

Dictation and Writing



Why take dictation?

Writing is a representation of talking; however, it is imperfect because it is difficult to show pitch, tone, emphasis, and juncture in writing. But writing is more permanent than talking and can be used over and over. Refined writing represents communication with word order and patterns that are not characteristic of spontaneous expression.

Young children are constantly discovering how the writing process works and soon understand the relationship between reading and writing. They are better able to read something they have dictated or scribbled than something another person has composed and written—probably because the children know what they were trying to say and the writing is important to them.

Writing should be considered a natural part of communication and used as often as possible in connection with oral language. At this point, emphasis is placed on the creative aspects of writing, not on the mechanical conventions of writing. The children will learn through experience that writing and speaking are different, and as they need the mechanics and standards of writing for clarity, they will learn them.

How do I encourage and take dictation?

There are many procedures for helping children bridge the gap from talking to writing to reading; however, there are a few essential elements in the process.

- Encourage children to generate stories, poems, and captions about things, ideas, and events that are important to them. You might begin by having the children draw or paint a picture.
- Talk with the children as you look at the painting. Ask questions that will cause them to name things; tell how they move, describe color, size, texture, sound, taste; express feelings. *Do not write anything until you and the children have talked.*
- Decide whether to use labels or whether the child can create a story that contains some structure. If the goal is a group story, let the children tell the entire story before you begin writing. If the children are writing individual stories, you can usually achieve the desired goal by writing only one or two things.
- As you write, talk so the children can hear you. As you talk, you can point out elements of writing, such as the letters of the alphabet represent sounds people say; letters have names; we use the same letters over and over.
- Sometimes it will be appropriate to help a child choose alternative language. You might want to say what the child said, offer an alternative, and let the child choose.
- Read what you have written to check that what you wrote is what the child said. You might want to have the child read with you. Over time ask the child to point out and name some words and progress to asking the child to repeat whole sentences. Do not expect exact replication. The major goal at this point is to develop a growing awareness of the reading and writing processes.

What can I do with dictated stories?

- Display the illustrations with dictation attached. Invite the children to tell about their illustrations or “read” the dictation. Read some of the statements in unison. Model reading with appropriate phrasing, tone, pitch, and emphasis.
- Ask the children to identify obvious language characteristics, such as words that are the same; words that begin alike; words that end alike; words with capital letters; and rhyming words. Limit the categories to one or two at a time.
- Collect words that appear five or more times and write them on a “Words We Use” chart. The chart can be a resource as children write on their own.
- Duplicate stories and bind them into books so that each child has his/her own storybooks.

What should I do to encourage children to write independently?

- Establish a writing center in the classroom. This will be a place where children can experiment with writing. Encourage children to “Write it the best you can” or “Write it your way.” In this way, a writing center gives children opportunities to compose and to try out different ways of encoding messages. A writing center is *not* the place for direct instruction of any kind, including handwriting instruction or spelling instruction. Direct instruction belongs in other contexts. Children need opportunities to invent their own developmentally appropriate ways of writing. They also need many opportunities to write so they will be at ease with writing. The writing center can fulfill both of these needs because it is a place where children can write freely and with the intention of communicating ideas to others.
- Let each child keep a writing folder—a collection of one or two pieces of writing that he/she does each week. A writing folder gives the child the sense that he/she is an author. The writing folder is also a valuable diagnostic tool for you, enabling you to see development in composing and spelling abilities. Finally, a writing folder is an excellent tool to use in parent conferences because it gives parents concrete examples of the child’s progress.
- When children first indicate an interest in writing independently, they often begin scribbling. This is a natural part of learning to write and you should encourage it.
- As children continue to experiment with writing, they might write using strings of letters that have no phonetic relationship to the words being encoded (e.g., NTCFTEACHKOB for “My New Year’s resolution is that I won’t fight with my friend any more”). They might use invented spellings that depict parts of words (IWTCAPDB for “I want to see a panda bear”). Or they might use full invented spellings (I LIK RAN BOS BE KUS THA ARE COLOR FOOL for “I like rainbows because they are colorful”). Each of these ways of writing is a natural part of the developmental process of writing and each is a typical strategy used by four- and five-year-olds. These strategies should be accepted and encouraged.
- Attach two or more illustrations to the chalkboard, leaving space for writing. Let the children compose at the chalkboard. One or two words is a good beginning. When the children are relatively comfortable with their writing, read the chalkboard stories to a small group. Let the children suggest changes or improvements. The author can copy on sentence strips his/her story with the edits that are important to him/her. Then you can hang the sentence strips with the illustrations.

- Some children will find it helpful to use “Words We Use” charts, picture dictionaries, and alphabet cards to make words and sentences.
- Provide blank books with substantial covers for children to use for their edited stories. The author can read the stories to the class or place them in the classroom library for other children to read. The author can help other children with words they don’t recognize.
- Encourage the children to share their writing. Informal sharing can take place in the writing center. For more formal sharing, you might have the children read their writing to each other in an activity such as Author of the Week, Author’s Chair, or Author’s Corner. Each week choose a child as author. That child selects three pieces from his/her writing folder that he/she likes best. Display these pieces for the rest of the class. On Friday the author reads selected pieces to the rest of the group. Then everyone can discuss the author’s work.
- Handwriting can be done in conjunction with dictated captions or stories. To help children with their handwriting, record dictated captions or stories very lightly in pencil. Then the child can trace over them. Or record dictations and leave space below them for copying.