

## Advice for Early Writers

We've been asked some questions about encouraging early writers. It's difficult to give one answer for all children. Some are just at the point of forming letter shapes where as others might be writing a few sentences.

Here are some tips:

In school we use a few things to support all of the children. You should have had these in your learning pack.

- A sheet to guide children in the correct letter formation – with a red spot for the starting point and a small arrow to remind them which way to take the pencil
- A phonic mat giving all of the graphemes (letters), digraphs (two letters that make one sound) and trigraphs (three letters that make one sound) and for phase 2 and 3. . So far we have only taught the first set of single letter sounds and the digraphs.
- A tricky word sheet – these are words that are used frequently but can't always be spelled phonetically.

So, if you child is mark making – just testing out the letter forms – let them experiment with different tools (pens, pencils, crayons, paintbrushes) and different media (water, paint, in sand, soil, flour, rice, different papers, shaving foam – the list is as long as your imagination!) and different positions (standing at a wall, lying on our tummies, lying on our backs under a table). It's as much about developing the joint and muscle movement as it is learning the sounds and letters.

If you child can identify and relate sounds they can begin to form words. At the beginning they may only be able to hear a few sounds in words – most likely the consonants. That's ok – just get them to write the sounds they can hear. As they understand the relationship between letter and sound you can encourage them to slow down and sound out a word to find the sounds before they begin to write – ask them how many sounds they heard. Start with the CVC (consonant vowel consonant) words – eg. cat, sit, pat etc. Single syllable words are obviously easier.

Going on, the children will be writing sentences. They will initially only be able to learn the sounds we have learned so far. (see the phonic mat) However, there are some sounds that have several ways to write them. So they might write 'plai' if we have just learned the 'ai' sound, but not its alternative spelling 'ay'. Also you might find them writing things like 'bizee' for 'busy'. At this stage we would not expect them to have enough experience of words and language to be able to identify the correct spelling and we would praise a phonetically plausible attempt.

However, and this is where you will know your child best, we need to walk a fine line between correcting and teaching them the correct spelling and not discouraging them from writing. If they are happy and relaxed and find the sounds easily, you could praise them for great sounding out but show them that there is another way to make the sound.

So that's a bit about the mechanics of writing. Now – how do you actually get them to write??!!

The only way really is to make them feel it is purposeful. We do lots of things in school that encourage writing for a purpose.

- We make lists or label pictures
- We draw plans before we do any modelling with labels and lists of materials
- We send messages to each other and to other teachers and classes
- We provide imaginary problems for them to solve
- We write to re-tell stories or to make our own
- We send letters to people to invite them in or thank them