

*Especially for parents of preschoolers!*

# Write Right

*Drawing and Writing*

Preschoolers are just starting to understand the difference between writing and drawing. Many can write their names and some letters. To be ready to learn adult spelling, they need lots of writing practice. Even using spelling and letter shapes that are not always correct.

## What is the practice?

**Invented spelling** is having preschoolers **write using whatever letters or symbols they can**. It works best when an adult helps the child “sound out” words and shows interest in the child’s attempts. There are many chances to put invented spelling into your daily routine with your child.

## What does the practice look like?

By drawing a picture and writing about it with a mix of letters and “sounded-out” words, a child begins learning the rules of writing. In the same way, a child writing his name on a sign for his room, even if letters are missing, learns that he can write things others can understand.



## How do you do the practice?

You can encourage your child to use invented spelling in lots of ways during the day. Look for chances for writing or drawing. Since you know your child’s personality best, figure out what activities your child likes most.

- Give your child lots of chances to observe and help you with writing during your day. For example, he can help make a grocery list by adding one or two items using invented spelling. Let him leave a note for another family member to find. He can sign his name to a letter you write to a friend. Such activities let your child practice writing and spelling skills and experience some everyday uses for writing.
- Give your preschooler various writing materials, including nontoxic markers, pencils, crayons, greeting cards, construction paper, lined paper, and chalk boards. All of these offer slightly different writing experiences and encourage your child to experiment.
- As your child begins to write, help by showing interest in what he is working on. Remind him to think about the sounds of the letters. Have him spell words the way they sound, rather than spelling them for him. This teaches him to listen for the sounds in words. It also helps him link what he hears with what he writes.
- Encourage your child to “read” her stories or any other written work. This reinforces the link between what she has written and its meaning.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child eager and enthusiastic about writing notes, letters, and/or her name?
- Does your child offer to help you with writing in your daily routine?
- Is her writing gradually becoming clearer and more adult-like?

# Take a look at more fun ways to “write right”...

## Making a List, Checking It Twice

Four-year-old Emma and her dad are getting ready to go to the grocery store. They talk about the items they need to buy. “How are we going to remember all this, Emma?” her dad asks. “Should we write it down?” “I’ll write it,” Emma says, and goes to get paper and a pencil from her room. “Okay, we’ll both make a list,” her dad says. “What’s the first thing we need?” “Apples,” Emma says. “I’m going to write it.” She writes an A, then says the word out loud again to listen for more sounds. “P?” she asks. “I hear *ppp*,” her dad agrees. Emma finishes out the line with a few letter-like shapes. Together, they compose a list this way. “Okay, how about you read it back to me so we make sure we haven’t forgotten anything,” her dad says. Emma frowns at her list a moment, makes a few changes, and then recites a list of grocery items. They consult both lists throughout their trip to the store.



## Write To Say “Thanks”

“Antwan,” Mom calls. “Come here and help me write a thank-you note to your Aunt.” Four-year-old Antwan runs eagerly to the kitchen table. His mom has spread out a variety of stationery, markers, and crayons. “Remember how Aunt Rachel sent you those great presents for your birthday? Well, now we’re going to write her a letter and tell her how much you appreciate them.” “I’m going to draw her a picture,” Antwan says. He reaches for a crayon. “I’ll say, ‘Thank you for the toys, love, Antwan.’ I already know how to write *love* and *Antwan*.” He hesitates. “That’s a good start,” Antwan’s mom says. “Let’s listen to the sounds and figure out how to write the rest of it.”

## Labels for Artwork

Megan, 4½ years old, has been diagnosed with speech and language delays. She loves drawing and painting with her mother. They sit in their playroom together. They use crayons, markers, paints, and pens to create pictures that they hang around the room. “What are you drawing today?” Mom asks. “I draw a princess and a horse,” Megan says, pointing to those figures on her page. “I’m drawing a castle,” her mom says. “And look, I wrote *castle* here so everyone will know what it is.” Megan examines the picture and then asks, “How you write *princess*?” “Listen to how it sounds,” her mom says. “*Ppp...ppp...*” Together they listen for the sounds. Megan writes a *P* followed by a few more letters and marks above her princess. They do the same thing with the horse, the flowers, and the sun in the picture. “Great,” her mom says. “Now we’ll know what everything in the picture is. Can you read it back to me?” Megan takes a deep breath. “This the princess, and this the horse who lives there, and this the flower that lives there, and it sunny.” “You worked hard on that,” her mom says. “We’ll hang that picture up right away.”



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# Delighting in Writing

*Drawing and Writing*

Preschoolers learn from experiences that help them use drawings and symbols to represent their ideas. Such pre-writing activities let them begin to develop the skills they'll use throughout their lives to communicate through print.

## What is the practice?

Writing is communicating ideas through print. Writing focuses children's attention on print, helps them learn that letters represent sounds, and helps their early reading skills. The practice of early writing is based on research showing how children ages 3 to 5 can use drawings and symbols to express thoughts, feelings and ideas. They can print or copy their first name. They can use letter-like shapes to write words or ideas. When given opportunities, young children make meaningful pictures and stories using written symbols.



## What does the practice look like?

Early writing by young children combines drawing, "made-up" spelling, copying, and repeating patterns. With drawing, the child tells his thoughts and interests by drawing pictures and then "reading" them. Scribbling is often used by young children, with the scribbles going left to right and sometimes looking like cursive writing. Young children will often put letters together in random order. They might even use some of the letters in their name. Invented spelling is when a child writes by using his own spelling for words. Sometimes a single letter stands for a word, as in *h* for house. Or the beginning and ending letters stand for a word, as in *dg* for dog.

## How do you do the practice?

Writing can be a part of family life. Ordinary home and community activities provide natural opportunities for putting early writing skills to work.

- Young children can draw picture reminders. They can also use their version of "writing" to fill in events and dates on a family calendar.
- Family members can leave each other notes at a message center.
- Before shopping, you can ask your child to write a list of his own. A parent can tell the child, "I need to make a list. Would you like to make one too?" They can take turns "reading" the lists aloud.
- Your child can add a picture or note to a letter written to grandparents, other family members, or friends. He can use scribble writing or invented spelling to add to the note.
- You can help your child connect spoken and written words by having him draw a picture. They he can tell a story about it. You can write out the story under the picture just as your child tells it. Then read it back to him.
- Help your child write and draw a story. You can make a simple booklet from paper folded in half and stapled on the fold. Make a fancier book with paper and a cardboard cover. The book can be bound by lacing thick yarn through holes made with a hole-punch.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child spending more time "writing"?
- Does the child seem pleased about his letters, notes, or stories?
- Is your child trying different ways to write or is he trying new ways to spell?

# Look at more 'writing' with preschoolers

## *Message on a Sand Cake!*

Four-year-old Kameko sits next to her mother on the beach. She is playing in the sand with a small plastic shovel and pail. Over and over she fills the bucket with damp sand, then dumps it in a pile. After awhile, she begins to mold the sand into a circle and flattens out the top. "See? I'm making a cake!" she tells Mom. "What a yummy cake," Mom replies. "What kind of a cake is it?" "A birthday cake!" says Kameko. "Who's birthday is it?" asks her mother. "My birthday" answers Kameko. "Oh, I see. Then maybe you can write *Happy Birthday, Kameko* on it," Mom suggests, handing her a small piece of stick. Kameko makes lines and squiggles all over her "cake." When she finishes, Mom asks her to read the cake. "Happy birthday me!" Kameko says with satisfaction. "Yes, that's what it says," agrees her mother.



## *Mail Call!*



Asia climbs onto the couch next to her granddad. "I'm writing a letter to my brother," he tells the three-year-old. "I'm just about finished. Then we'll put it in an envelope and mail it." Asia picks up his address book and looks at the cover. "That book tells where to send mail to people," Granddad explains. "Here, why don't you write something on this letter to Uncle Cliff, too?" Granddad hands Asia the pen and paper. He watches patiently as she makes marks and lines across the bottom of the page. He says, "Asia sees Uncle Cliff." "Oh, that's good! Uncle Cliff will be happy to know you want to go see him," says her granddad. "Now I'll write his address on the envelope and you write something for him on back of it." Asia watches her granddad address the envelope using his address book. Then she takes the pen and copies him, making curvy lines while looking at a page in the address book.

## *Just Like Mom!*

Five-year-old Carlos has a fine-motor delay. He sits next to his mother at the desk of her home office. She is working on a company report. Seeing Carlos take interest in her writing, she hands him an earlier draft of the report. She asks her son to "help" her with it. "What do you want to write in the report?" she asks Carlos. "I can write about Grandpa," he replies. "OK, that's a good idea," she answers. She hands her son a crayon that he grasps awkwardly. "Where do you think we should write about Grandpa?" Carlos looks the page over and points to where he wants to write. "Okay," says his mother. "Write all the good things about Grandpa." Carlos takes the crayon and draws broad, uneven strokes across the entire page with the crayon. "That's great writing, Carlos!" says his mother. "Read to me about Grandpa." Carlos "reads" his writing and his mother listens intently. She doesn't expect Carlos' writing to look much like adult writing yet because of his delays. "Wow! That's a really good report, Carlos. Thanks for helping me!"



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# Mail Call

*Drawing and Writing*

When your child sends and receives mail, she can try out writing and see the many uses of print.

## What is the practice?

Your child needs to try scribbling, drawing, and using “made up” spelling before she can write in the traditional way. One way to boost her writing interest is to set up a home mail center. This gives her a place to write letters to mail or where family members can leave letters to each other.



## What does the practice look like?

A home mail center can be simple. It can be a shoebox or small plastic bin. It's filled with paper, envelopes, pencils or pens and stamps. It can also have old greeting cards, markers, stickers, etc.

## How do you do the practice?

Give your child lots of chances to “write” letters. Talk with her about how writing helps her share her thoughts with others.

- When she's writing a letter, talk about what she knows about letter writing. Tell why people write notes to each other. Talk about how people use the mail and let her know she can use it too.
- Children often have fun with stamps and stickers. Tell her why we use stamps to mail letters. Have ones with different pictures for her to use. If mailing the letter through the postal service, let her put the stamp on her letter. If her letters are for family members at home, she can have fun using different stickers as stamps.
- Talk about things related to mailing letters. For example, show her on a map where a mailed letter is going.
- Talk about addresses, and help her learn your home address.
- Let her use different size envelopes or different types of mailers. This will expand what she knows about mail.
- Put stamped and addressed cards in the mail center. This will show her how letters look when they are mailed.
- Let your child explore letter writing by using different kinds of stationery. She can also use different writing tools, like markers or colored pencils.
- Change things in the mail center to keep your child's interest. You can switch out the stationery, stamps, or writing materials available. You might try to find seasonal greeting cards at discounted stores for her to use.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child enjoy the materials in the home mail center?
- Does your child “write” letters to others?
- Is your child's letter writing becoming more traditional and confident?

# More invented spelling with preschoolers

## *Return to Sender*

The mail center at Shannon's house has colored markers, paper, envelopes and stickers. Three-year old Shannon uses the markers to scribble "words" on the paper. One day, her mother asks Shannon what she's writing. Shannon says she is writing daddy about their cat, Tiger. When Shannon is done, her mother prints Shannon's words about Tiger on the paper. Shannon puts her letter in an envelope. She picks out a sticker to use for the stamp. Shannon's mother writes "Daddy" on the front of the envelope. They leave it in the mail center. Shannon is happy when there's a letter back from Daddy. His letter tells her he liked reading her story about Tiger.



## *Dear Grandma*

Five-year old Shayla misses her grandmother living in another state. Her mother asks Shayla if she wants to write grandma a letter. Right away, Shayla says, "Yes!" and runs to the mail center. She uses a pencil and paper and prints her name. She then prints short words and letters she knows how to write. She makes up word spellings by putting random letters and squiggles together. She draws a picture of herself at the bottom of the paper. She puts the paper in an envelope. Her mother lets her choose a stamp for it. "The eagle!" says Shayla. Her mother writes grandmother's address on the envelope. She says the words aloud as she writes. Later that day, Shayla's mother lets her place the letter to grandma in their mailbox and raise the red flag for pick-up.

## *Outgoing Mail*

Jonathan's mother set up a home mail center so he can practice writing. Jonathan has a hard time holding small things. His mother put wide-grip markers, large pencils, and large erasers in the center. She also placed a list of family members' addresses in it. Though his fine motor skills are limited, Jonathan can make marks on the paper. He can then pick someone to mail his letter to. One day his mother helps him address an envelope for a letter to his aunt. She talks about addresses and where stamps go on envelopes. They walk outside and put the letter in their home's mailbox. Later his mother shows him on a map where the letter is going.

