

Especially for parents of preschoolers! 

Adventure in a Box

 *Literacy Learning Experiences*

Have fun creating a special writing box with your preschooler! A box filled with inspiring writing materials can help your budding writer build confidence and skills.

What is the practice?

Writing becomes a special event for children ages 3-5 when they make their own writing boxes. With a writing box, a young child begins to see himself as a writer—one with good ideas to express and all the tools needed to express them. Homemade writing boxes keep writing materials in one place, close at hand, for whenever your child gets the writing spark.



What does the practice look like?

Fill a box with many materials that your preschool child can use to draw, write, and create. Place the writing box somewhere in your home where your child can reach it easily. The box should hold writing tools that interest your child and motivate her to write. For example, have markers or pencils in her favorite colors, or a note pad in the shape of her favorite animal.

How do you do the practice?

Start with an ordinary cardboard box, large enough to hold papers and writing tools. Help your child cover it in whatever way pleases her. Some easy choices are gift wrap, craft paper, plastic shelf liner, or magazine pages.

- After covering the box, encourage your child to decorate it. She can use stickers, stamps, drawings, or whatever else she wants. Fill the box with lots of writing materials. Include small packs of crayons, wide lined paper, construction paper, pencils, small notebooks, washable markers, and erasable colored pencils. Add envelopes, a roll of tape, and bright stickers to make pre-writing and writing even more fun.
- Use small sets of pencils, markers, crayons, and paper so that making choices and cleaning up are easier.
- Crayons that don't roll, extra-thick pencils and markers, and child-sized scissors with rounded points work well for preschoolers who are developing fine-motor control.
- Encourage your child to use the box for writing letters to grandparents. She can also use it to make lists and to draw and create stories for you to read together.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child spend time using the materials in the writing box?
- Does she show you books, cards, papers, and other writings that she has created?
- Has your child shown interest in trying to write with different tools?
- Is she exploring new uses for writing?

Take a look at more fun with writing boxes

Rainy-Day Writing

Four-year-old Eric is restless on a rainy afternoon. He looks out the living-room window and says, "Water's on the road." "Where do you think all that water goes?" asks his mother. "The ocean!" he says. "I wonder how it gets there," Mom muses. "It's a long trip," says Eric. "It is?" asks his mother. "I know, why don't you write me a story about the water's trip to the ocean?" Eric gets his writing box from a low shelf and pulls out papers and markers. Mom staples some of the paper together, making a booklet. Eric draws pictures across the pages, telling her all about the water. Mom writes his words on the bottom of each page. When the story is finished, Eric's mother reads his story aloud to him. Eric takes more paper from his box. He makes a cover for the book, drawing random shapes to "write" the title. When he's finished, his mother staples the cover to the book and sets it up on a shelf for display.



Pictures and Stories



Three-year-old Mari's mother finds her at the kitchen table absorbed in drawing. The table is covered with markers, crayons, and paper from the homemade writing box Mari keeps in the cabinet under the kitchen sink. Kneeling next to Mari's chair, Mom asks about her drawing. Mari says she's making a rabbit. "What's the rabbit doing?" asks her mom. "Hopping," Mari answers, drawing lines and dots for "hops" across the paper. Then she adds lines around the figure to show "where he goes." Mari reaches for a different marker and colors a spot on the picture. "Oh! That's a pretty color," comments her mother. Mari changes markers again and adds more color to the spot. "That looks nice," says her mother. "It's a hat," says Mari. She takes a pen from the box and "writes" on the page. Her mother pretends to read the writing. "That's a neat story, Mari," says her mother.

Special Greetings

Five-year-old Liam has a disorder that affects his fine-motor skills. Hearing that his grandma is ill, Liam tells his father that he's going to make her a get-well card. "Great idea!" says Dad. Liam takes his writing box from his toy shelf. He sits at his small table, and pulls out paints and a paintbrush easy for him to grasp. His father clips heavy paper from the box onto a drawing board so that the paper won't slide around. Liam finds some stickers in the box and puts them on the paper. He uses the paints to add large areas of bright color. The paintbrush is non-rolling, so Liam can set it down and pick it up with ease. He asks his father how to spell "Feel better soon, Grandma." His father patiently sounds out the letters and waits as Liam slowly writes each one with a thick marker. "Grandma's going to love that card!" says Liam's father.



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Wired To Read

 *Literacy Learning Experiences*

Activities with computers can help children as young as 3 years of age build early language, reading, and writing skills.

What is the practice?

Research shows that by age 3, children's brains and muscle skills are developed enough for them to start using computers. Computer-based learning is one way that young children can develop their literacy and language skills. Children ages 3-5 who use computers, in addition to other activities off the computer, gain language, reading, and writing skills.

What does the practice look like?

Computer activities should match your child's age. They should let her play with words, sounds, or characters, try different activities, and discover new things. The software should have characters and topics that interest your child. The activities should match her age and her skill level. Research shows that children learn better from programs that let the child control the activities and make decisions. They should use clear instructions, and have many levels of difficulty. Your child should sit in a comfortable chair with the keyboard and mouse within easy reach. Keyboards made especially for young children have large keys. They also have color-coded command keys and features to make typing easier. They can be used in place of a traditional keyboard.



How do you do the practice?

When choosing software programs for preschool children, it is best to pick programs that let him work by himself. The programs should be realistic and use familiar objects and words. You can help your child use computers for gaining language and literacy skills:

- Use programs that have activities that interest your child.
- Place the computer within easy reach for him.
- Select a low-traffic and well-lit area for the computer, away from direct sunlight to avoid glare on the screen.
- Place the computer on a low table or cart at the appropriate height for your child.
- Keep software organized in some way. You can use a CD album, so that your child can easily flip through the disks and pick the one he wants.
- Provide several software choices with animated activities, sound effects, and characters that interest your child.
- Let your child help you with simple computer tasks, such as typing a word or using the mouse.

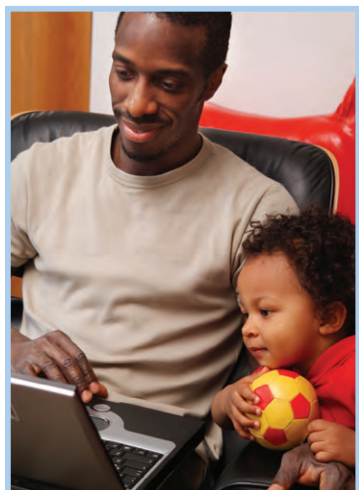
How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child spend time using the software programs?
 - Has his skill level improved?
 - Does he use more vocabulary or recognize more printed words?
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Take a look at more literacy and computers

Interest-Based Web Sites

Five-year-old Serena often spends time putting together new outfits on her dolls. Her mother noticed Serena's interest. She found a Web site for children on the Internet where they can create outfits for characters on the site. One day at the library, Serena's mother shows her the Web site on the library computer. She helps Serena use the computer mouse to explore the different activities. Serena chooses an activity that lets her pick different colors and styles for a girl character's clothes. "OK, first we have to name the girl!" says her mother, "What should it be?" Serena quickly gives the name of her favorite doll, "Dora." "Okay," says her mother. "Let's type that in the box." She helps Serena guide the mouse to the name box. "What letter comes first in 'D-D-Dora?'" asks her mother, emphasizing the first letter. "D is for Dora," says Serena as her eyes light up with recognition. "That's right!" says her mother. "Can you find the letter D on the keyboard?" She waits patiently for Serena to locate and press the key. "Great! You found it!" says her mother with enthusiasm. "Now let's figure out the next letter." She helps Serena identify and locate each letter in the name. Then she lets Serena take the lead in creating clothes for Dora.



Writing E-mail Together

Three-year-old Martin sees his father typing on his laptop computer. Dad reaches over and pulls Martin close. "I'm writing a letter to Aunt Corrie," he says. "Do you want to help me?" Martin eagerly nods. "Okay," says Dad. "I'm writing, 'Martin wants to say 'Hi' to you.' Now you type and tell me what you are writing." "Hi, I love you, bye, Marty," says Martin as he presses random keys. "That's good!" says his dad. "Aunt Corrie is going to be so happy that you wrote to her. Let me finish this letter and then we'll send it to her." He types in Martin's words to go with his letters. Then he places Martin's hand on the mouse. He guides Martin's hand, moving the cursor to the "send" button on the screen. He shows him how to press the mouse button to send the e-mail. "There," Dad says, smiling at his son. "You just sent the e-mail to Aunt Corrie." Martin looks pleased. Then he climbs down from Dad's lap and runs off to play.

Touch-Screen Action

Four-year-old Jaime has developmental delays. He likes to help his mother water plants in the garden and see how they've grown. Because of his love for plants, his mother buys a touch-screen program about plants that fits Jaime's developmental age. She sits by Jaime in front of the screen. It shows a picture of a plant pot. Mom asks, "Jaime, do you want to see the plant grow?" "Yes!" says Jaime. "I'll bet you can make it grow," says his mom. "Touch the pot and let's see." Jaime reaches up and touches the picture of the pot on the screen. To his delight, the plant immediately sprouts and grows across the screen through colorful movement and sound. Jaime laughs with pleasure. "Look! You made it grow!" says his mother, "You grew a pretty plant. See, this word says 'Daisy.' You grew daisies." "Again!" says Jaime. "You want to grow some more plants?" asks his mom. "Okay, let's see what other ones we can find."



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Word Wise

Reading and Storytelling

Practice with words helps your preschooler get ready to later read and write. You can help by making written words a part of your child's day.

What is the practice?

Put things in print around the house where your child can see them. You can place labels you write by hand on things in each room. You can use index cards, or even small paper sheets with your child's own scribbling or writing. The labels will help your child best if they are read aloud and "used" each day.

What does the practice look like?

Everyday things are labeled with the child's name. Labels with matching pictures are used around the house to help show her where things go. A parent writes down a story the child tells and posts it, with a picture the child made, on the refrigerator or a wall. The parent lets the child add to the printed messages around the house.



How do you do the practice?

There are lots of ways to add print to your home. The print should fit with things your child uses or sees at home. When you use print each day, your child will learn all the uses of print.

- Start with your child's name, which is often the first word children are interested in. Label your child's clothes or toys and help her use your labels to copy the letters. That way she can learn to write her own name.
- Show that print is important by using it. For example, point out posters or read the labels around the house out loud: "Please get a shirt from the drawer that says 'shirts', which is the top drawer."
- Let your child add to the print at home. She can scribble or write letters and words she knows on a piece of paper to make a story. She can write her name on her story, and you can display it in the house.
- Make an activity board by letting her find labels and logos from favorite places. They can be places like McDonald's, Chuck E. Cheese's, and local fun spots. Put the labels on a bulletin board or glue them to a piece of paper. Young children often know the labels and logos of places they like before they can actually read them. As your child links the words in the logos to the place itself, it helps her pay attention to letters and words. You can let your child use the labels on the board to choose places to go.
- Point out stop signs and street signs to your child to show her that print is all around her. These signs are easy for children to name.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child pay more attention to everyday print?
- Does she know more words and symbols?
- Does your child write her name or other letters or words?

Take a look at more play with words

Where Shall We Go?

Four-year-old Temika likes to use local magazines and the newspaper to tear out pictures of signs or logos of places she likes. Her mother lets her paste the pictures onto a poster board that she keeps in her room. One day, Temika's mom asks her if she'd like to get ice cream. "Yes!" exclaims Temika, heading for the door. "Wait" calls out her mother. "We need to pick the place where we will get it." Temika goes to her room and returns with the poster. She looks at it carefully, then sees a label and points to it. "Dream Cream Wagon" reads her mother. "Is that where you want to go for ice cream?" "Yes!" says Temika happily. "Then that's where we'll go," replies her mother.



Get Well Soon!

Jackson likes to draw pictures. His father helps him write his name on his drawings. Sometime Jackson prints with a pencil. Other times they use alphabet stamps, to make his name. When Jackson's friend next door is sick one day, his father asks if he wants to make a 'get-well' card. "Yes!" says Jackson as his father gets out letter shaped stamps and paint. Jackson dips the stamps in the paint. He presses them to a sheet of paper that his father has folded in half like a card. He makes the sponge marks in the places and order that pleases him. He tells his father what his note says, and his father prints it at the bottom of the card. They later take the card to his friend's house.

Time for a 'Word Walk'

Every week, Sarah's grandmother takes her on a "Word Walk" in the neighborhood. Sarah has limited mobility so Grandma pulls her in a wagon. A game they play on the walk is to notice all the words they can find. If Sarah doesn't know the word, Grandma reads it aloud to her. Sarah then speaks it into a recorder to remember later. The words can be on signs, buildings, even trash. Back home, Sarah and Grandma use the recorder to add new words to the list they keep of ones they've seen.

