

PHASES OF WRITING DEVELOPMENT

Just as children make many “mistakes” or approximations as they learn to talk, the development of writing skills is also a process. At each phase of writing development children demonstrate what they know about written language and all their writing efforts need to be recognised and encouraged as steps towards conventional writing skills.

Phase 1: Role Play Writing

As children attempt to make sense of the connection between spoken and written language, they may engage in role play writing. During this phase of writing development, children experiment with marks on paper as they imitate adult writing. They make random marks on paper including circular scribble, scribble lines and attempts to draw symbols consisting of straight and curved lines. They may mix letters, numbers and invented symbols with letters often produced in reversal or mirror image. They have a preference for capital letters and will often use letters from their own name repeatedly within writing. These marks and scribbles may be an attempt to communicate a message however their understanding of sound-symbol relationships has yet to develop and hence their messages are not yet readable by others, however they may believe others can read what they have written. Children usually operate at this phase of writing development between 2-3 years of age.

Skills Demonstrated by Role Play Writing:

- Children know people write to communicate a message.
- Children demonstrate early attempts at letter formation.



When the big monster went for a walk to the billabong he went to see a flower.

(Briana 3years)

Summary of Role Play Writing – attempts to create letters and marks that represent letters have been included.

Phase 2: Experimental Writing

During the experimental writing phase (usually 3-4 years of age), students demonstrate an understanding that speech can be written and that written language means something. They will write from left to right, experimenting with letters and words as they write about familiar topics. Students in this phase are developing an understanding of 1 to 1 correspondence and sound-symbol relationships, and may represent each word with 1-3 letters, usually consonants. Writing is often a mix of capital and lower case letters, and often letters from their own name. They do however demonstrate knowledge of the difference between letters and numbers. Experimental writers have a developing understanding that we write for a purpose and to a specific audience.

Skills Demonstrated by Experimental Writing:

- Students demonstrate knowledge that written language has meaning and can “read” what they have written.
- Students have an awareness of words with each word represented by a single letter or a cluster of letters (usually words are represented by 1-3 capital letters, mainly consonants).
- Students demonstrate knowledge that we write left to right and have a developing awareness of spaces between words.
- Students demonstrate knowledge of the difference between letters and numbers.
- Students know that letters represent the sounds in the words we say.



Daddy's going for a walk. I picked a flower for my Mum and we saw a butterfly flying.

(Alayna 4yrs)

Summary of Early Experimental Writing – some letters have been included to represent the words.

See over for Phase 3 and 4

Phase 3: Early Writing (or Phonetic Writing)

During this phase of writing development (usually 4-5 years), students are beginning to demonstrate use of some writing conventions. Early writing includes attempts at correct punctuation and will include appropriate spacing between words. Students consider audience and purpose when writing familiar structures such as retells, reports, letters, lists and emails. Frequently used words are usually spelled correctly and unknown words are spelled phonetically (by sound) (e.g. because = becos). Writing begins to include detail and description however may repeatedly use the same phrases or words. At this phase students are developing the ability to make some simple corrections in writing, however editing can be overwhelming.

Skills Demonstrated by Early Writing:

- Students demonstrate knowledge that writing is made up of words and spaces between words.
- Students are aware that words have a number of letters, a beginning and end sound and have vowels.
- When students know a word they will spell it the same every time.
- Students use phonetic spelling and their knowledge of sounds when writing unfamiliar words.



Me and Dad in the monster truck. (Clay 6yrs)

Summary of Early Writing – familiar words spelled correctly; uses both capitals and lower case letters; spells unfamiliar words phonetically.

Phase 4: Conventional Writing

Students in the conventional writing phase (usually from 5½ years) have a sound knowledge of the basic elements of writing. They are able to choose text structures based on the purpose of the writing and will often plan before commencing a writing task. Writing demonstrates an awareness of the reader, including appropriate background information. Students in this phase have variable control of structure, punctuation and spelling depending on the complexity of the writing activity. Students begin to use headings to organise writing and group sentences on a topic into paragraphs, however sentence length, organisation and complexity varies. Conventional writers link ideas and choose vocabulary appropriate to the topic and audience and demonstrate the ability to edit their work.



I like going to the sandy track when it is raining, to ride my motorbike. (Taj 7 yrs)

Summary of Conventional Writing – familiar words and sight words spelled correctly with unfamiliar words spelled phonetically; correct spacing of words and use of punctuation; sentences are increasingly complex.

References:

- Queensland School Curriculum Council. (1998).** Supporting your child's writing development.
- Department of Education WA. (2013).** First Steps: Writing map of development.