

Developmental Writing Levels

An explanation showing progression through the writing process appropriate for grades 1-5.

LEVEL 1 /DRAWING

After watching others communicate through writing, children develop awareness that they can do the same thing through pictures and symbols.

Characteristics:

- drawing
- lollipops and triangles
- they print own name
- wiggle line
- invented letters

LEVEL 2 /PRINTING

As children learn to print the letters of the alphabet, they use the letters randomly, with pictures, to convey meaning. They also become aware of environmental print.

Characteristics:

- own name letters
- a few memorized words
- child reads back something unrelated to letters
- primarily capitals
- handwriting/printing legible
- copying from walls or books
- random letters for words

LEVEL 3 /INVENTED SPELLING

When children write about their pictures, they begin to use letter/sound correspondence. This ranges from labeling to writing complete sentences.

Characteristics:

- sound/letter correspondence
- vowels in appropriate places
- majority of words are spelled inventively-few recognizable
- child reads back only while writing
- usually one idea or picture labels
- words may be run together
- some lower case letters
- slashes/spaces/dots/dashes
- not readable to others

LEVEL 4 /PRACTICING

When increased reading ability, children become more aware of word structure. Invented spelling becomes more readable and writing is less labored.

Characteristics:

- expanded awareness of phonics
- words are properly spaced
- child reads back at later date
- several ideas on one topic
- invented spelling is more recognizable
- upper and lower case letters, mixed
- others are able to read
- may have a title

LEVEL 5 /SHOW AND TELL

As the physical process of writing becomes easier, children are able to focus more on content. The child's writing imitates their speech patterns and the books they are reading.

Characteristics:

- primarily lower case letters
- vaguely related ideas combined
- many run-on sentences, little punctuation
- sentences do not flow
- repeated sentence patterns
- usually has a title
- mixes tenses

LEVEL 6 /TELLING A STORY

Children begin to make connections, show relationship, and develop sequences. For the first time, sentences express ideas that flow from one to another.

Characteristics:

- a shift toward standard spelling
- tells a story, beginning, middle, end
- some correct sentence punctuation
- 5 to 8 story sequence, dawn to dusk stories
- compound sentences
- little detail or elaboration
- dimensions of topic limited
- connection or flow between sentences

LEVEL 7 /FOCUSING

Because children become aware of audience, they see the need to focus on an interesting aspect of their topic. The writing expands to include detail and explanation.

Characteristics:

- larger percent of standard spelling
- complex sentences (clauses)
- correct sentences and punctuation
- consistent tenses
- no paragraphs (or incorrect)
- beginning of story more developed than end
- awareness of audience
- focused narratives
- all information is on topic
- may have summarizing title
- detail and explanation included
- may have one sentence conclusion
- may include dialogue

LEVEL 8 /ORGANIZING

Children master the standard conventions and mechanics of writing. As a result the content becomes more focused and more interesting.

Characteristics:

- mechanics enhance meaning
- correct paragraphing
- some descriptive words
- loosely developed organization plan based on sequence. categories
- cause and effect information
- one sentence conclusion
- whole story is told
- few grammatical errors
- dialogue punctuated correctly

LEVEL 9 /AFFECTING AN AUDIENCE

Children become aware of the power of writing to engage an audience. They manipulate the form of the writing to enhance the content.

Characteristics:

- chapter books, longer narratives
- ability to use second or third person voice
- sentences with varied structure, varied length
- variety compatible with the story line
- personal reaction to events
- background information
- smooth transition between dialogue and text
- engages the reader
- descriptive phrases

LEVEL 10 /BEING AN AUTHOR

As children expand their awareness of literary techniques, they begin to develop a personal writing style.

Characteristics:

- conditional information (if-then)
- figurative language/imaginative verb
- complex treatment of time: use of flashback, non-linear narration
- synthesizing conclusion
- introspection
- dialogue accurately reflect character and situation