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Writing Into Literacy: Supporting Young Children's Early Writing

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Crane Center's 10th Symposium on Children
Ohio State University

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Agenda

- Why is early writing important?
- How does early writing develop?
 - Early Writing Framework
- How can I scaffold early writing?
 - Rising Star Scaffolding Guide

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A Variety of Writers in Classrooms

How do I write sun?

What should I say?

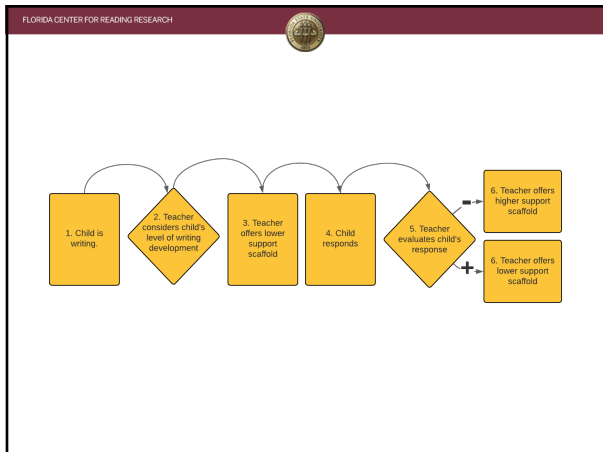
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The Early Writing Framework

Level 1: Drawing & Scribbling	Level 2: Letters & Letter-Like Forms	Level 3: Salient & Beginning Sounds	Level 4: Beginning & Ending Sounds
<p>No understanding of the alphabetic principle</p>	<p>"I love Pennsylvania"</p>	<p>"hop"</p>	<p>"hop"</p>

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WHAT IS EARLY WRITING?

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Writing: A Multi-Dimensional Construct

- **HANDWRITING**
The way in which children *physically produce* the writing
- **COMPOSING**
The *messages* children are trying to convey with their writing
- **SPELLING**
Understandings about *how the writing system works*

Justice, Kaderavek, & Cabell, 2009

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What Is Early Writing?

- We will focus on how children’s knowledge of *how the writing system works (spelling)*
- This is reflected in the ways in which children’s marks get more sophisticated over time
- When we say “early writing” from this point forward, this is what we mean
- Concepts include:
understanding that what we say can be written down, left-to-right directionality, letters correspond to the sounds in language, appropriate sequencing of letters

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WHY IS EARLY WRITING IMPORTANT?

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Early Literacy Skills are Integrated to Help Children Break the Code of Reading

Children begin to understand that oral language is made up of smaller sounds and that letters represent those sounds in a systematic way. This is known as the alphabetic principle.

SOUND KNOWLEDGE (phonological awareness) Read PRINT KNOWLEDGE (alphabet, print concepts)

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Early Writing First Reflects Print Knowledge and Later Reflects Both Print and Sound Knowledge

SOUND KNOWLEDGE PRINT KNOWLEDGE

WRITING

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SUMMARY

- Writing is part of a set of *inter-related* early literacy skills that lay a foundation for “breaking the code” of reading
- At first, writing reflects children’s understandings about *print*
- As children’s early writing develops, they begin to *combine* their knowledge of *print and sound*

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Writing Reflects Understandings About Print

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Writing reflects knowledge of print and sound

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How writing relates to other literacy skills

1. Writing serves as a window into children's literacy knowledge
As children learn more about print and sound, their knowledge is reflected in their writings.
2. Writing helps children's literacy grow
As children engage in writing, they grow in their knowledge of print and sound.

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Writing serves as a window into children's literacy knowledge

- Teachers can **assess** children's understanding of how written language works and the extent to which children are integrating their knowledge of print and sound
- Writing samples can inform teachers of how to help children take the next step in their literacy development by **scaffolding** their writing attempts

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What does this writing tell us about this child's understanding of print and sound?

"I went to the beach."

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What does this writing tell us about this child's understanding of print and sound?

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What does this writing tell us about this child's understanding of print and sound?

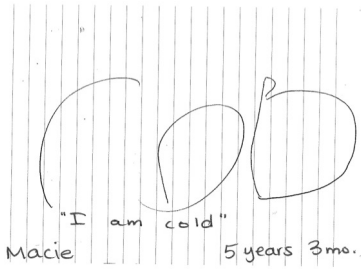


This child's name is Macie.

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Activity: on your own



What does this writing tell you? Quickly write down the first things that come to your mind.

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Writing helps children's literacy grow




- Through engaging in writing, children are like scientists who are **actively forming and revising hypotheses** about how written language works.
- Children's writing can serve as a **springboard** for instruction about print and sound

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HOW DOES EARLY WRITING DEVELOP? THE EARLY WRITING FRAMEWORK







Cabell, S. Q., Tortorelli, L., & Gerde, H. K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 650-659.

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The Early Writing Framework


Level 1: Drawing & Scribbling	Level 2: Letters & Letter-Like Forms	Level 3: Salient & Beginning Sounds	Level 4: Beginning & Ending Sounds
			
No understanding of the alphabetic principle		"I love Pennsylvania"	"hop"

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Drawing & Scribbling


At first, children's drawings are their writings. Then, they begin distinguishing drawing from scribbling. Scribbling changes over time from directionless to moving from left to right.




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Level 1: Drawing & Scribbling



At first, children's drawings are their writings




Scribbling starts as directionless


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Level 1: Drawing & Scribbling (cont'd)




Scribbling moves from left to right



Scribbling moves from left to right and top to bottom

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Goals

Drawing & Scribbling

- To consistently distinguish writing as separate from drawing
- To use individual units or letters while writing

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Katrina: Drawing & Scribbling



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CASE STUDY

Katrina (Drawing & Scribbling):

Current Knowledge	Goals for Learning	Next Steps to Support Writing

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CASE STUDY

Katrina (Drawing & Scribbling):

- **Current Knowledge:** represents writing by drawing, shows directionality when writing name
- **Goal:** to more consistently distinguish writing as separate from drawing
- **Next Steps:** encourage Katrina to add some words with her pictures

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Mrs. Jackson's response

Mrs. Jackson decides to focus on the first goal today and uses the picture book from story time as an example of the difference between pictures and print. "I love your castle, Katrina! Let's look at our book again. Yes, there's a picture of a castle there too! And let me show you one other thing, over here, there is the word *castle*. See, the book tells the story in two ways—in the pictures and in the writing." Mrs. Jackson coaches Katrina to add some scribbles beneath her picture and praises the result—"It looks like the book now!" She then directs Katrina's attention back to the book, highlighting how each word is made up of letters. She focuses on some words that include the letter *k*, the letter most familiar to Katrina.

Cabell, S.Q., Tortorelli, L., & Gerde, H.K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 650-659.

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Mrs. Jackson's response

Going forward, Mrs. Jackson will engage Katrina in a dialogue about her journal entries, over time encouraging her to incorporate familiar letters into her writing. Although Katrina's journal does not at all resemble conventional writing at this point, it is the first step toward making print concrete for Katrina. At this point, Katrina's writing development focuses on increasing her knowledge of print; she is not yet ready to integrate phonological awareness or her letter-sound knowledge into her writing activities.



Cabell, S.Q., Tortorelli, L., & Gerde, H.K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 650-659.

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Appropriate strategies to support writing: drawing & scribbling

- Encourage name writing.
 - sign-in for centers, signing own work
- Include writing during dramatic play.
- Write down the words children speak.







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Letters & Letter-like Forms



Next, children begin to write with letter-like forms and a few letter shapes. They then produce strings of letters that do not correspond to the sounds of the message they are trying to convey. These letters are often letters in their names.

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Level 2: Letters & Letter-Like Forms

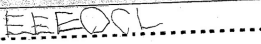


Children use letter-like forms

Children use familiar letters unrelated to the message

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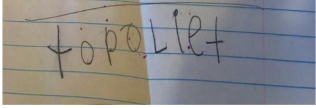
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Level 2: Letters & Letter-Like Forms (cont'd)

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Goals


Letters & Letter-Like Forms

- To write letters with more consistency and variety
- To write the salient sound in a word

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Marvin: Letters & Letter like forms



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CASE STUDY

Marvin (Letters & Letter Like Forms):

Current Knowledge	Goals for Learning	Next Steps to Support Writing

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CASE STUDY

Marvin (Letters & Letter-Like Forms):

- **Current Knowledge:** knows a few letters, can write part of his name, he knows that symbols are associated with writing
- **Goal:** to make connections between print and sounds, particularly the salient or beginning sounds in words
- **Next Steps:** emphasize beginning sounds in a variety of contexts

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Mrs. Jackson's response

When Mrs. Jackson stops by the play center, she praises Marvin: "I like how you wrote your name! Let's write your friends' names on their prescriptions, too!" She then talks to Marvin about the letter *M*—it is the first letter in his name, and the first sound in his name is /m/. They practice saying "/m/, /m/, Marvin" together while pointing to the letter *M*. Then Mrs. Jackson asks Marvin which of his "patients" in the dramatic play center have names that start with /m/. With her support, Marvin identifies Maria and Meredith and writes their names down as *M*s combined with scribbles.

Cabell, S.Q., Tortorelli, L., & Gerde, H.K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 650-659.

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Mrs. Jackson's response

With Mrs. Jackson's direction and support, Marvin is also able to identify the /s/ at the beginning of *Sam* and /l/ at the beginning of *Liz*. In each case, Mrs. Jackson identifies the letter that makes the target sound and helps Marvin write the letter on the prescription.


Marvin is developing an understanding of how letters represent sounds at the beginning of words, a first step toward grasping the alphabetic principle. Going forward, Mrs. Jackson will encourage Marvin to identify beginning and salient sounds and to match those to letters in his writing in play centers and in his journal, embedding this systematic connection in his mind.

Cabell, S.Q., Tortorelli, L., & Gerde, H.K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 650-659.

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Appropriate strategies to support writing: Letters & letter-like forms



- Help children identify and write beginning sounds.
- Brainstorm a list of words that start with the same sound
- Encourage children to write names during play. Draw attention to names starting with the same letter

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Salient & Beginning Sounds

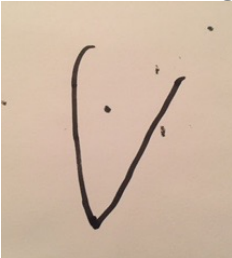
Children begin to represent the salient sounds they hear in the spoken language. Often the beginning sound in a word is the most prominent.

P.
"puppy"


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Level 3: Salient & Beginning Sounds



Children use a salient sound, like "V" for "lava"




Children use the beginning sound in a word, like "D" for "dog"

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Level 3: Salient & Beginning Sounds (cont'd)

IPY LG N



I play with Carson.

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Salient & Beginning Sounds

Goals

- To continue writing more salient sounds heard in longer words
- To write with beginning and ending sounds in a simple word

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Carmen: Salient & Beginning Sounds




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CASE STUDY

Carmen (Salient & Beginning Sounds):

Current Knowledge	Goals for Learning	Next Steps to Support Writing

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Case study

Carmen (Salient & Beginning Sounds):

- **Current Knowledge:** Writes with beginning sounds
- **Goals:** To write with beginning and ending sounds in words
- **Next Steps:** Ask what else she hears. Encourage her to represent additional sounds.

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Mrs. Jackson’s response

Mrs. Jackson looks at the S on Carmen’s paper. “I like the way you wrote down the first sound you heard in the word snake. S-s-s-nake. Great job! Do you hear any other sounds in *snake*? Let’s say the word together and stretch it out.”

As they stretch out the word, Mrs. Jackson emphasizes the final /k/ sound, which Carmen identifies. Mrs. Jackson follows up by asking, “How do you spell [the sound] /k/?” Carmen might choose the letter c, because that letter represents the /k/ at the beginning of her own name.

Cabell, S.Q., Tortorelli, L., & Gerde, H.K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers’ early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 650-659.

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Mrs. Jackson’s response

Carmen settles on the spelling SC, and Mrs. Jackson praises her effort, because Carmen is using the letter-sound correspondences she knows to write based on the sounds she hears within words. During both center and journal time, Mrs. Jackson will encourage Carmen to listen for the final sound in the word and represent that sound in her writing as well as the initial sound.

Cabell, S.Q., Tortorelli, L., & Gerde, H.K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers’ early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 650-659.

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Appropriate strategies to support writing: Salient & Beginning Sounds



- Include writing into play activities such as making labels and signs
- Emphasize ending sounds to help children hear more sounds in a word
- Play games to recognize ending sounds. Start with children’s names

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Beginning & Ending Sounds

Children begin to mark word boundaries by representing beginning and ending sounds of words. At this point, children consistently write with spaces between words. They generally do not represent medial vowel sounds in words.

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Level 4: Beginning & Ending Sounds

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Goals

To solidify beginning and ending sounds of words and syllables

To listen for and include a middle vowel sound in a word

Beginning & Ending Sounds

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Jayden: Beginning & Ending Sounds

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CASE STUDY

Jayden (Beginning & Ending Sounds):

Current Knowledge	Goals for Learning	Strategies to Support Writing

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CASE STUDY

Jayden (Beginning & Ending Sounds):

- **Current Knowledge:** uses beginning and ending sounds, spells some familiar words correctly, uses letter-sound knowledge to write new words
- **Goals:** to include the middle vowel sound
- **Next Steps:** encourage him to listen for the middle vowel by stretching apart the word

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Mrs. Jackson's response

Mrs. Jackson tries to draw Jayden's attention to the vowel sound in simple words. To build on Jayden's spelling of the word *goat* (*GT*), Mrs. Jackson draws a rectangle with three sections, or boxes, on a piece of paper. She writes the letters *G* and *T* in the first and last boxes, respectively. "You wrote two sounds, but there are three. *G* is at the beginning of *goat*; *T* is at the end of *goat*. What do you hear in the middle?"

Cabell, S.Q., Tortorelli, L., & Gerde, H.K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 650-659.

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Mrs. Jackson's response


Mrs. Jackson emphasizes the long /o/ sound. Jayden identifies the sound and writes an O in the middle box, spelling GOT. This spelling represents a step forward in that Jayden is focusing on the medial vowel sound. Moving forward, Mrs. Jackson will support Jayden by continuing to work on both long and short vowel sounds in other simple words.

Cabell, S.Q., Tortorelli, L., & Gerde, H.K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 650-659.

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Appropriate strategies to support writing: Beginning & Ending sounds




- Encourage children to write longer messages
- Encourage children to write down all the sounds they hear in a word
- Stretch out sounds and draw children's attention to the middle sound in words

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What is the next step? Representing Beginning, Middle, and Ending Sounds

Children consistently write with beginning, middle, and ending sounds in words. They may not represent all the sounds in a word. Children use a logical, letter-name strategy to write vowel sounds. They may not represent the middle sound correctly.



"bop"

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A word about name-writing development

- When children write their names, they use a different strategy than when they write other words
- Children remember their names as pictures and do not sound them out
- Name-writing development, while similar to the development of other words, is not exactly the same

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Name-Writing and Invented Spelling

Name-Writing	Often the first stable string of letters children write.	Invented Spelling	Children begin to represent sounds in writing when they are beginning to grasp the alphabetic principle. They are parsing oral language.
	Children view names as logograms. Thus they may know how to write many letters in their names but not have a grasp of the alphabetic principle.		To invent spellings, children rely on their knowledge of both print (e.g., alphabet knowledge) and sound (e.g., beginning sound knowledge).
	To write their names, children generally rely on print knowledge only.		

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Review: The Early Writing Framework

Level 1: Drawing & Scribbling	Level 2: Letters & Letter-Like Forms	Level 3: Salient & Beginning Sounds	Level 4: Beginning & Ending Sounds
			
No understanding of the alphabetic principle		"I love Pennsylvania"	"hop"

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Consider the Samples Collectively

"Jingle Bells"

Three names

Aerin doctor sleep

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Activity

Work with a partner and look at all the samples for a single child.

Do you agree with the level selected?
What is a next step in supporting this child?

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SCAFFOLDING LEARNING

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How do I write *sun*?

What should I say?

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What do we know about scaffolding in the classroom?

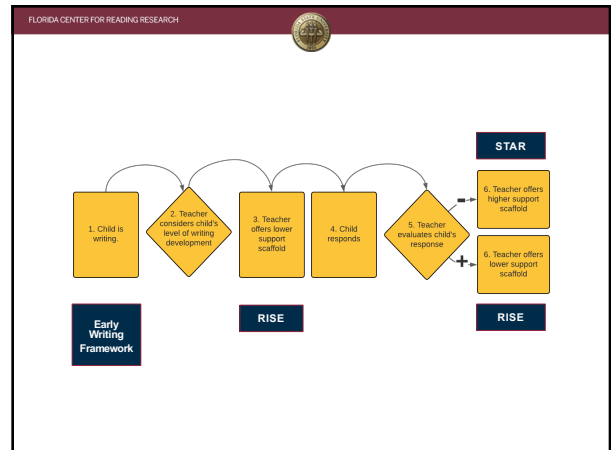
Teachers do differentiate scaffolds.

Teacher use a limited repertoire of scaffolding strategies with children.

In the context of writing, teachers tend to use higher support scaffolding strategies more often than lower support strategies.

Copp, Cabell, & Invernizzi, 2019; Gerde & Bingham, 2012; Henderson et al., 2002; Pentimonti & Justice, 2010

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Early Writing Scaffolding Strategies

RISE (Lower Support Scaffolds): Teacher Effort (top) / Student Effort (bottom)

STAR (Higher Support Scaffolds): Teacher Effort (top) / Student Effort (bottom)

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Lower Support Scaffolds

- Reasoning** You wrote the letter "T", what word are you making with the letter "T"?
- Information** Stretch out the word.
- Sequencing** What is the first word you are going to write?
- Encouragement** You made the "s" for slide!

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STAR

1. Child is writing

2. Teacher considers child's level of writing development

3. Teacher offers lower support scaffold

4. Child responds

5. Teacher evaluates child's response

6. Teacher offers higher support scaffold

6. Teacher offers lower support scaffold

RISE

Early Writing Framework

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Higher Support Scaffolds

- Showing** I hear a /c/ in cookie, so I will write a C.
- Tools** Lines for writing, putting up fingers for words in sentences
- Asking** Let's think, what sound do you hear first in /h/ippo? I hear an /h/. What letter makes the /h/ sound?
- Reducing** R says /rr/. Do you see how my lips change "points to mouth" /mmm/ my lips are together, r says /rr/ my lips are apart. So I'm going to give you two choices. Is /mmm/ made by the letter M or F?

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Teacher: What are you writing?
Juliet: I am writing about my mom.

Teacher: You heard /m/ and I did too! What letter makes the /m/ sound? (Asking) Let's look on the alphabet chart. (Tools) Is it M or A? (Reducing Choices)

Juliet: I hear /m/.

Teacher: Okay, the first thing we do when writing a word is think about the sound that we hear. What is the first sound you hear in mom? (Sequencing)

STAR

1. Child is writing

2. Teacher considers child's level of writing development

3. Teacher offers lower support scaffold

4. Child responds

5. Teacher evaluates child's response

6. Teacher offers higher support scaffold

6. Teacher offers lower support scaffold

RISE

Early Writing Framework

Level 1: Showing	Level 2: Letters & Sounds	Level 3: Letters & Sounds	Level 4: Sequencing

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T: "Can you read me what you are writing so far?"
S: pointing with pencil "shark boy and lava girl"

Teacher: You wrote a V for lava. (Encouragement) What other sounds do you hear in lava, /l/-/v/a/? (Sequencing)

Teacher: What's the next word you are writing? (Sequencing) Remember to stretch it out and write all of the sounds that you hear (Information).

STAR

1. Child is writing

2. Teacher considers child's level of writing development

3. Teacher offers lower support scaffold

4. Child responds

5. Teacher evaluates child's response

6. Teacher offers higher support scaffold

6. Teacher offers lower support scaffold

RISE

Early Writing Framework

Level 1: Showing	Level 2: Letters & Sounds	Level 3: Letters & Sounds	Level 4: Sequencing

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Activity

Work with a partner and look at all the samples for a single child.

Use the STAR and RISE tables to select a low support and a high support scaffold for the student based on level of development.

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Answering a Child's Questions

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Review

- Early writing is **important** because it helps children integrate their knowledge of print and sound
- Early writing **develops** in a predictable way – children begin with drawing and scribbling, and their writing becomes more sophisticated over time
- The Rising Star Scaffolding Guide can be a tool to **scaffold** children's early writing

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THANK YOU!

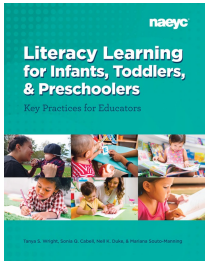
<https://www.readingrockets.org/article/how-do-i-write-scaffolding-preschoolers-early-writing-skills>

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Resources



[Literacy Learning for Infants, Toddlers, & Preschoolers](#)

- Wright, Cabell, Duke, & Souto-Manning
- Published by NAEYC

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Resources

Cabell, S. Q. (2019). *Writing into literacy: Why early writing matters (Selected Speaker)*. TEDx FSU Conference, Florida State University. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNjwxyzmCE0>

Cabell, S. Q., *Tortorelli, L. S., & Gerde, H. K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 650-659. <https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/preschool-and-child-care/articles/how-do-i-write-scaffolding-preschoolers-early-writing>

Copp, S. B., Cabell, S. Q., Gabas, C., *Slik, D., & *Todd, J. (2023). The Rising Star scaffolding guide: Supporting young children's early writing skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 76(4), 380-389. (special issue) <https://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/trtr.2156>

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