



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

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The Journey to Writing



Before children can pick up a pen or pencil and write, there is so many skills to practice and develop, and this begins from birth! Pre-writers need to develop a strong sense of their body map, exploring what they can do with their arms, hands and fingers, strengthening their gross motor skills and refining their fine motor skills. They need to have good hand-eye coordination, and their core needs to develop strength and balance so they can hold themselves straight and steady.

The muscles in the shoulders elbows and wrists must be developed and children need to be able to use, and cross, both sides of their bodies. This is called crossing the midline. Young children also need to develop their communication, language and listening skills as these are vital for when they begin to write. Children will need to master the skill of distinguishing between sounds, verbally tell their own stories and eventually, sayaloud what they want to write.

So where do we begin to build these writing skills? We begin at birth!

Strategies and tips to support babies between the age of 0-2

Gross motor

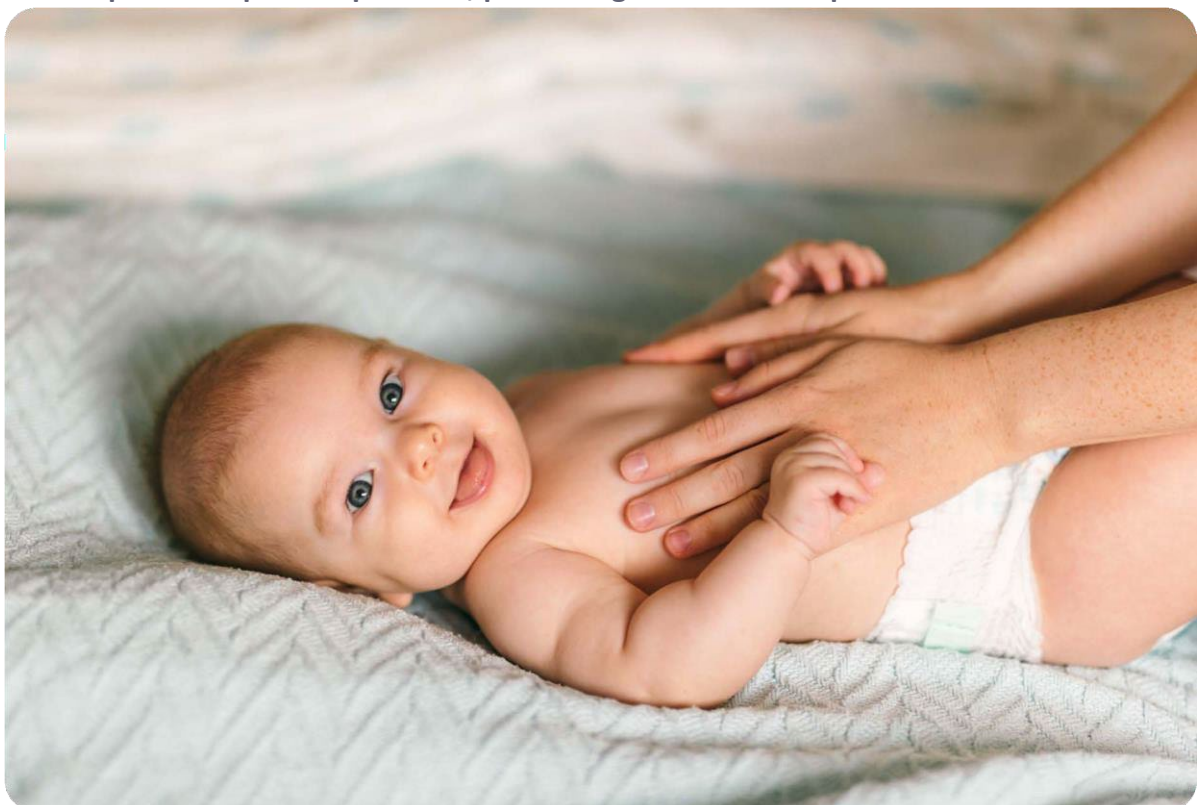
Offer daily tummy time for the opportunity for baby to lift their head, strengthen their back and push up on their arms. Support babies to do this in a positive way, engaging with them through talk, encouragement and praise.

Rolling, reaching and allowing a baby the space to move freely every day develops their awareness of their body, develops hand-eye coordination and strengthens all of the muscles.

Encourage crawling and reaching for toys by stretching forwards when on their tummy. Put toys just out of reach to encourage perseverance and a little challenge.

Support sitting up at around 4-6 months, developing the core muscles. Babies should be able to sit up independently by around 8 months.

Waving and banging, tugging and pulling all supports the shoulder and arm muscles. Offer pieces of material to explore and provide pots and, pans along with wooden spoons to drum with.



Fine motor

Offer small items to pick up between the finger and thumb to support fine motor muscle development, for example, peas or sweetcorn for babies who are weaning.

Encourage pointing when reading, or when out and about in the garden and local area, naming what you can see for the baby to develop their language.

Offer opportunities for babies to mark make using fingers and hands in a range of tactile materials. For example, edible sand or custard – this also supports sensory development and creates a lot of fun!

Encourage babies to clack and bang objects together using both hands, meeting in the middle, for example, using two wooden bricks, and celebrate with them when they achieve this to build self-esteem and confidence.

At roughly 16-18 months, offer opportunities to make marks using non-toxic paints, allowing the babies to spread the paint with their hands across large paper. Consider allowing the babies to lay on their tummies, reaching and stretching for the blobs of paint, creating a whole-body sensory experience.

Communication, Language and Literacy

Observe and watch for baby noticing and turning towards sounds and name these sounds for them.

Talk to the baby throughout the day and encourage babbling, mirroring and extend their babble by adding more sounds.

Babies should begin to make sounds in a range of ways to gain attention.

As a baby's sounds develop, they should use this growing range of sounds and babble to 'talk'. Talk back and offer the two-way conversation, using eye contact, facial expressions and smiles.

Sing rhymes and songs frequently with babies and encourage them to copy actions and movements such as 'Wind the Bobbin Up' or 'Row your Boat'. Ensure these are not rushed and words are sung at a speed that a baby can keep up with.

Babies at around 16-18 months should be using a range of nouns, verbs and adjectives in their day-to-day lives with new words used frequently.

Encourage babies to copy the environmental sounds they hear such as "brrrm" for a car, "beep, beep" for a bus or "moo" for the cows they see in a field.

At around 18 months, babies should begin to be able to follow simple instructions. Provide instructions such as "shoes on" or "get your cup" and support with helping them to understand by showing them.

At around 18 months, babies should be able to hold back-and-forth, simple conversations.

Offer plenty of opportunities to talk in play and ensure you give the baby your full attention when they are talking to you. Turn off TV's and avoid giving babies screens as these do not promote good speech, language and communication skills.

Share books with baby and encourage them to name and point to the things they see. Lift the flap or feely books are great for encouraging babies to interact with the pages. Allow them to turn the pages and give them time to repeat movements.

Offer opportunities for baby to make marks with a range of media e.g toxic-free paint, water and brushes or, chunky crayons on wallpaper, as they begin to understand that their marks hold value.

Top tips to support children aged 2-3 years old

Gross Motor Skills

Two-year-olds should be offered opportunities to jump, hop and balance on a range of equipment including park equipment, large wooden blocks, tyres and planks.

Children aged two are beginning to be able to sit for short periods and can sit on a chair to eat and drink if their feet are able to be flat to the floor.

Children should be offered the opportunity to ride balance bikes, trikes, scooters and other wheeled vehicles outdoors in open spaces.

Provide opportunities to kick and throw large balls and offer inflated balloons that make throwing and catching a little easier.

Use dance and movement games to support crossing the midline, moving their arms across the body to the opposite side.

Fine motor skills

Two-year-olds should be offered opportunities to draw and mark make in a range of situations and through a range of media. For example, using rollers and brushes on a large scale, drawing and painting whilst laying on their tummies, using squeeze bottles and water, dabbers, chunky chalks, chunky crayons etc.

Children aged two may be beginning to show preference for a dominant hand and are holding the writing tool in a comfortable grip.

Playdough offers the opportunity for two-year-olds to develop finger strength, pinching, squeezing and rolling. Remove the chairs from this activity to ensure they are also developing their shoulders and putting weight through arms and wrists.

Offer opportunities to draw vertical, horizontal and circular lines together as children at age 2-3 should be able to draw these shapes.

Encourage children to distinguish between the marks they make, talking about their marks with them and what they represent.

Children at this age may be developing their grasp and may hold the writing tool with their thumb and three fingers.

Peg jigsaws can be offered for children aged 2-3. These support fine motor skills but also mathematical thinking in terms of shape and space.

Communication, Language and Literacy

Children aged between 2 and 3 are developing words quickly and need their adults to continue to provide new words for them on a daily basis.

Two-year-olds will be joining words together to make short phrases or sentences. Support them further by adding words to their



sentence and extending on their ideas e.g. if the child says, “red bus”, model the sentence “Yes, I see a long, red bus”.

Children between the age of 2-3 are beginning to listen to talk with interest and can join in, although may become distracted easily.

Support 2-year-olds to tune into environmental sounds. For example, vehicle sounds, bird sound or the wind and rain. Identify these sounds and name them with the children. Talk about quiet sounds and loud sounds and have fun with making sounds with your voice or objects around you!

Children at aged 2-3 are developing their imaginative play and may take on a character or role from their own experiences. Offer open-ended dress up and home corner resources to support this imaginary play. Items such as hats, bags, shoes and scarves are always very popular.

Two-year-olds will show interest in short stories and enjoy simple stories with pictures. Offer stories with repeated refrains so they can join in with you and build on their language.

Continue to sing and enjoy a range of nursery rhymes with two-year-olds, encouraging them to be active, joining in with the actions and dancing using the whole of the body. The adult should also join in as a positive role model for the children.

Instruments should be accessible for the children to explore arrange of sounds. Explore sounds with the children and discuss quiet sounds, loud sounds, fast sounds and slow sounds.

Two-year-olds can tune in and find a sound that is hidden. Consider hiding a noisy toy or egg timer for them to find in the indoor space.

Opportunities for mark making within the provision should be offered continuously indoors, for example, whiteboards and pens, wallpaper, dabbers, a range of different paper sizes, an A-frame with paints and large paper as well as opportunities to make marks in tactile materials. Outdoors should feature paints on a larger scale, chunky chalks, large brushes, rollers, clipboards and paper, small sweeping brushes and powder paints.

Children should begin to understand that the marks they make convey meaning at this age.

Top tips to support preschool children age 3-4

Gross motor skills

Children at age 3-4 can sit on a chair with their feet touching the floor for short periods.

Opportunities for children to draw and mark make at tables, on the floor, stood up and in the crawl position should continue to be offered daily.



Children aged 3-4 should be developing and refining their shoulder, elbow and wrist movements and be able to use mark making tools with greater control.

Yoga and dance activities can offer the opportunity to cross the midline and strengthen muscles in the shoulders, arms, hands and fingers.

Fine motor skills

Offer children the opportunity to use scissors. Squeezy scissors are a great starting point, which allow development of control and movement before single-handed scissors are mastered.

Continue to offer opportunities to draw and make horizontal, vertical, circular lines as well as other shapes on a range of media.

Opportunities to write within continuous provision both indoors and outdoors should be rich. Envelopes, post-it notes, notepads, diaries, whiteboards, cards and paper of all sizes should be offered, along with a range of mark making tools.

Communication, Language and Literacy

Curiosity cubes or enhancements within the provision will offer opportunities for conversation and new language to be supported as children are developing the number of words spoken.

“Why?” questions can be asked to allow children to offer reasons and thoughts as they can now articulate more complex answers. Open ended questions such as “I wonder...”, and “What if...” also offer the opportunity to ponder and think.

Rhythm, rhyme and poetry should be celebrated through books but also through verbal story telling. Children should hear these daily as they begin to be able to hear rhyming words and play with these in conversation.

Children aged 3-4 enjoy sharing stories and should have the opportunity to listen to a range of stories daily. These stories should be selected to ensure they are providing new language for children. Books should be shared both indoors and outdoors, in small groups and on a 1:1 basis.

Children may begin to have a go at writing their name using lines, curves and circles. Encourage them to have a go and celebrate their achievements. Model and talk to the children about how to form the letters in their name.

Letters within the environment, both indoors and out, should be noticed and talked about with the children. For example, on packets and tins in the home corner or on signs outdoors. The correct letter sounds and names should be used as children aged 3-4 are beginning to tune into initial sounds.

Opportunities for mark-making should be featured in the role play area, such as shopping lists, recipe cards and birthday cards or party invitations.

Other opportunities for mark making should feature within the provision, providing children with a range of tools and media to access freely. Add challenge by providing children with new resources such as watercolours and thin brushes or cotton buds for mark-making.

Adults should model writing for 3–4-year-olds and talk to the children about this process, scribing children’s stories and sentences for them.

Children at age 3-4 may begin to blend and segment words. Model and play games such as ‘Metal Mike’ that allow those children who are beginning to do this to build on their skills.

Top tips for Reception Children Age 4-5

Gross motor skills

Children at age 4-5 should be able to travel safely and navigate their space. Offer obstacle courses for them to practice these skills and consider obstacles that support children to crawl, climb, jump, hop and balance.

Children should be able to sit on a chair, with their feet flat to the floor for longer periods at this age, however, this does not mean that all activities should be carried out at tables. Children at age 4-5 continue to learn through movement and high-quality play.

Scooters and pedal bikes should be provided and children should be working towards riding these competently.

Children in Reception should have now developed a strong core, and be able to sit on the floor unaided, holding their bodies up straight.

Opportunities for balance should continue to be provided, adding to the complexity by offering stepping stones and thinner or longer planks and walkways.

Fine Motor Skills

Jigsaws with more complex elements can be offered and children should have the opportunity to work together or work independently to complete these tasks.

Children in Reception should be able to use their shoulder, elbow and wrist movements to make marks with increasing control and precision.

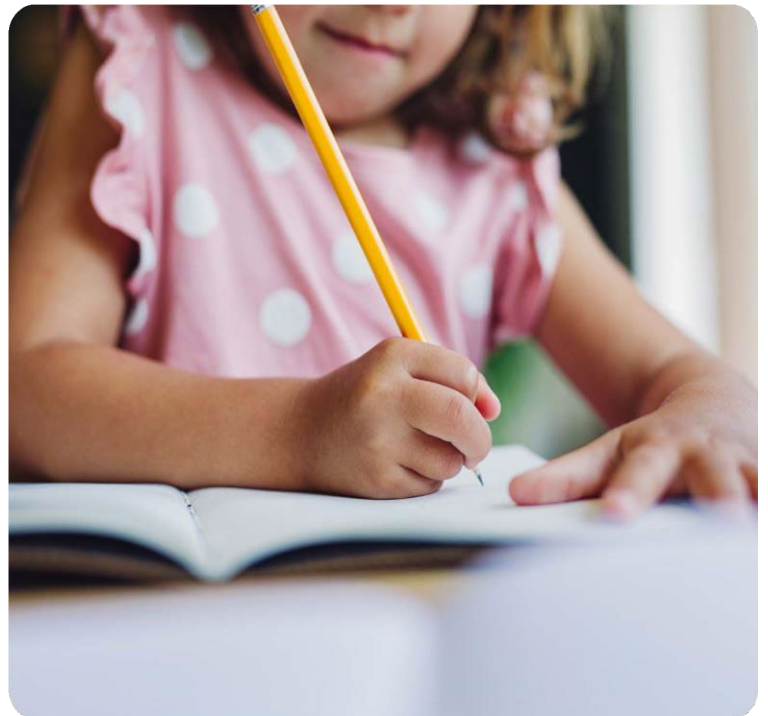
Opportunities for new activities such as threading and sewing using a thick needle can be offered to support the development of the fine motor muscles.

Most children in Reception should settle on a dominant hand and be comfortable holding a pencil or pen using the pincer grip.

Opportunities for mark-making should continue to be featured across the provision, both indoors and out, with added challenge such as coloured pastels or charcoal. Children should be mark making with purpose in Reception.

The pre-writing shapes should be mastered, and children should now be making attempts to write letters, both capital and lower case.

By the end of Reception, children should be forming most letters correctly.



Communication, language and Literacy

Children in Reception should be able to hold a conversation on something that interests them, answering questions and offering opinions. Continue offering opportunities for conversation throughout the day, drawing in others and modelling how to reflect on peer's opinions and thoughts.

A range of adjectives should be understood by children, and by hearing a wider range of stories and through exploring language through play, children's range of vocabulary and understanding of the meaning of words should continue to develop.

Children should be using longer sentences with only some grammatical errors. Adults can support this further by re-casting correct words and grammatical structures when speaking with children.

A wide range of stories and poems should be read to children daily, but adults should also tell stories without books as children in Reception should be able to follow the story without images. Key stories should be read repeatedly to allow children to develop their understanding of story structure but also to embed the language within the story.

Children in Reception should be developing their ability to express their feelings and needs, with the ability to share how they are feeling and why with the support of emotionally available adults.

Children's sense of awe should continue to grow over their time in Reception and beyond. At age 4 and 5, children should have a love of exploring and want to know more about what they experience, hear and see. Offer opportunities for children to learn from a wide range of books, technology and other adults in the school through questioning and conversations.

Children who are ready to write will be willing to have a go and not worry about getting things wrong. They will explore and write with a range of media throughout the provision. They may choose to write cards or lists, write a story or create a ticket for a show in their role play area.

Children who are ready to write can hear initial sounds and use their phonic knowledge to put letters onto paper. Their pencil grip is comfortable, and they have developed the strength in their shoulders, elbows, wrists and fingers to be able to control their pen or pencil. They are eager and keen, and they can break the flow of speech into single words.

To reach the Early Learning Goal (ELG) at the end of Reception, children should be able to:

- Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed
- Spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters
- Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others

Writing is a complex task, and there is so much that needs to come before it. The development of writing cannot be rushed. It needs a wide range of skills to be embedded before it can happen. Children require the ongoing support from effective practitioners within a high-quality learning environment to ensure they have the wealth of opportunities to develop these skills.

Not only this, but in order to be a confident and creative writer, children need to hold a willingness to 'have a go', to not be afraid of getting it wrong and to know that their efforts will be valued and celebrated. Therefore, it is vital that from birth, we encourage and grow this self-confidence by championing children during each stage, and support them in becoming the most confident writers they can be.

Further information and support

[Get a grip - Developing ideas for early writing](#)

[Supporting writing in the early years.pdf](#)

[Birth to 5 Early-Writing.pdf](#)

[How to Approach Early Years Writing in the EYFS | Family](#)