
READY for SCHOOL News: **Stages of Children’s Writing**

Learning to write is a significant developmental milestone in young children’s lives. The typical stages that children’s writing follows are below. The ages accompanying these stages are rough guidelines and vary widely.

1. **Making a mark:** Through experimentation, children discover that the writing instrument they are holding (crayon, marker, pencil) can “make a mark.” Initially, children discover this as they experiment with cause and effect relationships, but later, making marks becomes more purposeful. The “doing” of the mark is more important than the end product to toddlers and twos. This stage includes experimenting with all the different ways to make marks including scribbling, jabbing, marking back and forth, etc. The sheer joy of making marks is the focus. Older infants or young toddlers may experiment with making a mark, but it becomes more deliberate in older toddlers and twos.
2. **Marks have a meaning:** Sometimes unintentionally, children look at the marks they have made and think they look like something. This is the very beginning of deliberate writing – marking for a purpose. Internal questions become “how do I make that again?” Some marks may be designated as pictures, while others the child designates as writing of some sort, ie, “That says “Michael.” The marks may all look the same to adults, but they mean something different to children at the time. Gradually the marks children make for writing begin to look different from the marks used for drawing.
3. **Marks begin to resemble letters:** Children often start first drawing lines or lots of lines next to each other. Or they may draw lines of scribbling vs. circular scribbling. Either way, it begins to more closely resemble letters or even cursive writing. Eventually children move to “mock letters” which resemble letters, but aren’t exactly letters (i.e., an “E with five horizontal line instead of three). This is typical around age four. Mock letters typically contain many of the strokes in real letters – straight lines and curves.
4. **Writing more closely resembles standard letters:** Children come to understand that there are a finite number of letters. Mock letters are less frequently.
5. **Writing includes “mock words”:** Children write standard letters in groupings that resemble words, but aren’t actual words.
6. **Phonemic or Invented Spelling:** Children attempt to write words the way they think they sound. This is typical for many kindergarten age children.

A few ways to encourage children in their writing:

1. Have lots of paper and writing tools freely available.
2. Ask children to tell you about their written work vs. asking them what it is. It may be a drawing, or it may be writing. Asking an open-ended question conveys your respect for their work.
3. Encourage children to tell stories and you can either write down what they say or have them attempt to write it down.

Schickedanz, J. A. & Casbergue, R. M. (2005). *Writing in Preschool: Learning to Orchestrate Meaning and Marks*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association