



EVERY CHILD A READER

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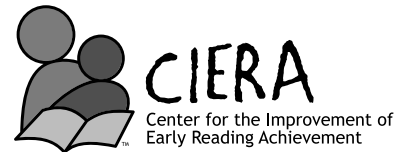


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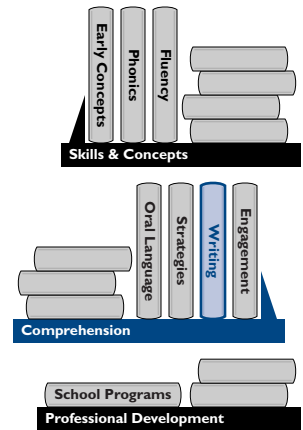


EVERY CHILD A READER

TOPIC 6

Writing and Reading

Learning to write assists children in their reading; in learning to read, children also gain insights that help them as writers. But writing is more than an aid to learning to read; it is an important curricular goal. Through writing children express themselves, clarify their thinking, communicate ideas, and integrate new information into their knowledge base.



Writing is a remarkable human accomplishment. Even young children can compose a meaningful message, keeping in mind their audience and purpose, as well as the conventions of word usage, grammar, genre, spelling, and punctuation.

Young children communicate many ideas in conversations—what they want, see, feel, and think. Communicating ideas in writing requires new strategies of composing—dealing with message focus and organization, as well as conventional spelling.

When selecting topics on their own, children often compose personal narratives, such as “I went to my Grandmama’s on Sunday.”¹ While personal narratives remain prominent in journal writing, kindergarten and first-grade children begin to use other genres. They write predictable-pattern stories (such as variations on “The house that Jack built”) and informational pieces (like records of the weather). As children enter second grade, they use genres that stretch their thinking and organizational skills. After collecting information, they summarize their findings in reports. Creating stories with new events and characters other than themselves is another priority of the primary grades.

The primary grades are an active period for children’s growth in spelling. Most begin kindergarten able to spell only a few words, such as their own name. When they leave third grade, they have mastered the conventional spelling of hundreds of words. This feat is remarkable in light of the variability of sound-spelling relationships of English. Consider the fact that the sound associated with these five different underlined vowels letters is identical: ago, agent, edible, comply, and focus.

Children go through a series of stages as they progress from idiosyncratic to conventional spelling.² **Phonetic** or **invented spelling** (where children select common letter(s) to represent sounds) is an important step toward conventional spelling. Children must test their hypotheses to see if they are on the right track. Early on, if a child spells the number 8 as “ate,” we consider it progress because it shows that the child is attuned to the common spelling patterns for a sound, in this case /long a/. Later, we expect very sophisticated

knowledge about the spelling of sounds. Using the /long a/ example, we expect them to realize the many different ways it can be spelled: ate, weight, aim, say, they.

Accomplishments for Composing and Spelling³

KINDERGARTEN	FIRST GRADE	SECOND GRADE	THIRD GRADE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses phonemic awareness and letter knowledge to spell independently (invented or creative spelling) • Builds a repertoire of some conventionally spelled words • Shows awareness of distinction between “kid writing” and conventional orthography • Writes own name (first and last) and the first names of some friends or classmates • Can write most letters and some words when they are dictated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spells correctly three- and four-letter short vowel words • Uses invented spelling/phonics-based knowledge to spell independently, when necessary • Shows spelling consciousness or sensitivity to conventional spelling • Uses basic punctuation and capitalization • Composes fairly readable first drafts using appropriate parts of the writing process (some attention to planning, drafting, rereading for meaning, and self-correction) • Produces various types of compositions (e.g., stories, journals) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correctly spells previously studied words and spelling patterns in own writing • Shows sensitivity to formal language patterns in place of oral language patterns at appropriate spots in own writing (e.g., quotes for speech) • Makes reasonable judgments about what to include in writing • Discusses ways to clarify and refine writing of self and others, and applies suggestions to own writing with aid • With aid in organizing, writes well-structured reports • Attends to spelling, mechanics, and presentation for final products • Produces various types of compositions (e.g., stories, reports, correspondence) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correctly spells previously studied words and spelling patterns in own writing • Begins to incorporate literary words and language patterns in own writing • With some guidance, uses all steps of the writing process in writing compositions and reports • Combines information from multiple sources in writing reports • Discusses own and peers’ writing with peers • Independently reviews products for spelling, mechanics, and presentation • Produces various written works (e.g., reports, “published” books) in various formats including multimedia

A complete writing program attends equally to conventions of writing and to the writing process.

These accomplishments make it clear that, by the end of third grade, children are expected to write for a variety of purposes, and that their compositions need to employ high standards of spelling and mechanics. They also suggest that children must develop expertise with the conventional aspects of writing as well as the writing process. While the steps in the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, and publication) are important, equally important is the development of “writerly dispositions”: Young children must learn to think like writers, to think that they are writers, and to believe that they have ideas to share with others.⁴

Instruction for the Youngest Writers

In kindergarten and early in first grade, children’s composing efforts are personal narratives (stories about themselves).

The good writing described in these accomplishments does not suddenly appear at the end of third grade. It reflects the presence of frequent, often daily, writing from kindergarten through third grade.

Activities for composing

Children’s initial writing experiences begin in kindergarten and preschool when they tell their ideas to an adult who writes them down. Sometimes the dictation occurs in groups, sometimes one on one. The content can be based on a unique experience, a common experience such as a trip to a store, or responses to a book that was read aloud.

Books with predictable patterns are very useful as a stimulus for group books. After hearing *Are You my Mother?*^a one group of first graders wrote: “Once there was a spider that could not find its mom. Then he met a lizard and said, ‘Are you my mom?’ and he said, ‘No.’ Then he saw a shadow and it was his mom.”⁵ When the charts—including the daily news or morning message—and big books written by the class are part of library centers, children gravitate to the materials, rereading their contributions and those of their classmates.

Early in kindergarten, children write messages in the form of journals. Initially, some children draw their entries or represent words by their initial letters. But throughout kindergarten and into first grade, children increasingly attempt phonetic spelling. By mid-year of first grade, most children will be writing in fairly decipherable text, as Ryan’s journal entry indicates: “Thes is a trou storey. wen I Was Playing BasBall I het a homrun.”⁶

Activities for spelling

Phonetic spelling—where children produce the letters for sounds that they hear—is the first step on the pathway of good spelling. Teachers use phonetic spellings as springboards to extend children’s knowledge of spelling-sound patterns.

As teachers write children’s messages in group contexts, they talk about the spelling of words and the conventions of writing such as capitalization. By the middle or end of kindergarten, children take turns writing some of the words in the message. Teachers also interact with children about the spellings of their compositions. For example, Ryan’s teacher might have talked with him about the spellings of words (*this* and *hit*) in the following manner: “You’ve spelled ‘was’ and ‘playing’ correctly. But look at ‘this’ and ‘hit’. There’s one sound that you need to listen for in each of the words—the middle one. Stretch out the word ‘this’: /th-i-i-i-i-s/. Now stretch out the word ‘hit’: /h-i-i-i-i-t/. What vowel other than ‘e’ might it be?”

By glancing through children’s journals, teachers can identify the sound-spelling elements requiring attention. Elements that are challenging to several students, such as whether the middle vowel in *pin* and *bin* is spelled with an *i* or an *e*, become the basis for class lessons. The words challenging to individuals can be collected in personal “word banks,” and words that are used often by many children can be displayed prominently on a classroom “word wall,” organized alphabetically and topically.

Instruction for Older Primary Children

As children progress and begin to master the fundamentals of spelling and text organization, nothing improves writing faster than providing lots of opportunities to write.

Activities for composing

Reading response journals, where children can write their reactions and summarize what they have read, connect reading and writing. Teachers support children’s learning with response journals by asking children questions that extend written responses. After reading *My First American Friend*,^b a second grader had written: “Life was hard for Saruna because she had lived somewhere else.” The teacher asked the child to elaborate with the question, “Why does that make it harder for her?” The child thought about it and then added: “Saruna had a hard time because she was from China and looked different.”⁷

Writing “realistic” narratives—where children create stories with characters, settings, conflicts, and solutions—is enhanced by writing in response journals. Once children begin to study the motives or feelings of a character such as Saruna, they begin to integrate these elements into their own stories.

Primary-level children enjoy acquiring new information about a wide range of topics—nature, historical figures, and mythical characters. Children’s ability to integrate information on a topic from several sources does not magically happen. Teachers guide children in refining topics, identifying sources and the critical information within them, and organizing information.

One teacher of a third-grade class had each child pick an animal.⁸ Children wrote ideas from books on note cards. Next, children used felt pens to highlight particular categories of ideas (e.g., yellow for ideas about animals’ habitats, pink for ideas about the babies of the species, green for ideas about food, with orange and blue left for new categories). The teacher then worked with small groups of children to identify the main concept behind the ideas highlighted with the same color.

Writers’ Workshop

Writers’ workshop is a popular context for combining lessons in composition and writing conventions (spelling, grammar, and usage such as quotation marks).⁹ Lessons give children occasions to learn about all aspects of the writing cycle—planning, writing, getting feedback, revising, editing, and publishing. Peer interactions are an important part of writers’ workshop, where children read one another’s compositions and give feedback. The interaction occurs through writer’s chair where individuals share work in progress, and in pairs or small groups interacting at different points in the writing cycle.

Extending phonetic to conventional spelling

In addition to the formal spelling program content, teachers can assist children in taking responsibility for conventional spelling by having them check

spelling in their daily work. In writers' workshop, for example, children often have an editing checklist and are asked to proofread their writing for words where the spelling looks wrong. They can also add personal words that are misspelled in their compositions to their weekly spelling list. Meeting standards for correct spelling is especially important when students progress to the publication stage in writers' workshop.

Instruction for English Language Learners

Writing has been found to be a particularly critical medium for involving English language learners in literacy.

When given many occasions for writing and when phonetic spelling is used as a bridge to conventional spelling, English language learners can, over time, perform at levels comparable to native English speakers.¹⁰ Luis, a native Spanish-speaking child, demonstrated a dramatic improvement in writing after participating in writers' workshop. When topics were prescribed and spelling and handwriting were the chief grading criteria, Luis wrote sparsely and described his writing this way: "I cannot write the words correctly.... I just don't know how." In a classroom that was part of the Optimal Learning Environment project (OLE)¹¹ where writing experiences began with children's personal narratives, Luis wrote prolifically, beginning with the crises in his neighborhood.

Creating dialogue in journals where an adult responds to the child's entries can give English language learners a model for English forms and the chance to communicate important messages. For example, if a child wrote "I am three journal," the adult might write back, "Yes, you are beginning your third journal. Congratulations!"¹²

Instruction for Children Who Are Struggling Readers and Writers

Writing messages improves struggling readers' attention to relations between sounds and letters and, consequently, word recognition fluency.

Composing messages can be a means for struggling readers to develop the beginning reading skills that challenge them most—phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge. Writing requires attention to individual sounds and children's knowledge is expressed concretely in their spellings. This information is useful to teachers in designing lessons that move children to word recognition fluency and conventional spelling.

The positive effects of phonetic spelling on reading were demonstrated in a study of first graders.¹³ The project compared children's progress in classrooms that encouraged phonetic spelling with those that encouraged conventional spelling in compositions. Children using phonetic spelling wrote longer compositions and performed better on spelling and word analysis tasks than children using conventional spelling. The encouragement to use phonetic spelling made the biggest difference for children who were struggling the most in reading at the beginning of first grade. Phonetic spelling gives struggling

readers the confidence that they can attempt words that they have not seen or written before. When teachers and children use these attempts to clarify and expand knowledge, children progress as readers and writers.

**EVERY CHILD A READER:
COMPANION READINGS**

Button, K., Johnson, M., & Furgeson, P. (1996). Interactive writing in a primary classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 49, 446–454.

Fresch, M., & Wheaton, A. (1997). Sort, search, and discover: Spelling in the child-centered classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 51, 20–31.

NOTES

- ¹ Newkirk, T. (1989). *More than stories: The range of children's writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- ² Read, C. (1975). *Children's categorization of speech sounds in English*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- ³ Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- ⁴ Dyson, D.H., & Freedman, S.W. (1991). Writing. In J. Flood, J.M. Jensen, D. Lapp, & J.R. Squire (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (pp. 754–774). New York: Macmillan.
- ⁵ Taylor, B.M., & Pearson, P.D. (1998). [Observations of reading/language arts of teachers in schools that beat the odds]. Unpublished raw data.
- ⁶ Hiebert, E.H., Colt, J.M., Catto, S., & Gury, E. (1991). [Text-level and word-level performances of students in restructured and regular Chapter 1 programs at fall, winter, and spring of their first-grade year]. Unpublished raw data.
- ⁷ See note 5 above.
- ⁸ Davinroy, K.H., & Hiebert, E.H. (1994). An examination of teachers' thinking about assessment of expository text. In C.K. Kinzer & D.J. Leu (Eds.), *Multidimensional aspects of literacy research, theory, and practice* (43rd yearbook of the National Reading Conference, pp. 60–71). Chicago, IL: National Reading Conference, Inc.
- ⁹ Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.
- ¹⁰ Edelsky, C. (1986). *Writing in a bilingual program*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
Hudelson, S. (1989). *Write on: Children writing in ESL*. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Center for Applied Linguistics.
- ¹¹ Rueda, R. (1991). Characteristics of literacy programs for language minority students. In E.H. Hiebert (Ed.), *Literacy for a diverse society*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- ¹² Staton, J., Shuy, R.W., Peyton, J.K., & Reed, L. (Eds.). (1988). *Dialogue journal communication: Classroom, linguistic, social and cognitive views*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- ¹³ Clarke, L.K. (1988). Invented versus traditional spelling in first graders' writing: Effects on learning to spell and read. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 22, 281–309.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

- ^a Eastman, P.D. (1960). *Are you my mother?* New York: Beginner Books, Random House.
- ^b Jin, Sarunna (1996). *My first American friend*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

This topic is part of the series *Every Child a Reader* by E.H. Hiebert, P.D. Pearson, B.M. Taylor, V. Richardson, & S.G. Paris of the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA).

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