

EMERGENT WRITING STRETCHES ACROSS THE ELOF DOMAINS

The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) helps teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors understand child development and what children should know and be able to do to succeed in school. Adults use the ELOF to implement effective program and teaching practices* for all children, including children with disabilities or suspected delays. These practices also support children who are dual language learners or children who are learning a tribal language. Writing supports children’s developing skills in multiple ELOF domains, including Approaches to Learning, Language and Literacy, Cognition, and Physical Development. Children’s early attempts at written communication range from making random marks on paper to invented spelling.

FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

- Emergent writing begins with children’s natural initiative and curiosity about how the world works, which is in the Approaches to Learning domain. They begin to show interest in objects and materials in their environment and use creativity to increase their understanding and learning.
- By 8 months, perceptual motor and physical development allows children to intentionally reach for writing materials, use growing hand-eye coordination skills to make marks on paper, and enjoy using various writing materials to explore language and literacy.
- By 36 months, toddlers understand that written symbols have meaning, which is in the Cognition domain.



FOR PRESCHOOLERS

- Preschoolers communicate in many ways, including writing and drawing ideas through their many approaches to learning.
- Children exercise their literacy skills by writing for a variety of purposes. This consists largely of drawing and scribbling, then making letter-like forms, then using invented spelling.
- Not only do preschoolers begin to understand how print works, but they also begin to understand number symbols and can associate a quantity with the written numerals, showing growth in the Cognition domain.
- Regarding physical development, preschoolers begin by drawing simple shapes like circles. As they develop, they perform more complex tasks such as drawing letter-like forms. By the end of preschool, children begin to hold writing materials with some precision and control, they may use a pincer grasp to hold a chunky crayon.
- Teaching children in their home language is an important part of connecting writing skills to their families, cultures, and developmental goals. To support children who are dual language learners or children who are learning a tribal language, learn what writing looks like in their home language (symbols, pictures, tilde, etc.) and use familiar words in the learning environment. Allow children see their written home or tribal language and offer opportunities for them to practice writing. For cultural groups without a written language, talk to families about including storytelling or non-written language in the environment.



*For Home Visitors: Teaching practices mean providing effective and engaging learning experiences and interactions with children that support important learning outcomes.