

Competency 3: Language

Skill 1: Identify and evaluate the developmental stages of writing (e.g., drawing, dictating, writing).

Introduction

The stages of the developmental stages are fluid. Students move from preliterate drawing and scribbling, to early emergent where they make letter-like forms, emergent where they make random-letters or letter strings, transitional where they write using inventive spelling, and eventually find themselves fluent writers using conventional spelling. The stages are the cornerstone of writing.

Developmental Stages of Writing

As you will learn, the developmental stages of writing are rather fixed. However, researchers have renamed, merged, and expanded the stages over time. What may have appeared in your textbooks as drawing, dictating and writing, have expanded into more robust terms. Therefore, for this purpose, we will settle upon the following developmental stages of writing: drawing, scribbling, letter like symbols, strings in letter, beginning sounds emerge, consonants represent words, initial, middle and final sounds, transitional, and standard spelling.

When a student draws, he believes that his images represent writing and that they convey messages with these drawings. Furthermore, if asked, they can “read” their drawings as they would a text. This is no surprise, since students see this modeled repeatedly when their teachers, parents, and caregivers read picture books to them. In picture books, there are no words, thus teachers “read” the pictures to tell the story of the book. Students who are learning to write naturally do this as well.

Students move from drawings to scribbling. Thus, scribbling resembles writing as well and like drawings are intentional. They also begin to hold their writing tools the way they have seen adults hold them. It is common for students to use drawings and scribbles together. At this point, students know that their drawings and scribbles mean something, and is becoming aware that words move from left to right when spelled and when printed on paper. Scribbling looks like random assortment of marks on a child's paper. Sometimes the marks are large, circular, and random, and resemble drawing. Although the marks do not resemble print, they are significant because young writers use them to show ideas.

To assist students' writing development during the drawing and scribbling stages, teachers can write stories together while writing and repeating words as they are

spoken. Teachers can also label items and have students' names appear on desks and boards.

During letter like symbols, students become aware of the different shapes of symbols that make up the words in a line of print, shapes in writing actually resemble letters but are not actually letters; many letter-like marks are unique. Letter-like forms emerge, sometimes placed randomly, and interspersed with numbers. Children can tell about their own drawings or writings. In this stage, spacing is rarely present.

During strings in letter, students begin to move from mock letters to real letters; random letters or letter strings are used in sequence. Students undergo remarkable growth at this stage: they begin to learn to write their names, they write the same letters differently, they begin to read their own writing, they attempt writing familiar forms of writing such as lists, letters, and messages, they use simplified oral language structures, they begin to understand that there is a one-to-one correlation between written and spoken words, and they realize that print carries messages. In the strings-of-letters stage, children write some legible letters that tell us they know more about writing; although they are slowly becoming aware of the of the sound-to symbol relationship, they are not matching most sounds. Children usually write in capital letters at this stage and have not yet begun spacing.

To assist students' writing development during these stages, teachers can make big books that are fictional or nonfictional, set up pen pals between classrooms or within the class, create word cards and underline consonants, given them written instructions on cards and have them follow them.

Beginning sounds emerge at this stage; students begin to match letters to sounds often only writing the beginning sound to represent a word. Students are beginning to write left to right directionality, but will display letter reversals. At this stage, children begin to see the difference between a letter and a word, but they may not use spacing between words. Their message makes sense and matches the picture, especially when they choose the topic.

During the consonants represent words stage, students include beginning and ending consonant sounds and may attempt to add vowel sounds. Sight words are used and frequently spelled correctly, and they may even mix upper- and lowercase letters. Their writing is becoming easier to read, and they begin to leave spaces between their words. Finally, when they write sentences ideas are present.

Composing more than one sentence with spaces between words, occur during the initial, middle, and final sounds stage. During this stage they have developed an increased understanding of letter sounds and spelling patterns and can apply them when writing. Even though they may spell some sight words, siblings' names, and environmental print properly, they spell all other words the way they sound, but the handwriting is legible.

Transitional, or early writing is characterized by a lack of uniformity, improper spacing, and early comprehension that capital letters are used in different ways. They also begin

to add final consonant and vowel sounds when writing. As their writing matures, more words are spelled conventionally as they continue to rely on obvious sounds; but some letters are still invented or omitted. They use few text forms and sentence structures, but will vary sentence beginnings. They can discuss contextual purposes of when to write, such as for making a shopping list or telephone messages to assist memory.

Writers have developed a personal style and are able to manipulate forms of writing to suit their purposes, during the standard spelling/proficient writing stage. They have control over conventions such as spelling and punctuation. They have steadily increased the size and range of their vocabulary and can now pull from there when needed. Their writing is clear, comprehensible, and comforting.

By the time students reach standard spelling, they are becoming familiar with most aspects of the writing process, able to select forms for different purposes, and are able to use writing conventions according to the complexity of the writing task. Children in this phase can spell most words correctly and are developing an understanding of root words, compound words, and contractions. This understanding helps students spell similar words.

Check for Understanding

Suggestions for activities to support the early stages of writing development appear in the early parts of this text; however, there aren't any after beginning sounds emerge, consonants represent words, initial, middle and final sounds, transitional, and standard spelling. Using the following pairings, provide examples of the type of activities that you could use in your class to support students as they move through these stages.

Pair 1: beginning sounds emerge; consonants represent words; initial, middle and final sounds

Pair 2: transitional; standard spelling

Response

Pair 1: Beginning sounds emerge; Consonants represent words; Initial, middle and final sounds

- Play games where students match sounds to letters
- Give them a photo (use cutouts from magazines or printouts from online) and have them write a story about the picture.
- Have students write a short story. Collect the stories and pass them out so that no student receives their own story. Then instruct students to continue the story.

- Have students create sight words from people, places, and things in their homes and communities.
- Put students in groups of three and give them cards with letters on them that spell multiple words, give the groups 5 minutes and see how many words they can find (e.g. S T O P – TOP, TOPS, POT, POTS, SOP, SPOT)

Pair 2: Transitional; Standard spelling

- Model and discuss how to choose a topic and the selection of details depending on the purpose of writing.
- Encourage children to write for purposes that are relevant to them such as letters, cards, messages, and to do lists.
- Jointly construct, display, and use various forms of functional print, such as schedules, calendars, rules, charts
- Create sets of card banks and sentence strips that are relevant to specific centers.
- Have word cards available for children who repeatedly ask how to spell certain words.
- Give students opportunities for personal choice writing such as diaries and journals.
- Talk about the features of their writing, including; topics, purpose, audience

Activities

Watch the following videos for additional information.

- Developmental Writing Stages: Whiteboard Demonstration <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQdNGnc54QM>
- Written Expression <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4BSMrhKC80>
- Stages of Writing Development <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4BSMrhKC80>

“Go Deeper”

- How Writing Develops <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/how-writing-develops>
- Stages of Early Writing Development https://www.zaner-bloser.com/media/zb/zaner-bloser/WriteOn_WritingDev.pdf
- Developing Stages of Writing https://www.zaner-bloser.com/media/zb/zaner-bloser/WriteOn_WritingDev.pdf
- Stages of Writing Development <http://www.communityinclusion.org/elm/Professionals/1%20Profe>

[ssional%20Development/2%20ELL%20and%20Making%20Print%20Talk/files/StagesofWritinghandout.pdf](#)

- Kindergarten Developmental Writing Stages <http://www.kaneland.org/d302/depts/ca/curriculummaps/Language%20Arts/K-5%20Writing/Writing%20stages%20rubric%20%20kdg%2009-10%20report%20card.pdf>

Summary

The stages of writing are important markers of student development and must be adequately monitored. Thus, teachers must know when students are to move from one stage to another and how to help them along. It is also the teacher's responsibility that students get off to a good start with writing and monitor their progress as they enter and exit grade levels. Waiting until the student is heading to high school is not the best time to notice that he doesn't write as well as he should. There is of course a difference between lack of motivation to write well, physical or mental challenges that interfere with writing, and developmental delays as he attempts to move from one stage to the next.