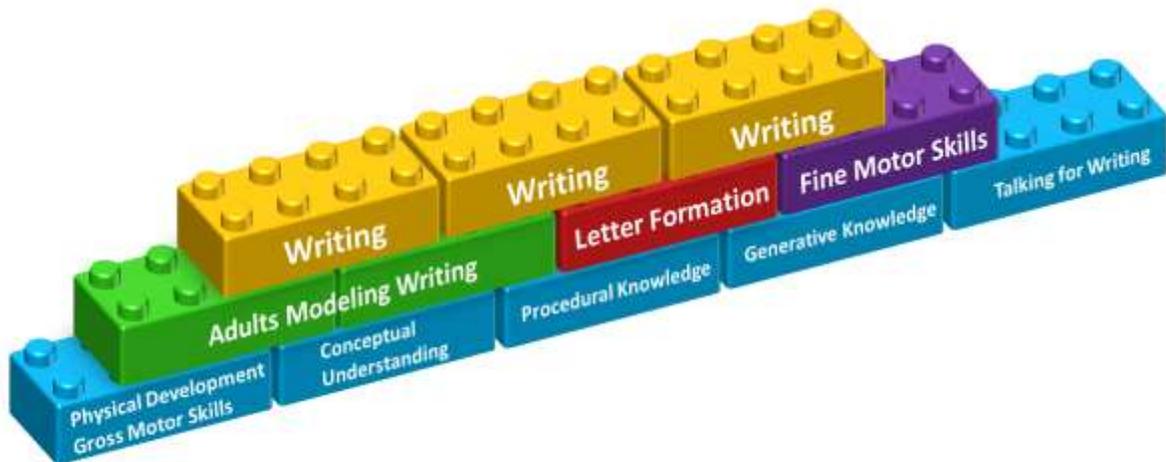


Becoming a writer – a guide for parents

The building blocks of writing



Becoming a writer is a developmental process. The foundation - the building blocks of physical development and understanding must be in place first. If children miss parts of this developmental process, the gaps become barriers to their learning – they might worry about being right, they might struggle to link sounds to letters, they might lose confidence. None of us want this for our children!

This guide aims to lead you through the different building blocks as well as giving you some practical ideas to try at home. As always, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact either Mrs Moody or Mrs McLarty.

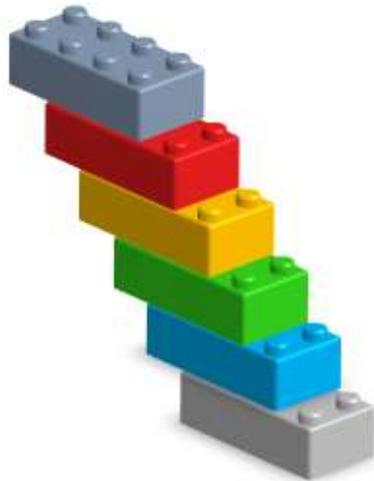
Physical development – Gross motor skills

Children need strength in the following areas in order to be able to write:

- shoulder muscles. Children need full movement of their shoulders and need activities to strengthen back, upper arm and shoulder muscles.
How you can help at home - spaces to play, sweep, dig and climb.
- elbow pivot muscles. Children need their elbow to bend.
How you can help at home - large circular movements, washing the car, drawing on large surfaces, cleaning windows, mixing and stirring.
- wrist muscles.
How you can help at home - smaller surfaces, threading and weaving.
- core strength. Children need sufficient core strength in order to be able to sit and write.
How you can help at home - climbing, monkey bars, exercise, yoga, instead of sitting encourage your children to lie down on the floor, supporting their heads with elbows on the floor

Cognitive understanding - the sequence of writing development

Sequence of writing development



Babies making patterns in food.

Early attempts at mark making – random marks on different surfaces, usually with a fist like grip.

A definite attempt at individual marks.
Combines shapes and lines.
Makes marks going across the page using zig zags and wavy lines.

Becomes aware that drawing and writing are different and that print carries a message.
Makes individual marks and may use some letters from child's own name.

The child forms recognisable familiar letters. They are aware that writing conveys meaning.

The child is using their phonic knowledge to convey simple sentences. Children often start off by being able to write the beginning and end letters and then progress to being able to write beginning, end and medial sounds.

How you can help at home - one of the most valuable things that you can do as a parent, is to praise your child at each stage in their development, display their work and read your child's writing with them. These are not scribbles – "tell me more about your picture and your writing. Can you read it to me?" are useful questions. If your child has written a list or a card, make sure you send/post it or use it for its intended purpose.

Playing rhyming games, I spy, listening games etc. will all help develop phonetic knowledge. A meaningful print rich environment (alphabets, appropriate labels (not for everything!), reading the back of cereal packets) at home will also help with this.

Talking for writing

Vocabulary

Children need to learn the vocabulary associated with books and writing. They need to learn that print is different from pictures and that it is read from left to right. We can teach this by talking to children as we read books. There are many words associated with the mechanics of writing that children need to learn. For example, curved, straight, top, bottom, left and right.

Children need to be able to hear sounds. Reading and singing rhymes and rhyming books will help develop this. It is important to teach pure sounds.

This is a useful video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqhXUW_v-1s

Children also need to learn a rich vocabulary in order to become successful writers (and readers). Research shows that children need 15,000-20,000 words to read children's literature successfully. Think about the language children have already absorbed! If children can learn dinosaur names, then the sky is the limit! Aim high. Read books to your children at a higher level than they could themselves and explain new vocabulary, because books don't always give context to words. Don't assume the children know what you are talking about. You don't know what they don't know.

Writing structure

To become writers, children need to understand the structure of writing. Re-telling stories and making up stories with children is paramount to their understanding of language.

Physical development - Fine motor skills

Once the gross motor skills are developed we can work on fine motor skills in order to encourage children to hold their pencil in a tripod grip. Children need to be able to use a pincer grip, move their fingers in isolation and use opposing thumbs.

How you can help at home -tearing and scrunching paper, opening packets, kneading bread and manipulating playdoh. Singing finger rhymes that involve fingers in isolation (Ruby Ring, Two Little Dicky Birds etc.).

Physical development – Hand eye co-ordination and bi-lateral co-ordination.

Children need to be able to follow lines and their pencil on the paper in order to be able to write. They need to be able to operate both sides of their body independently (bi-lateral co-ordination).

How you can help at home – ball games, throwing and catching, target throwing, following a balloon or chasing bubbles.

Modelling writing

In today's digital age it is increasingly important that children see writing and that we as adults model writing. Talking out loud as you write a shopping list, letter or card is very important.

Celebrate every effort...find new reasons for writing...scoring and making tallies, mark making to support counting, warning signs (wet floor, don't let the dog out, put your wellies here...anything that links to what they are doing.

Letter formation

Once all of the physical and cognitive building blocks are in place we can start looking at letter formation. This must only be when children are ready. Asking a child to perform an activity that they physically can't do (like colour in between the lines) will damage their confidence and impact on their desire to write.

In Reception we follow the RWI phonics programme and teach letter formation as the children are taught each new sound. We use handwriting mnemonics and practice constantly in a variety of different ways. We teach the children how to write lower case letters first.

It is a delicate balance between correcting letter formation and allowing children to see themselves as writers.

How to help at home - It often helps to separate out the practice of letter formation and writing at first so that children aren't discouraged and it is so important to continue praising your children for writing, even when letter formation isn't fully developed yet. Writing on paper is only one form of practising writing. Drawing in mud, outside with chalk, in custard powder or in bubbles in the bath are other fun ways.

How we support your children at St Teresa's

A range of activities to develop the correct physical skills at the right time.

Working in close partnership with PE teachers to ensure relevant skills are developed in PE lessons as well as in the classroom. Physical activities embedded in all that we do.

A wide variety of surfaces and tools and meaningful opportunities to explore mark making (not just paper and pencil) both inside and outside.

Continuous assessment to ensure the right skills are being developed at the right time.

In Reception, building on the skills developed in Pre-School, we continue to provide a variety of activities to develop letter formation and opportunities to write for a purpose.



We work hard to support your children at every stage of the writing process and it is important to remember that children develop differently and at different times. Please always ask us if you would like any further information in order to support your children at home.

Eleanor Moody and Abi McLarty