CASTLE BROMWICH
INFANT AND NURSERY SCHOOL
PLAY. LEARN. GROW.

Writing Progression Framework for Early Years (2-4 years)

This framework recognises that writing development is a gradual process that begins with physical development and play, progresses through meaningful mark-making, and culminates in independent writing for purpose. Every child will move through these stages at their own pace, and your role is to provide rich opportunities, model purposeful writing, and celebrate every step of their journey.

Key Principles

1. Physical Development Comes First
Children develop their gross motor skills (large muscles) before fine motor skills (small muscles). Core strength, shoulder stability, and arm control must be established before expecting controlled pencil grip.

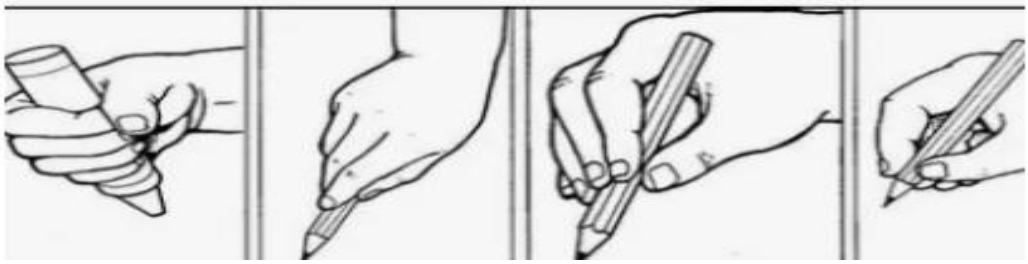
2. Writing Through Play
Meaningful mark-making opportunities should be embedded throughout continuous provision.

3. Adults Model Purposes for Writing
Children need to see adults writing for real purposes - making lists, writing notes, creating signs, recording observations.

4. Talk Before Writing
Oracy and language development is the foundation for all writing. Children need rich vocabulary and the ability to articulate their thoughts before committing them to paper.

5. Grip Development is Gradual
Pencil grip evolves naturally through a progression of grips as hand muscles strengthen and coordination improves.

Pencil Grip Continuum



2-3 (Nursery 1)
Progression Framework

Physical Development Focus
What to look for in play:

- Whole body movements - climbing, crawling through tunnels, balancing
- Two-handed activities - carrying large objects, pushing/pulling toys
- Beginning to show hand preference
- Palmar grasp (whole hand grip) when holding objects

Fine Motor Opportunities:

- **Treasure baskets** - exploring objects with different textures and sizes
- **Large-scale mark-making** - painting with large brushes on vertical surfaces (easels, walls)
- **Sensory play** - squeezing playdough, sand play, water play with scoops and containers
- **Threading** - large threading beads, threading curtain rings onto dowels
- **Construction** - large Duplo blocks, stacking cups, nesting toys

Adult Modelling:

- Adults make marks alongside children, narrating: "I'm drawing a circle for the sun"
- Create shopping lists together using pictures and marks
- Make marks in sand/foam with fingers

Communication & Language

- Building vocabulary through play commentary
- Simple songs and rhymes with actions
- Responding to simple instructions
- Beginning to use 2-3 word phrases

End of Nursery 1,
Beginning of Nursery 2 (3 to 4)

Physical Development Focus
What to look for in play:

- More controlled movements with tools
- Beginning to show preference for dominant hand consistently
- Can manipulate smaller objects
- Attempts at circular marks and vertical/horizontal lines

Fine Motor Opportunities:

- **Mark-making stations** - available in multiple areas (home corner, construction, outdoors)
- **Tweezers and tongs** - picking up pom-poms, cotton balls, small toys
- **Pegs** - attaching to boards, baskets, or washing lines
- **Small world play** - manipulating small figures and vehicles
- **Malleable materials** - clay, playdough with tools (scissors, garlic press, hammers)
- **Painting** - introducing smaller brushes, cotton buds for printing

Adult Modelling:

- Creating signs for play areas: "Car wash open"
- Writing simple captions for photos
- Making marks to represent quantities: "How many apples?"

Communication & Language

- Using longer sentences
- Beginning to use past tense
- Asking lots of questions
- Retelling simple events

3- 4 (Nursery 2)
Progression Framework
Autumn

Physical Development Focus
What to look for in play:

- Increased core and shoulder strength
- More controlled mark-making - circles, lines
- Beginning to hold pencil with thumb and fingers (may still use palmar grip)
- Can use scissors with increasing control

Fine Motor Opportunities:

- **Threading** - medium-sized beads, threading pasta onto string
- **Cutting** - snipping paper strips, cutting along lines (with support)
- **Playdough tools** - scissors, rolling pins, shape cutters, plastic knives
- **Pegboards** - creating patterns with pegs
- **Pipettes and droppers** - water play, colour mixing
- **Tweezers** - sorting small objects (buttons, beads) into containers
- **Mark-making** - variety of tools (crayons, markers, pencils, chalk) on different surfaces

Writing Through Play Examples:

- **Home corner**: Notepads for shopping lists, phone message pads
- **Construction area**: Clipboards for 'building plans'
- **Outdoors**: Chalks for pathways, water and brushes on walls
- **Small world**: Paper and pens for creating maps, signs

Adult Modelling:

- Writing for real purposes daily
- "I need to write a note to remind me..."
- Creating labels together for displays
- Writing in role play: "Let me write your order down"

Communication & Language

- Using sentences of 4-5 words
- Beginning to use connecting words (and, because)
- Listening to longer stories
- Talking about recent experiences

Spring Term

Physical Development Focus

What to look for in play:

- Emerging tripod grip (thumb and two fingers)
- Drawing recognisable circles and crosses
- Beginning to copy some letters (especially from their name)
- More controlled cutting along lines

Fine Motor Opportunities:

- **Lacing cards** - threading laces through pre-punched holes
- **Nuts and bolts** - screwing and unscrewing
- **Spray bottles** - water play, painting with water outdoors
- **Hole punches** - making holes in paper (builds hand strength)
- **Clothes pegs** - attaching to cards, sorting by colour
- **Small construction** - Lego, connecting blocks
- **Pre-writing patterns** - encouraging vertical lines, horizontal lines, circles in various media

Writing Through Play Examples:

- **Role play café**: Taking orders, writing receipts
- **Vet's surgery**: Patient records, appointment cards
- **Mark-making outdoors**: Large-scale patterns with chalks, water, paintbrushes
- **Invitation station**: Creating party invitations with marks and drawings

Adult Modelling:

- Modelling writing names on work
- Creating simple captions: "Tom built a tall tower"
- Writing letters together: "Dear Grandma..."
- Demonstrating left-to-right directionality

Communication & Language

- Speaking in longer sentences
- Beginning to understand 'why' questions
- Retelling familiar stories with support
- Using talk to organise play

Summer Term

Physical Development Focus

What to look for in play:

- More consistent tripod grip
- Attempting to write some letters from their name
- Drawing people with basic features
- Confident with scissors

Fine Motor Opportunities:

- **Letter formation practice** - in sand trays, with paint, with playdough
- **Stencils and templates** - tracing around shapes
- **Small-scale mark-making** - smaller paper, beginning to use lined paper
- **Beading patterns** - creating specific sequences
- **Sewing cards** - simple in-and-out stitching
- **Tongs and chopsticks** - transferring objects
- **Writing Through Play Examples:**

Adult Modelling:

- Writing simple sentences together
- Encouraging children to 'have a go' at writing
- Celebrating approximations: "You wrote the first sound!"
- Demonstrating that writing carries meaning

Communication & Language

- Using well-formed sentences
- Understanding and using question words
- Describing events in detail
- Beginning to use story language

By the end of Nursery ready for Reception Transition

What to look for in play:

- Established tripod grip (or moving towards dynamic tripod)
- Writing recognisable letters, especially from own name
- Drawing people with increasing detail
- Confident scissor control

Fine Motor Opportunities:

- **Letter formation** - multi-sensory approaches (sand, paint, playdough, air writing)
- **Fine threading** - small beads, creating patterns with peg boards
- **Cutting skills** - cutting out simple shapes, following curved lines
- **Manipulative games** – jigsaws, small construction toys, dough

Writing Through Play Examples:

- **Writing area**: Variety of paper types, envelopes, cards, booklets
- **Role play writing**
- Block play+ planning mapping and mark making
- **Outdoor writing**: Clipboards, chalks, mark-making in mud kitchen
- **Investigation table**: Recording findings, labelling specimens

Adult Modelling:

- Daily demonstration of writing for purpose
- Shared writing of class messages, stories
- Scribing children's ideas, then encouraging them to write
- Modelling sounding out words: "Snake... I can hear 's' at the start"

Talk Before Writing

- Rehearsing sentences orally before writing
- Discussing what to write: "What shall we tell them?"
- Building vocabulary through rich discussions
- Using story language in play

What to Observe:

- Children giving meaning to their marks
- Recognising some letters in their name
- Beginning to write letters from their name
- Understanding that print carries meaning

One Page Progression Summary

2-Year-Olds

- Gross motor development through active play
- Whole-hand grasp progressing to palmer grasp
- Large-scale mark-making
- Sensory exploration
- Beginning to give meaning to marks

3-4 year olds

- Developing shoulder and core strength
- Circular marks and lines
- Mark-making with purpose
- Understanding that writing carries meaning
- Developing tripod grip

Practical Implementation Tips

1. **Observe First**: Watch where children naturally make marks and enhance those areas
2. **Continuous Provision**: Ensure mark-making materials are available in every area
3. **Model Daily**: Write authentically in front of children as often as possible
4. **Celebrate Attempts**: Value all mark-making as writing
5. **Talk, Talk, Talk**: Prioritise language development alongside physical skills
6. **Individual Progression**: Remember that children develop at different rates
7. **Home Links**: Share the importance of physical development and play-based writing with parents