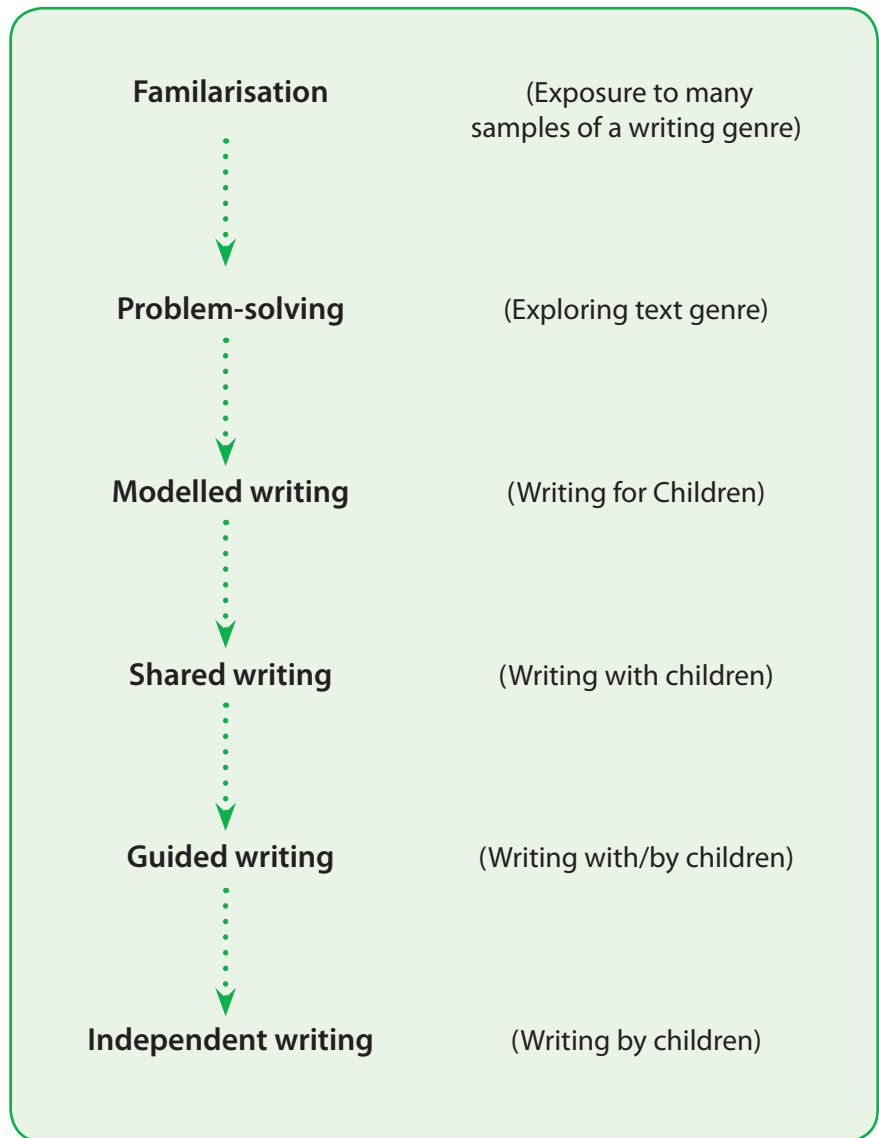
Children are surrounded by print – the boxes holding their toys, TV advertisements, supermarket products, road signs, books and magazines at home. As they meet these many different varieties of print they come to realise that the meaning is constant and that writing has distinctive structures.

When they begin to produce their own forms of writing they demonstrate their understanding that the marks on paper stand for separate words and that they can be read.

We must plan time for modelled, shared, guided and independent writing and make time to talk about what is to be done and how to do it.



The Writing Process





Modelled Writing

In the classroom children will see others write for a variety of purposes, for example, notes, cards, labels and instructions. Through such experiences children will come to realise the importance of writing and the pleasure that can be gained from it.

‘Modelled Writing’ is a specific strategy which allows the teacher to explicitly demonstrate the process of writing by ‘thinking aloud’ as she records her thoughts, for example, planning what she intends to write, talking about directionality, choice of words or how to spell or locate words.

Children participate by listening and observing the expert at work, rather than by contributing ideas and pursuing points through discussion.

The teacher talks through the process step-by-step to show the learner how things are done. Children see that writing is an interactive process and are reassured that writers make mistakes.



Features of Modelled Writing

- Each session has a planned focus.
- Pupils should be seated so that they can clearly see the teacher writing.
- The teacher should demonstrate writing for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- Both compositional and secretarial aspects should be addressed.

Teachers should model:

- planning before writing;
- making decisions about content as she writes, for example, choosing appropriate language; ensuring grammatical agreement;
- re-reading to check for sense or make improvements;
- how to present ideas or information;
- how to spell or locate individual words;
- leaving spaces and taking new lines;
- demarcating sentences;
- forming letters correctly.

Sessions should be short and enjoyable.





Shared Writing

As children share in the writing process with an experienced writer, they explore and expand their knowledge of how writing works through enjoyable, purposeful and meaningful experiences.

Shared Writing is a strategy which allows children to participate in the writing process by contributing ideas and knowledge without the pressure of having to write on their own. The teacher usually scribes, however, children may share the recording.

Why Shared Writing?

Children will gain:

- pleasure;
- a desire to write;
- independence;
- knowledge of writing behaviours;
- knowledge of writing strategies;
- new concepts;
- an extended vocabulary;
- knowledge of variety of written forms;
- confidence to:
 - talk
 - think
 - share
 - compare
 - reflect;
- SUCCESS.

Features of Shared Writing

- Each session should have a planned focus.
- Children are in whole-class or small groups.
- Children and teacher collaboratively create a text.
- There is on-going discussion throughout the sessions.
- The teacher encourages and scaffolds contributions.
- Children have a safe, supportive time to explore and try out both compositional and secretarial aspects of writing.

The focus may be on:

- deciding upon the purpose and audience, for example, labels for our models, a list of things for the party;
- generating ideas or gathering information;
- agreeing the best way to present writing, for example, list, caption, instructions;
- deciding what to write;
- recording ideas or information;
- attempting to spell or access words;
- re-reading the text to check for sense;
- making necessary corrections or improvements.

Sessions are focussed and fun.

Children should have opportunities to consolidate and transfer learning to other situations through a variety of supported and/or independent writing tasks, for example, shopping lists, recounting personal experiences, composing simple stories, greetings cards, menus.

Careful observations of children's writing behaviours need to be made to determine the appropriate teaching focus for each shared session. This will involve observing them, not only during whole-class shared sessions but during small-group sessions and informal interaction with text, for example, in role-play situations.



Independent Writing

While children will learn an immense amount about writing during whole-class sessions, it is important that they also have frequent opportunities to write independently from the beginning of the Foundation Stage. As they experiment with mark-making, children try out the skills and knowledge they have acquired through modelled and shared experiences.

Children should have access to a variety of writing materials throughout the day to facilitate independent writing in a range of meaningful contexts, for example a list of things needed for a new play area, an invitation to a show or a recount of a personal event.

Children may be writing individually, in pairs or in small groups as they attempt to record their thoughts and read them to others.



Teachers can observe children's understanding of:

- written communication as they begin to demonstrate that:
 - printed text is recorded speech.
 - writing can be read to or by others.
 - writing can be used for different purposes.
- the secretarial aspects of writing as they begin to:
 - problem-solve how to write words.
 - form writing directionally, one word at a time.
 - form some letters correctly.

It is important to remember that children need ample opportunities to try out the skills and knowledge they have acquired at each stage of their development – from mark-making through to more conventional writing.

Guided Writing

In the Foundation Stage the most important aspect of the adult's role in developing children's writing is to respond positively to the child's attempt at written communication. The adult responds to the message or idea being communicated and acknowledges the effort involved. Meaningful interactions with an experienced writer help to extend the child's understanding of the writing process.

Guided writing sessions enable the teacher to support an individual or small group of children in thinking and talking about their ideas **before** writing; prompting them to apply and extend their knowledge, skills and strategies **during** writing; and reading and talking about their work **after** writing.

During guided writing children should *try out* what they have seen and absorbed from modelled and shared sessions. It is the teacher's role to scaffold these attempts, encouraging the children to take on more of the writing process for themselves. The teacher should identify each child's stage of development and gauge the level of intervention appropriately.



Some children who are ready for conventional writing may not be willing to write by themselves. They may need some of the following:

- extra modelled and shared writing in a small group or individual sessions;
- a clear reason for writing that will motivate them, for example, a label for their own model, an invitation for a party;
- support in verbalising what they want to write;
- teacher and child writing together, for example, the child writing some words and the teacher writing others.

Other children will be at the role-play/scribbling stage for a considerable length of time and they need specific support in order to progress. If the children can 'read' their own 'writing' the focus is to move them towards more conventional writing. These children will need:

- extra modelled and shared writing in a small group or individual sessions;
- increased emphasis on developing sound-symbol correspondence;
- increased focus on the concept of words and spaces;
- support in verbalising what they want to write.

Teachers should ensure that children have ample opportunities to 'have-a-go' at writing independently.



Handwriting in the Foundation Stage

The main reason for writing is to communicate meaning. From the earliest mark-making children are showing an understanding that messages can be recorded. As they realise that print carries a constant message they recognise the need for more conventional forms of handwriting which other people can read.

By the end of the Foundation Stage the majority of children will be able to use a pencil and hold it effectively to form recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.

Children progress through developmental stages before they have the necessary hand-eye co-ordination, fine motor skills and visual discrimination to produce conventional handwriting. **Children should not be asked to copy lines of individual letters or words.**

Gross Motor Skills

Whole arm and shoulder actions developing anti-clockwise and vertical movements

- Wash windows – large paintbrushes, scraper and buckets of water.
- Wash bicycles and cars – sponges/water.
- Painting walls and ground with water and large paintbrushes.
- Making large patterns with paint on old wallpaper.
- Climbing equipment.
- Swing ball type activities, for example, suspend hollow balls on string and provide bats.
- Hoop rolling.
- Swirl sticks with ribbons.



Hand-eye Co-ordination and Fine Motor Skills

- Cutting with scissors, for example, collage area.
- Playing musical instruments.
- Cooking – real or play-stirring, kneading, cutting.
- Pouring water.
- Ball and bat games.
- Painting – various sized brushes, finger painting.
- Using clay tools.
- Drawing – felt-tips, chalk, pencils, crayons.
- Make patterns in wet or dry sand with fingers.
- Pegging dolls' clothes onto a washing line.
- Small world toys.
- Use malleable materials, for example, clay, play-dough, compost, plasticine, shaving foam, pasta, with a variety of tools, for example, chopsticks, cutters, scissors, potato mashers, rolling pins.
- Lacing and threading, for example, lacing beads onto string, pegboards.

Visual Discrimination

Noticing shape, direction and orientation.

- Matching shapes and pictures.
- Identifying differences between shapes or pictures, for example, odd one out, spot the difference.
- Jigsaws.
- Reproducing patterns, for example, threading beads, assembling multilink.
- Sorting letter shapes, for example, magnetic letters.

Beginning Letter Formation

From the beginning, during modelled and shared writing sessions, the teacher should explicitly demonstrate letter formation orally describing how each letter is formed emphasising orientation. They should provide a supportive climate in which children are encouraged to 'have-a-go' for example, using white boards.

Teachers should ensure that children have ample opportunities to experiment with writing in a range of purposeful contexts, for example, during play – telephone notes, invitations, appointment books; cross-curricular opportunities – personal recounts, instructions.

As each child's co-ordination develops and as letter-like shapes appear in emergent writing, specific guidance on correct letter formation should be given. Teachers should ensure that children hold pencils and writing tools effectively and attention should be drawn to posture.

As fluency develops (in Year 2) children may practise writing longer texts, for example, jokes, rhymes, songs. Care must be taken to ensure that such practice should not become a meaningless copying exercise.

Remember that not all children will be ready at the same time. Instruction should take place with individuals or small groups. Teachers need to:

- Observe closely;
- Intervene at the child's point of readiness;
- Scaffold the learning;
- Work from where children are.

In this way teachers can ensure that children move confidently from scribble to script.

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