

*Especially for practitioners working with young children!* 

# Starting Write

 *Invented Spelling and Writing*

Before preschoolers begin to spell and write as adults do, they start to understand that writing uses symbols to carry meaning that others can understand. In order to encourage their exploration and interest in written language, show them how to use invented spelling. This lets them focus on the process of communicating through writing, rather than on a perfect finished product.

## What is the practice?

Beginning writers can get frustrated by not knowing the exact spelling of words they are trying to use. This can lessen their motivation to write. Teachers can best help children develop writing skills by encouraging preschoolers to write using whatever letters sound right to them without insisting on exact spelling or letter formation.



## What does the practice look like?

A preschooler signing his art project with some letters in his name reversed or missing, or a child making a grocery list with a combination of letters, numbers, and other symbols are examples of how children begin to experiment with written language. Children who get to explore written language this way and talk about their writing with an interested, responsive adult gain the important motor and cognitive skills needed for “real” writing skills to develop.

## How do you do the practice?

You can find a world of opportunities to use invented spelling in your preschool classroom. Just for starters: Have the children compose a list of class rules at circle time. Post sign-up sheets at popular activity centers. Encourage children to sign their work and write their own descriptions or stories about their art.

- You can arrange your classroom to encourage the use of writing. Include writing materials at every center, not just art and writing. Demonstrate their possible uses to groups or individual children. For example, pads and pencils in the blocks center could be used for drawing roads or diagrams, as well as labeling works in progress. In the housekeeping center, writing materials can be used to make play menus or grocery lists. The library can include materials for children to make their own books.
- You can encourage children to take their work seriously in many ways. Have them read it aloud to you and show your appreciation. Display functional examples of their writing, such as handwritten cubby labels or welcome signs for class parties. Set up a classroom mail center for children to leave notes and messages for each other.
- Provide plenty of examples of conventional writing all around the room in the form of books, posters, the alphabet, and printed labels. When children struggle for the right letter, they will have access to familiar models all around them.
- Some children are more focused on “getting it right,” and can be hesitant to write something if they aren’t sure how it is spelled. You can encourage these children by helping them listen for the sounds in letters and words and collaborate with other children on how to spell something.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Are the children in your classroom eager and motivated to write?
- Do they understand that what they write carries meaning?
- Does their writing and spelling grow more conventional over the course of the year?

# Take a look at more prewriting with preschoolers

## Writing "Thanks!"

At circle time in Ms. Johanna's preschool class, the children are discussing their recent field trip to the grocery store. Everyone wants to talk about the best parts of the trip and the goodie bags they were given. Ms. Johanna unrolls a large piece of paper and tells her class, "Let's make a list of all the interesting things we saw and learned at the grocery store. Then we are going to write thank-you letters to Mr. Black, who showed us around his store." The children take turns mentioning their favorite parts of the trip—everyone liked going back into the bakery to watch bread coming out of the big ovens. Ms. Johanna writes all their ideas on her large sheet of paper, reading and pointing out the words as she does so. She invites the children to help her with spelling the words. She hangs the list where everyone can see it. Then she sends the children to nearby tables with construction paper and markers. The children make thank-you cards for the store manager using a combination of pictures, letters, and words.



Our Class	
 Ada	Ada
 Mario	mario
 Carlton	CDHL
 Nadia	NNNN
 D'wanna	Dipp
 Tim	Tnn
 Lissa	LQ
 Vanessa	Vanessa

## Sign-In Charts

The preschoolers in Mr. José's class use sign-in sheets every day when they come to school. They find their pictures on the laminated sheet by the door, and use markers to write their name next to their picture to indicate they are present. Some of the children are not yet making any recognizable letters, but they still enjoy "signing in" to show others they have arrived. During free center time, they also sign up for the most popular centers by writing their names on the waiting lists at those centers. The children not only get to practice their writing throughout the day, they learn to recognize one another's names as well.

## All Kinds of Greetings

In Ms. Amy's inclusive preschool class, the children have access to writing materials throughout the day, as well as a mailbox system to leave notes and letters for each other and for their teacher. Many children are in the habit of writing greetings to each other, including special birthday messages or notes for an absent child. For the children who have trouble with fine motor skills, Ms. Amy also encourages them to type messages on the classroom computer. It is equipped with an extra-big keyboard and a microphone that allows children to speak their messages and watch them appear in print on the screen. She helps the children print out their messages and find the right mailbox, so that all children, regardless of disability or preference, can participate in the process of composing and delivering messages to their friends.

