



“But Teacher, I Don’t Know How to Write...”

Helping Young Students Develop Foundation Skills Needed for Becoming a Writer


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Learning Objectives:

- Describe the components of the writing process and the stages of development.
- Describe assessment strategies to identify levels of writing skill development.
- Implement evidence-based intervention techniques to facilitate writing as well as enhancing other language and literacy skills.




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Historically,

- In the 1960s and 1970s, writing instruction overemphasized handwriting and spelling and neglected composing.
- In the 1980s and 1990s, process writing introduced composing and neglected handwriting and spelling.


(Berninger, 2012)



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Why intentionally teach writing?



- Extensive research has shown that if the foundations of handwriting, spelling and sentence fluency are established early, composition quality and length improves throughout grades 2, 3, and 4. (Berninger & Wolf, 2016; Moats, Foorman, & Taylor, 2006)



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AGENDA


- 1 • Foundation skills needed for becoming a writer
- 2 • Developmental sequences and assessment processes
- 3 • Intervention strategies and routines


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Rate the importance of...

As you learn to become a writer, how important is:



	Really not important	Not so important	Important	Really important
Handwriting				
Spelling				
Print conventions				
Composition				




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1 Critical Foundation Skills

In the big picture...

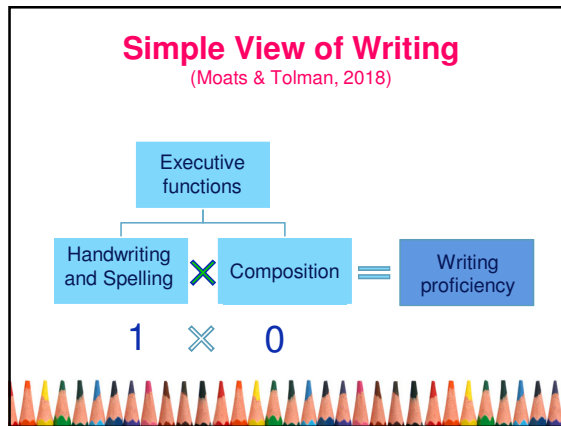
- Transcription skills
 - Handwriting
 - Spelling
- Composition skills
 - Words to sentences, paragraphs, and essays
 - Creating, organizing, elaborating ideas
 - Editing, revising, sharing
- Executive functioning skills



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Simple View of Writing

(Moats & Tolman, 2018)




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Handwriting




- Linked to better letter perception, reading fluency, and writing fluency (Berninger, 2012; Graham, Harris, & Fink, 2000)
- Trains the orthographic loop, which supports spelling and composing.
- Trains serial organization
- Automaticity – quickly, accurately, effortlessly
 Reduces cognitive load needed for composition



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Why Handwriting Instruction

1. Learning to form letters by hand improves perception of letters and contributes to better reading and spelling.
2. Automatic letter writing promotes better composing—both amount written and quality of writing. (Berninger, 2012)




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Spelling




- Explicit spelling instruction:
 - in the early grades is linked to better composition in the later grades. (Berninger & Fayol, 2008)
 - is linked to greater phonological awareness and reading proficiency (Santangelo & Graham, 2011)



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Oral Language Skills


- Vocabulary – Writers must be able to spontaneously recall words and have a clear understanding of word meaning and usage. (Corona, Spangenberg, & Venet, 1998)
- Sentence construction – practice in combining simple, short sentences into complex sentences improves writing quality (Saddler & Graham, 2005)



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Writing Process

- Plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish



Explicit instruction in the writing process is supported by multiple studies. (Graham & Perin, 2007)

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Executive Functioning Skills



- EF includes a wide range of skills such as self-regulation, focused attention, memory, inhibitory control, mental shifting during planning, reviewing, and revising. (Berninger & Winn, 2006)
- Explicit instructional cueing helps to develop self-regulation leading to other EF skills. (McCloskey & Perkins, 2012)

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2 Developmental sequences and assessment strategies of writing skills

- Drawing foundations and motor development
- Word-reading and spelling development
- Composition development
- Grade level assessment task recommendations

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Motor skills needed for writing







- Muscle strength to hold writing tool
- Fine motor control
- Kinesthetic awareness
- Rhythmic flow of movement
- Gated movement dragging hand across the page
- Directionality

(Graham & Weintraub, 1996)

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Foundations of Drawing Development

Child learn to print letters by first imitating geometric shapes beginning with:

- 2 years vertical strokes 
- 2 1/2 years horizontal strokes 
- 3 years circles 
- 4 years cross 
- 5 years square 
- 5 1/2 years triangle 

(Feder & Majnemer, 2007)

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Letter Shape Characteristics


- Straight i l
- Curved C c J j O o S s U
- Straight Intersections E F H I L T t
- Curved Intersections B D G P Q a b d e f g h m n p q r u
- Diagonal Intersections A K M N (R) V W X Y Z k v w x y z

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Determine handedness preference.

- Handedness should be established by kindergarten.
- Patterning for instruction and practice requires consistent development of muscle memory of letter shapes.
 - Important connections between peripheral and central nervous systems.

(Berninger & Wolf, 2016)




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Identify pencil grip.

- Proper pencil grip should use a tripod grip.
 - Pencil should rest on first joint of middle finger with thumb and index finger holding pencil in place and held at a 45-degree angle to the page.
- Recommended pencils should be:
 - #2 lead which require less pressure to write and don't break as easily
 - No eraser

(Berninger & Wolf, 2016)




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Manuscript, then Cursive

- Focus on a single style of writing during a given school year.
- Focus on legibility in the first year of instruction.
- In the second year of instruction, focus on legibility and automaticity.
- Cursive should be introduced in third grade.
- Periodic tune-ups should review both styles.

(Berninger & Wolf, 2016)




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Letter Writing Automaticity Guidelines

- Make sure to emphasize accuracy and legibility BEFORE fluency.
- 3rd graders should produce alphabet in less than a minute.
- Adults should fluently write the alphabet in 20 to 30 seconds.

(Berninger & Richards, 2002)




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More than Motor

“Despite the widespread beliefs that handwriting is purely a motor skill or that only multisensory methods are needed to teach handwriting, multiple language processes are also involved in handwriting.”

Berninger and Wolf, 2016

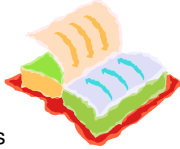



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Phases of Early Word-Reading and Spelling Development


- Prealphabetic
 - incidental visual cues
- Partial Alphabetic
 - letter knowledge
 - partial phoneme awareness
- Full Alphabetic
 - early sight-word learning
 - Phoneme-grapheme correspondence
 - Complete phoneme awareness
- Consolidated Alphabetic







(Ehri, 2014)





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Developmental Phases and Levels for Writing




0. No distinction between drawing and writing
1. Pre-conventional
 - Scribble 
 - Mock Letter 
 - Random Letter Strings 
2. Semi-phonetic 
3. Phonetic 
4. Conventional 



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Writing Assessment Tasks

- **Preschool Tasks:**
 - level of writing development (scribble to semiphonetic)
 - own name writing
 - letter name knowledge
 - phonological awareness
- **Kindergarten Tasks:**
 - level of writing development (random letters to phonetic)
 - letter name and sound knowledge
 - letter writing
 - phonological awareness
 - alphabetic principle in CVC word reading and spelling
 - sentence writing




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Writing Assessment Tasks

- **Primary Grade Tasks:**
 - automaticity and accuracy of alphabet letter writing
 - accuracy and fluency of decoding and spelling of phonetic and high frequency words
 - phonological awareness
 - paragraph writing organization and content
- **Later Grade Tasks:**
 - automaticity and legibility of handwriting
 - phonological awareness
 - accuracy and fluency of word reading and spelling (phonological and morphological)
 - paragraph writing
 - essay writing,
 - keyboarding

(Berninger & Wolf, 2016)



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3 Instructional strategies to develop foundational writing skills


- Handwriting strategies
- Spelling strategies
- A mention of composition strategies




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Determining Handedness Suggestions:

(Berninger & Wolf, 2016)




1. Face the child, offer a writing tool towards the child's chest, then note the hand the child uses to reach for the tool.
2. Have the child write his or her name with that hand. Note if the child switches hands and the quality of the writing. Then have the child write his or her name with the other hand. Make the same observations.
3. Then have the child draw a picture of a house first with one hand then the other. Make the same observations about rate, organization, and quality.




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Teaching a functional pencil grip



- Have students place their pencil on the desk with the point towards them.
- Tell them to "pinch your pencil" with their index finger and thumb where the point begins.
- Then tell them to "lift your pencil." As they lift their pencils, it will fall back into the correct writing position and rest on the first joint of the middle finger.

(Berninger & Wolf, 2016)




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Paper Recommendations


- Use lined paper that has space and lines appropriate for grade level.
- Preschool: paper with open space
- Kindergarten – Grade 2: use paper with resting lines and top lines that are solid and divided lines midway between solid lines.
 - This spacing supports their learning of the relative positioning of letter strokes that often differentiate letters from each other.

(Berninger & Wolf, 2016)




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Letter Writing Instruction:



- Is directed at the orthographic loop;
- Provides a visual plan with numbered arrow cues for forming the sequential strokes in each letter form;
- Includes practice in copying letters, writing them from memory, and finding letters in the ordered alphabet series in long-term memory;
- Emphasizes that letters should be both legible (recognized by others) and automatic (written effortlessly)

(Berninger, 2012)




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End Goal of Handwriting Instruction

- Develop “hybrid” writers:
 - Manuscript writing transfers to word reading.
 - Cursive writing transfers to spelling and composition.
 - Keyboarding helps with producing multiple drafts and revisions especially after students progress beyond hunting and pecking to touch typing


Writers often use a mix of cursive and manuscript or revert to manuscript.



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Spelling is really “Word Study”

- Through active explorations, word study teaches students to examine words to discover the regularities, patterns, and conventions of English orthography needed to read and spell.
- Word study increases specific knowledge of words – the spelling and meaning of individual words.




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Word Study


- **encoding and decoding of words**

- Written language is a skill that requires knowledge across several areas including:
 - phonemic awareness
 - morphological awareness
 - semantic awareness
 - orthographic awareness
 - mental orthographic images



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- Spelling is often referred to as a “window into the literacy mind” of a student. (Apel, Masterson, & Niessen, 2004)
- By using student’s **experimental** ~~invented~~ spellings as a guide, teachers can differentiate efficient, effective instruction in phonics, spelling, and vocabulary. (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2004)



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Definition of “Sight Words” (Ehri, 2014)


Old definition: High frequency or irregularly spelled words
More current definition: Words read from memory



“People used to regard sight words as limited to high-frequency or irregularly spelled words, but it turns out that **all** words, when practiced, become read from memory by sight.”
 Linnea Ehri, 2014

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Spelling Instruction



- K- Grade 1 **encoding** (writing down letters that represent phonemes in words) and **decoding** (linking sounds to printed letters) should be practiced alternately in the beginning stages (Moats & Hall, 2010)
- Grade 2 and up – encoding and decoding should be separate but reinforcing as spelling is much more difficult than reading (Joshi, et al., 2008-2009)

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Early Spelling Strategies

- Have an alphabet strip available to aid in uncertain recall.

Have students:

- Recite the alphabet orally or sing the alphabet song to automaticity.
- Name the letter before or after another letter or one in between two other letters.
- Copy the words in alphabetical order
- Practice alphabetizing

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Sound Walls (Instead of Word Walls)

- Designed to teach letter-sound knowledge
- Set up according to the articulation of speech sounds
- Arranged moving from the front of your mouth to the back of the throat
- Attach phoneme (sound) to orthographic (spelling) patterns

(Dahlgren, 2017)

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General Spelling Instruction Practices

- Use the same words for spelling and reading in K and Grade 1.
- Use frequent and distributed practice.
- Help students learn to analyze both speech and print.
- Use words in meaningful contexts.
- Teach proofreading and self-monitoring tasks.

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Instructional Strategy

- First, focus on student’s **content**.
- Handwriting and spelling development provide valuable instructional indicators for the next steps in their learning.


(Berninger & Wolf, 2016; Moats & Tolman, 2018)

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“What I think, I can say.”

Oral Language First

- Have students respond to questions using complete sentences.
- Have students practice combining short sentences into a longer, more complex sentence.
- Help students learn parts of speech (nouns, verbs, describing words)



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Creating Sentences:

Unscramble words to make a sentence

monsters I like clown I a saw

chew dogs bones eats bird a worms

the secret tell furry my is rabbit



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Creating Sentences:

Combine shorter sentences into longer ones.

Conjunction Use Sequence:

- 1st (sequence): and, both, then, when
- 2nd (causation): because, so
- 3rd (disjunction and alternation): but, or, either/or, neither/nor, though
- 4th (conditionality): unless, although, if, if/then, if only

(Moats, 2012)



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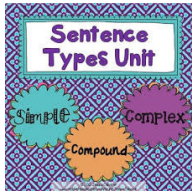

Creating Sentences:

Combine shorter sentences into longer ones.

- The boy was thirsty.
- The boy drank lemonade.

The weather was perfect.
The girls were playing soccer.

and, both, when,
because, so

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Deepen Vocabulary with Definitions

• Word	Mockingbird	
– Category	Songbird	
– Is like	Swallow	
– Is not like	Eagle	
– Definition	Songbird that mimics other birds, insects, and amphibians.	
– Connection to self	The mockingbird is the state bird of Texas.	




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Writing Information Paragraphs

One-Paragraph Structure

- Topic sentence
- Key idea
- Examples, explanations, events, experiences
- Concluding sentence

(Step Up To Writing, Grades K-2 Auman, 2016)




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Writing Paragraphs

Three-Sentence Paragraph

- Topic title
Volcano
- Beginning sentence
Volcanos are shaped like cones.
- Two important ideas
**Volcanos can erupt with ash and lava.
They are stunning in the landscape.**



(Step Up To Writing, Grades K-2 Auman, 2016)


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Writing Information Paragraphs

One-Paragraph Structure

- Topic sentence
- Key idea
- Examples, explanations, events, experiences
- Concluding sentence

Argument (opinion) writing has the same structure as information writing.

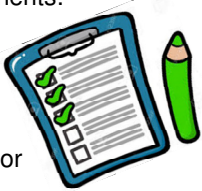


(Step Up To Writing, Grades K-2 Auman, 2016)

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Evaluating Writing Progress

- Use rubrics with components:
 - Organization
 - Content
 - Language
 - Print Conventions
- Students check writing for revision process.
- Teachers measure student progress and instructional needs.



(Adapted from Step Up To Writing, Grades K-2 Auman, 2016)

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Writing Rubric Components

1. Organization: Beginning, events, conclusion
2. Content: Level of details
3. Language: Sentence completeness
4. Print Conventions:
 - Handwriting
 - Capitals
 - Punctuation
 - Spelling

- Below basic
- Basic
- Proficient

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Rubric Ideas for Students


- My story has an order.
- My story has a message.
- I added details.
- I used capitals.
- My letters are legible.
- I used punctuation.
- I spelled my words correctly.

(Adapted from Step Up To Writing, Grades K-2 Auman, 2016)

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Take-Home Points

- Writing is a critical skill for all children.
- Handwriting and spelling facilitate composition skills.
- Early intervention is a key to reducing the impact of oral/written language disorders like dyslexia and dysgraphia.
- Explicit instruction at all levels is a proven, evidence-based approach to teaching writing.



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