

Before I Write . . .

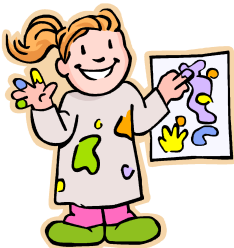
Before a child is able to write, he must be physically ready. In order to use the small muscles in the hand that are required to hold a pencil, the large muscles in the hand and shoulder must be developed. The most important thing you can do to help your child build coordination for writing is to provide ample opportunities to use both small and large muscles. That means plenty of running, cutting, scribbling, painting, and pasting. It is only after your child has developed these muscles that he will be able to coordinate his eye and hand movements.

A child is ready for writing when he:

- Can draw and color beyond scribbling.
- Can pay attention and imitate.
- Can follow simple instructions.
- Understands *up* and *down*, *start* and *stop*, *big* and *little*.
- Is able to sit and work for brief periods.
- Shows an interest in writing.

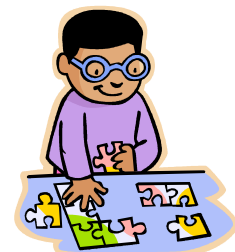
Formal writing instruction is usually not appropriate for young children, though many pre-writing activities can be provided.

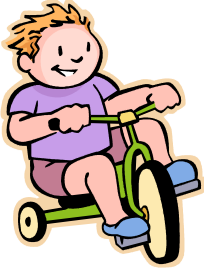
1-2 Year Olds Can: pick up small pieces of cereal off the highchair tray; put objects into a cup or container; put a simple shape into a shape box; climb over a stack of soft pillows; pull a wagon; push a large ball.



2-3 Year Olds Can: string large beads; put together a simple puzzle; pound playdough; scribble on a piece of paper using a short stubby crayon; catch a large ball; chase a ball and roll on it.

3-4 Year Olds Can: cut fringes on the edge of paper with scissors; string beads; put puzzles together; play in water; empty and pour cups of water; play in sand; ride a tricycle; throw a ball; catch a ball; run; and climb up a ladder to slide.





4-5 Year Olds Can: string small beads; lace shoes; button buttons; zip zippers; paste; cut; put together puzzles; swing; dribble a basketball; ride a scooter; build with blocks; do finger plays. They can be shown how to hold a pencil correctly and draw straight lines, curves, and circles.

5 Year Olds Can: draw; color within a line; write the letters in their name; draw around cookie cutters and stencils; skip; learn finger plays and dance routines; throw a ball overhand, underhand, near and far; catch a medium-sized ball; and play hopscotch.



What Can YOU Do to Help Your Child to Write?

- Let your child see you writing. Make grocery lists, write thank-you notes and love letters, and pay the bills. When your child sees you writing, he will learn that writing is important.
- Write *with* your child. Even the youngest child can write (or scribble) a thank-you note or letter to a friend.
- Label objects, toys, or clothing with your child's name. It will make him feel important, while showing him that writing serves a purpose.
- Make "signs." During your child's play, make signs to designate her block structure as a "farm," to label items for her pretend grocery store or restaurant, and direct toy vehicles to "stop" or "slow down."
- Write down your child's made-up story about a picture he drew or scene he created during play. Write down word for word his ideas, prompting when necessary to help him expand those ideas. *"What happened next?" "Tell me more about what the character did."*
- Label bins or containers of toys. Add a photo of the toy so that your child connects the word with the item.
- Write down "house rules" and post where your child can see them or you can refer to as necessary.