

5 Ways to Establish a Culture of Writing in Preschool

Teachers can create a writing-rich environment that encourages young learners' playful marks and inventive spelling.

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So much of what we do every single day starts with writing. Your grocery list, texts, emails, and every lesson plan have to be written. Even this introduction was scribbled, drafted, and finally polished on the computer at my dining table. It all started the first time I picked up a pencil. Someone looked at those first brave attempts at letters and encouraged me to keep going. That someone was most likely my parent or a preschool teacher.

For preschool students, writing doesn't begin with neat sentences or perfect spelling. It starts much earlier in moments that hold great meaning, deserve celebration, and set the stage for future success.

The Steps of Early Writing

Drawing and scribbling approximations. At around age 3, children understand that circles, lines, and swirls can become letters. Making these marks shows that children have a story to tell (they know what their marks "say").

String letters and letter-like forms. These early experiments mimic [the shape of writing](#).

Inventive spelling. Children begin to grasp basic phonics.

Transitional writing. Children start to comprehend correct spelling.

Conventional writing. Children create complete sentences and eventually paragraphs, where meaning becomes clear to others (starting at least in first grade).

As teachers, you don't just witness the evolution of early writing—you shape it. When you validate a child's scribbles as "real writing," or when you provide tools and encouragement, you send a powerful message: Your words matter. Those moments become the foundation for everything that follows.

It's also important to remember that formal handwriting lessons don't begin until first grade. In preschool, teachers should model how to print correctly, without requiring perfection. If writing feels like a test, children quickly sense that they'll fail—and at this age, that discourages them from even trying. Allowing approximations keeps the focus on exploration and confidence.

So, how do we turn classrooms into writing-rich environments? Here are five actionable steps that you can add to your classroom now.

1. Stock the Room with Tools

Keep writing supplies within children's reach. Have pens, pencils, markers, paper of all sizes and colors, sticky notes, scissors, glue, stickers, and paints in accessible areas. When tools are accessible whenever kids want or need to engage with them, writing feels like a natural part of play instead of a separate activity.

2. Embed Writing in Classroom Play

I've layered writing into familiar activities to seamlessly add this essential skill into the day.

Daily sign-in sheets: Leave space for children to sign in on their own next to their printed name.

Children can find their name and start writing at least the first letter in any form. This gives teachers an idea of where each child is in printing and writing ability. Most can copy what they've seen written, but any attempt is respected. One letter at a time, with letterlike forms.

Play centers: Encourage writing in areas of the classroom where you host imaginative play. For example, at the "restaurant" or "market," have children create the signage, products, and menus with drawings and attempts at letters. Encouraging children to use familiar logos, food labels, etc., reinforces the connection between print and real life. In the block area, provide sticky notes for labeling the streets or buildings they've set up.

Science and math areas: Provide clipboards with paper so children can record their observations and sketch discoveries.

3. Make Writing Interactive and Collaborative

It's important to find ways, as a group, to stop and write about experiences. The following procedures or points in the daily schedule are great opportunities for collaborative writing.

Morning meeting: When sharing the day's plans on the whiteboard, offer your marker for children to join in writing a letter or a word. Ask for a volunteer to come up and circle a sight word (*in, the, to*) or find and circle the letter *t* three times. Children can also reference a sight (instant) word chart for ideas.

Classroom rulemaking: Work with students to create rules for areas like the library. When children help write the rules, they feel ownership of the space and the behavior. These can adjust as time passes, indicating the children's experiences.

Shared experiences: After a walk, playground time, or experiment, start off by writing about what happened on a large easel paper. Invite children to come up and share in the writing with a letter or a word or punctuation.

4. Connect Writing to Literature

Try this writing project based on *Snowmen at Night*, written by Caralyn Buehner and illustrated by Mark Buehner.

First, children paint their own snowmen. All children can invent-write descriptions of their painting with a sentence, a phrase, or a couple of words. Next, ask the whole class, “How did these snowmen paintings come to be?” As children share their answers, write down their responses on a large sheet of paper and hang them up near the paintings.

To help children get some practice writing, they can create a sequel to the *Snowmen at Night*. Ask them, “What will happen tomorrow night?” and invite students to share the pen. They can write at the easel or on a write-and-wipe board. If a child wants to write their own next story, they can do that on paper with your support. Students can write in groups or individually, with the goal of extending the activity. They’ll get the most out of a quality book, and they’ll be creating.

I’ve had countless classrooms doing this project with this book and many others. Preschool students are incredibly creative given the attention. When they see writing being modeled, then they can join in as well as be independent with print—letters, words, and eventually short sentences.

5. Encourage Free Writing All Day Long

Provide baskets of paper or journals (with space for pictures and words) for children to use anytime. In my experience, I’ve seen that journals are safe places to capture personal stories, weekend memories, or an activity.

For a hesitant child, you can spark ideas with questions like “What do you like to do on the playground?” or “What did you notice about the rain yesterday?”

Nurture Skill Development Through Consistency

The most important thing to remember about these tips is that early writing develops level by level with time, attention, and consistency. Daily opportunities to explore and play with print are critical for preschool students. By implementing these tips, you’ll nurture students’ creativity as they begin to write stories and learn how to communicate meaning. Their language development and vocabulary will improve as they practice. Additionally, their critical thinking skills will broaden as they explore sequencing and how stories evolve. Perhaps most important, children will experience increased confidence as they see that their ideas and writing attempts are valued.

Writing starts small for young children, but it quickly grows into a powerful tool for communication. When you celebrate those early steps and provide opportunities to play and practice, preschool students see themselves as writers.