

THE YEAR 2 DIAGNOSTIC NET

Supporting your child's writing development

A Queensland Government Initiative
Supporting Literacy and
Numeracy Development
in the Early Years
of Schooling



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Writing

How writing develops — some notes for parents

Writing is an important skill that provides us with a powerful means of communicating with other people. We use writing in all aspects of our lives — from writing shopping lists to keeping in contact with our friends. Many of us also use some form of writing at work.

To become effective communicators, our children need to develop a range of writing skills. They need to be able to select what to write, produce the text and make decisions about how to present their writing to readers.

Writing begins at an early age with drawings and scribbles. It keeps developing throughout the school years and on into adult life. To help children develop as writers, teachers in the early childhood years of schooling have been supplied with a *Writing Developmental Continuum* as part of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net.

The *Continuum* provides an explanation of how writing develops. It also lists the key behaviours, or milestones, that children typically display as their writing improves. The *Continuum* groups these behaviours into different phases. Your child's teacher will use the *Continuum* to chart your child's writing development and to report to you about your child's progress.

The first four phases of the *Writing Developmental Continuum* are explained in this pamphlet. For each phase, some activities are suggested that will help you to help your child become a better writer.

Children will usually spend a considerable period of time in each of the early writing phases. Therefore, few children in the early school years will be operating in Phase D, the Conventional Writing phase.

No matter what writing phase your child is in, you and your child's teacher can help by:

- creating real-life situations that give your child a purpose for writing;
- providing your child with opportunities to write;
- serving as a 'model writer' so that your child sees that writing is a valuable skill;
- praising and valuing your child's writing efforts so that he or she will continue to write.

If you and your child speak a language other than English at home, you can try these activities using your home language. The writing skills your child acquires in that language will actually help your child become a better writer in English.

If you have any questions about writing or would like more information, please contact your child's teacher.

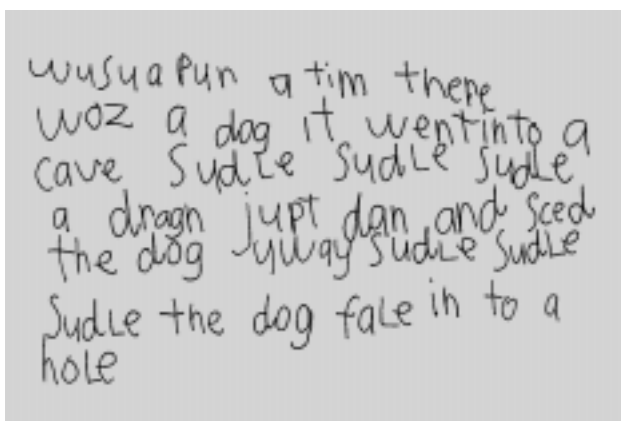
Phase B Experimental Writing

In this phase children know that speech can be written down and that it does not change. They understand that writing goes from left to right, and they experiment with writing letters and words.

Behaviours

Writers:

- try to read back their own writing
- show awareness that the written message stays the same but do not always 'read' it the same way
- speak their thoughts while writing
- mix up capitals and small letters
- are able to tell the difference between numbers and letters
- 'write' from left to right and from top to bottom on a page
- start to leave spaces between 'words'
- show awareness that one letter or letter cluster represents one word
- repeat familiar words when writing, such as *I like cats, I like dogs*, but will probably not write these words in conventional ways
- start to notice features like full stops and commas and sprinkle them through their writing
- dictate slowly when the adult is writing for them
- write different forms that are familiar, such as letters, lists, telephone messages, stories, greeting cards



Ways to help your child in this phase:

Provide plastic letters or cut-outs from magazines so that your child can make up words and write names or simple messages.

Keep an assortment of papers and pencils at a special writing place.

Make an 'in' and 'out' tray for messages that you and your child write to each other.

Read to your child every day, pointing out words and phrases that are of particular interest (nonsense words, names, exclamations etc.).

If you speak a language other than English at home, read to your child in the home language.

Be patient with your child's attempts to write. Ignore misspelled words at this stage and concentrate on the message. Write a dialogue with your child, for example:

Parent: *What did you like eating today?*

Child: *I likd a hambrg*

Parent: *I liked mushrooms on toast*

Child: *I dont lik mushrms*

Praise these attempts and say that you like writing messages.

Encourage your child to write thankyou notes and greetings on birthdays and special days.

Make books with your child by writing stories together in which you write some parts and your child writes others. Encourage the use of illustrations or cut-outs to decorate the book. Glue or staple the book and create a personal library for your child.

Use a family message board. Write to your child every day; encourage him or her to write messages as well.

Show your child the many available types of printed materials. Use books, brochures, advertisements and magazines to demonstrate the variety.

Let your child see you writing often and for as many different reasons as you can think of.

Encourage your child to write stories about pets, favourite toys, or places, or to describe something seen on television.

If the home language is a language other than English, encourage the child to write in the home language.

Phase C Early Writing

In this phase children write about things that are important to them. They begin to write for people other than their teacher or parent. They know what they want to write and struggle to put it on paper. If they are concentrating on one thing, they often lose control over another; for example, if they concentrate on neat printing or on spelling, they may 'lose' what they want to say.

Behaviours

Writers:

- use a small range of familiar forms of writing, such as letters, stories, recipes, lists
- often write about personal events — holidays, pets or something that has happened to them
- write in sentences that may or may not have correct punctuation
- use words such as 'and then' a lot
- use words that have a special meaning and may be part of the child's everyday world — from television, books, playground games etc.
- may begin to make simple corrections but may be overwhelmed if asked to correct writing of which they are very proud
- attempt to use some punctuation, such as full stops, capital letters, question marks
- start to use the language they have heard from books, films or television, such as *Once in a galaxy, far, far away ...*
- sometimes write on the same topic or use the same beginnings for sentences again and again
- talk with others to plan and revise their own writing
- re-read their writing to check whether it makes sense
- provide details and description in writing
- show eagerness to complete their writing

Ways to help your child in this phase:

Be sure to praise your child's every writing effort. Ignore misspelt words for the time being and focus on the message.

When your child writes a special card or letter, encourage him or her to write it out on scrap paper first, talk about it with you, and then write it very carefully on the card or new paper. This helps the child to see that people think carefully when they write.

Ask your child to write your shopping list as you dictate it. Tell him or her later how important the list was while you were shopping.

Talk about the writing your child does at school.

Encourage your child to write using a computer if one is available.

When reading books with your child, point out some interesting ways different print is used in stories.

Point out 'speech balloons' when they appear in print and discuss why they look the way they do.

Read what your child writes and discuss it. Point out the difference between writing a careful letter or story and writing a note or quick list.

A chalkboard can be helpful for some writers since they can erase and start again with ease. This is especially true in a play situation.

Help your child to make a diary. Show what diaries look like and ask whether your child would like to keep one. Help with information about certain dates and holidays and encourage your child to write a little each day.

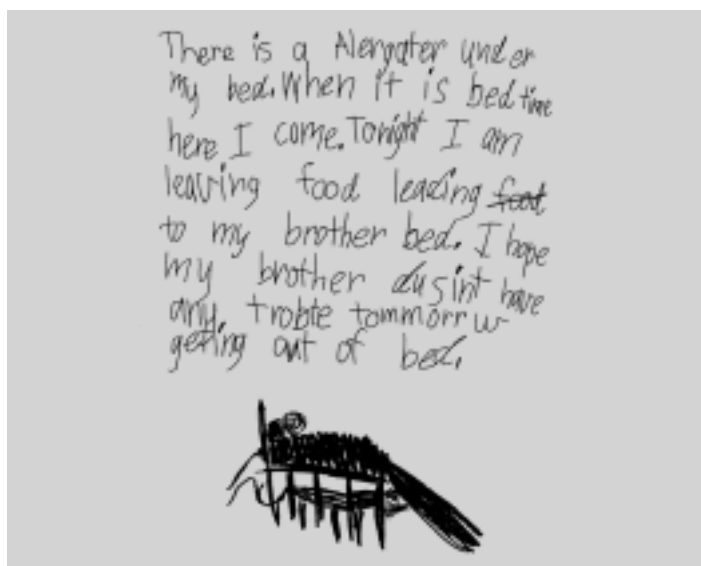
Introduce your child to easy-to-read dictionaries. Show how to use a dictionary and encourage him or her to recite the alphabet while searching for a word.

Read to your child every day. Look for interesting nonfiction as well as a wide range of fiction.

Play word games, such as Scrabble and simple crossword puzzles which can be found in magazines and some educational comics.

Cook with your child. Ask the child to read the recipes and perhaps write a recipe that you can make together.

Let your child make a list of things needed or wanted for his or her room, the house, the garage or garden.



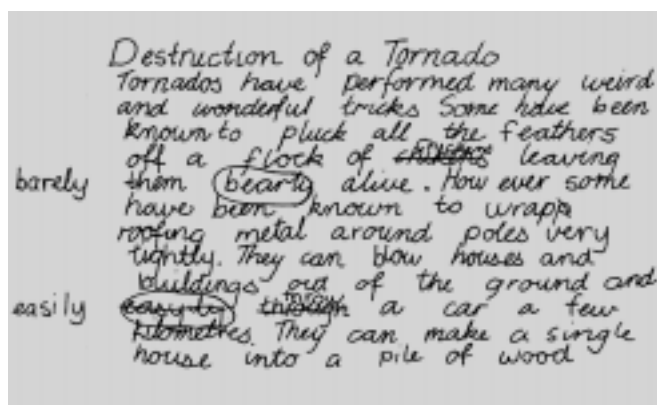
Phase D Conventional Writing

In this phase writers know most of the basic elements of the writing process. They are able to choose different types of writing to suit different purposes. Their control of structure, punctuation and spelling may vary when they are engaged in a difficult writing task.

Behaviours

Writers:

- use different forms of writing to suit different purposes, such as an explanation in social studies, an experiment in science, a procedure in mathematics
- show knowledge of other texts and use it to provide models for writing
- plan before starting to write
- show awareness of needs of the reader and include background information
- start to use headings and subheadings to organise their writing
- use information from their reading in writing, such as using notes from an encyclopaedia for a project
- group sentences that contain related information into paragraphs
- link ideas together to form a logical piece of writing
- vary sentences in length, organisation and complexity
- select vocabulary appropriate to specific curriculum areas
- proofread and edit their own work reasonably well
- enjoy having fun with language — for example *What's a snake that does sums? An adder.*
- begin to adjust vocabulary according to audience — for example, when writing a story for young children, they use less complex vocabulary than they would in a story for adults



Ways to help your child in this phase:

Comment positively about your child's writing efforts at every opportunity.

Realise that the writer is learning rapidly at this stage and may seem to forget to use skills previously used. This is quite normal, and a gentle reminder is usually all that is necessary.

Have dictionaries available that can be used easily by the child.

If you have a computer, look for programs that involve reading, spelling and other language-related activities.

Ask to read the reports and stories that your child writes at school, or ask your child to read them to you. Show appreciation by talking about the subject matter of the writing.

Encourage your child to keep a diary or make collections of favourite poems or sayings.

Investigate new authors and titles with your child at the library and in bookshops.

Encourage your child to organise a library to include his or her projects and 'published' stories.

Suggest that your child write letters to people for different reasons: contact with grandparents; thankyou cards for gifts; apologies for not being able to attend a party.

Encourage your child to read newspapers, selected magazines and books.

If your child is working on a project, look for creative ways of presenting information. Show your child different heading and subheading styles, and how graphs, tables and charts can be used to illustrate information.

Take time with your child to search for information by using indexes, chapter headings etc.

Make sure your child has enough space to work on projects and to write comfortably.