

Reception's Journey to Early Writing

Before children can form letters well, they must first develop the physical strength, stability and control which underpins writing. Gross motor development (core strength, shoulder stability, bi-lateral co-ordination, crossing the midline) gives children the postural control to sit upright, use both sides of their body together and move their arms smoothly and purposefully. Without this, writing becomes tiring, uncomfortable and inaccurate.

Fine motor development (hand strength, finger dexterity, pincer grip, in-hand manipulation) then enable s children to grip tools securely, control pressure and make precise movements. This is what eventually supports a functional tripod grip and confident, controlled letter formation.

Below is an overview of how we teach and support progression of gross and fine motor skills in reception. This is not an exhaustive list.

SKILL	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Gross Motor	Whole Body Co-ordination: ▪ Daily Squiggle while you Wiggle programme ▪ Dough Disco (intervention where needed) ▪ Weekly PE session with PE specialist focus on fundamental movements and skills ▪ Opportunities to crawl, balance and jump ▪ Big brushes and rollers to mark make and play with ▪ Tuff spots - large movement exploration ▪ Big equipment in continuous provision e.g. sweeping brushes ▪ Balance bikes and trikes ▪ Obstacle course ▪ Big loose parts play e.g. tyres, planks etc ▪ Opportunities to move in different ways e.g. running, skipping, crawling ▪ Yoga (from A2)	Shoulder and arm stability: ▪ Squiggle while you Wiggle In addition to all Autumn activities: ▪ Weekly Yoga ▪ Large scale painting ▪ Ribbon dancing ▪ Parachute play ▪ Digging Staff encourage pupils to: ▪ use large movements with control and strength to build upper body stability ▪ Jump in different directions, different distance and with increased balance and control ▪ Catch large balls ▪ Ride a tricycle using pedals ▪ To run, jump and climb well ▪ To skip	Core strength and crossing the midline: ▪ Daily Squiggle me into a Writer In addition to autumn and spring activities: ▪ Throwing and catching activities ▪ Ball games ▪ Dance games Staff encourage children to: ▪ Maintain upright sitting posture ▪ Use both sides of the body together ▪ Cross the midline naturally ▪ Throw, catch and bounce a ball with ease ▪ Skip with alternate feet ▪ Climbs ▪ Use bikes and trikes with increasing control and balance ▪ Negotiates space with ease

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SKILL	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Fine Motor	Hand and wrist strength Daily: ▪ Squiggle While you Wiggle ▪ Peg Talk (pincer grip strengthening) ▪ Morning writing activity (name writing) ▪ Daily letter formation in phonics (separate from handwriting) ▪ Daily handwriting focus groups ▪ Drawing Club (whole class literacy-focused approach that uses storytelling and drawing to develop children's language, imagination, and fine motor skills) Weekly: ▪ Writing focus group Other Provision: ▪ Mark making tools e.g. crayons, paintbrushes, chalk, water spray bottles ▪ Play dough ▪ Sand and water with tools e.g. whisks, jugs ▪ Mud kitchen with tools e.g. trowels ▪ Scissors ▪ Tweezers ▪ Tongs ▪ Rolling and using tools - stamps etc ▪ Threading ▪ Hand puppets ▪ Put on coat independently with support to zip Children will be able to squeeze, twist and manipulate tools with increasing control	Finger isolation and dexterity: ▪ Daily Squiggle While you Wiggle ▪ Daily Peg Talk ▪ Morning writing activity (word writing) ▪ Letter formation and word writing in phonics (separate from handwriting) ▪ Daily focus group handwriting ▪ Daily Drawing Club General provision (in addition to autumn): ▪ Tweezers ▪ Bead threading ▪ Finger puppets ▪ Small construction resources Staff encourage children to: ▪ Use correct pincer grip ▪ Draw lines, circles and shapes to represent objects to within increasing accuracy ▪ Use correct scissor grip to snip and cut straight lines ▪ Use scissors to cut curved lines and shapes ▪ To use a fork and spoon independently Dough disco for intervention groups if needed.	Tool Control and Precision: ▪ Daily Squiggle me into Writing ▪ Daily Peg Talk ▪ Morning writing activity - short sentence writing ▪ Letter formation and word writing in phonics (separate from handwriting) ▪ Daily focus group handwriting ▪ Daily Drawing Club] ▪ Weekly writing focus group General provision (in addition to autumn and spring provision): ▪ Pipettes ▪ Hole punches ▪ Tweezers in sensory trays e.g. picking up rice rather than pom poms ▪ Staff encourage pupils to: ▪ Use a tripod grip ▪ Draw lines, circles and shapes accurately ▪ Use scissors with correct grip ▪ Cut a variety of shapes accurately (with smooth cuts) ▪ Encouraged to use dominant hand ▪ Complete building structures with interlocking cubes and blocks ▪ Complete jigsaws and puzzles independently ▪ Put on and zip up coats independently ▪ Remove and put on shoes independently

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Marks for Meaning

Making marks is the very beginning of writing: it is how children learn that written symbols can carry meaning. When children scribble, swirl, draw and label their models or pictures, they are exploring the idea that 'marks can stand for something I want to say.' This is a crucial conceptual shift before they write letters.

Progression typically moves from:

Random, exploratory marks

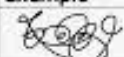
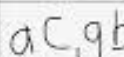
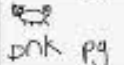
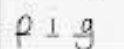
Marks with direction and control

Marks that represent objects/ideas

Marks linked to sounds/words

Recognisable letters in meaningful contexts (e.g. name writing, labels, cards)

This journey links physical development with cognitive development. Children co-ordinate hand eye movements, refine fine motor control and practice encoding meaning long before they write sentences. Meaningful mark making builds confidence, motivation and a sense that 'I am a writer' which is foundational for transcription, phonics application and purposeful writing.

Stages of Writing		
Stage	Description	Example
Drawing/scribbling	Scribbles look random but is purposeful for the child, represent ideas	
Wavy scribbles or "pretend writing"	Imitates writing from left to right or pretending to write words	
Drawing and letter strings	Draws pictures and writes strings of random letters from left to right	
Copying words and early phonetic spelling	Draws pictures, copies words and adds in phonetic spelling (using letters mostly just consistently to represent each sound they hear)	
Phonetic spelling	Writes words by using letters to represent EACH sound that is heard	
Phonetic spelling with sentence writing	Writes sentences with phonetic spelling. Most words from spaces between	
Conventional spelling with sentence writing	Writes with complete sentences with (mostly) correct spelling	

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Marks with direction control - pre-writing shapes and patterns

In Reception we teach pre-writing, shapes, patterns and movements in the autumn term. Mastering pre-writing shapes is important in reception because these strokes are the building blocks of all letter formation. Vertical lines, horizontal lines, circles, diagonals, crosses squares and triangles are the exact motor patterns that later become letters, numbers and joins strokes. If children can confidently draw these shapes with control, directionality and consistency first, they will have the muscle memory, spatial awareness and visual motor co-ordination needed for forming letters accurately, efficiently and legibly when formal writing begins.

Shape	Shape Name	Verbal Cue
	Vertical line	Down
	Horizontal line	Across
	Circle	Around
	Cross	1. Down 2. Across
	Diagonal	Corner to Corner
	Square	1. One stop (across) 2. Two stop (down) 3. Three stop (across) 4. Four stop (up)
	Diagonal	Corner to Corner
	Diagonal Cross	1. One Diagonal to the corner 2. Another Diagonal to the corner
	Triangle	1. Middle to corner 2. Jump 3. Middle to corner and across

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Tripod Pencil Grip

Establishing a tripod pencil grip in Reception is important because it allows children to control writing tools with precision comfort and efficiency. Developing this early prevents poor habits becoming embedded and supports fluent, effortless writing later on, freeing up children's cognitive load to focus on phonics, spelling and composition rather than the physical act of holding a pencil.

In Reception, we track the children's pencil tracker at key points of the year using this tracker:



In Reception we support correct pencil grip by modelling, guiding and practicing the tripod hold through daily fine motor experiences, small world tools, drawing, "Are you ready to write" routines and continuous provision. Check Whitemoor EYFS goals for more information.

Writing Warm up

Before engaging in handwriting or fine motor tasks, it is important that the children have the opportunity to warm up their hands. Hand exercises help the brain to increase awareness of where the hands are, improve coordination, prepare the body for controlled movements and aid precision. Before adult led writing, we

choose a warm up exercise:

- 1.) Rub hands together
- 2.) Push palms together.
- 3.) Finger stretches.
- 4.) Drumming fingers.
- 5.) Squeeze forearms and hands.
- 6.) Pulling fingers.
- 7.) Thumbs to fingertips.
- 8.) Finger circles.

(taken from: Little Wandle Handwriting)

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Progression Towards Transcriptional Fluency		
Letters	Dictated Words	Dictated phrase/sentence
Soley teaching letter formation in letter families	In writing focus groups children write CVC words once they can form the letters in these words correctly (children with an additional need e.g. dyspraxia will encouraged to form letters correctly but will not be held back from the next stage of writing).	Children that can write CVC words that are correctly formed and using the sounds taught will progress to writing a dictated phrase/sentence.
How we teach Transcriptional Fluency		
Pre dictation: ▪ Ready to write sequence ▪ Teacher models and formation phrase ▪ 'magic finger' 'air write' ▪ Magic fingers draw on the floor/table/hands ▪ Chn have a go, teacher supporting ▪ Check children using dominant hand ▪ Pencil tripod grip ▪ MTYT ▪ Use magic finger to trace letter in their books ▪ Teacher modelling on flipchart ▪ Teacher addresses misconceptions, including pencil grip ▪ Write a line of letters ▪ Children self-assess -' choose your best'	Dictation - CVC Words: ▪ Oral composition around the topic of the word going to write ▪ Teacher models-all together-independent ▪ Segmenting fingers ▪ Hearing initial sound ▪ Find the initial sound on formation mat ▪ Practice air write etc ▪ Children write it down ▪ Repeat for middle and final sounds ▪ Children self-assess -' choose your best'	Dictation: ▪ Oral composition around the topic of the word going to write ▪ Teacher dictates a sentence and holds it for the children. ▪ Dictate word by word ➤ Encourage children to use phonic knowledge when writing words ➤ Children should be forming most letters correctly using tripod grip

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Assessment Progression and expectations over the year			
Autumn 2 end not on track	Autumn 2 End on Track		
Pre-writing shapes and patterns	Letters	Dictated Words	Dictated phrase/sentence
Children taught up, down, side to side etc movements necessary for writing	Solely teaching letter formation in letter families	In writing focus groups children write CVC words once they can form the letters in these words correctly.	Children that can write CVC words that are correctly formed and using the sounds taught will progress to writing a dictated phrase/sentence.
Spring 2 end not on track	Spring 2 End on Track		
Pre-writing shapes and patterns	Letters	Dictated Words	Dictated phrase/sentence
Children taught up, down, side to side etc movements necessary for writing	Solely teaching letter formation in letter families	In writing focus groups children write CVC words once they can form the letters in these words correctly.	Children that can write CVC words that are correctly formed and using the sounds taught will progress to writing a dictated phrase/sentence.
Summer 2 end not on track	Summer 2 End on Track/Meeting ELG		
Pre-writing shapes and patterns	Letters	Dictated Words	Dictated phrase/sentence
Children taught up, down, side to side etc movements necessary for writing	Solely teaching letter formation in letter families	In writing focus groups children write CVC words once they can form the letters in these words correctly.	Children that can write CVC words that are correctly formed and using the sounds taught will progress to writing a dictated phrase/sentence.

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At Whitemoor, we recognise that spoken language is as important for writing as it is for reading. Pupils develop strong writing skills when they can first express their ideas orally, and therefore we ensure that children compose and rehearse their ideas out loud while they are developing their transcription skills. This practice remains valuable even once pupils can write fluently.

We also understand the crucial role of stories, rhymes, and songs in the Reception year. The language found in books, poems, and rhymes is broader, richer, and more sophisticated than everyday conversation, giving children access to high-quality vocabulary and structures. Repeated readings of the same stories are particularly effective in supporting word learning and deepening comprehension.

At Whitemoor, we are committed to ensuring that all pupils are taught to speak at the highest levels, using ambitious vocabulary and clear communication. Our approach is outlined below.

SKILL	How we teach this
Speech, language & communication development	• Daily routine songs • Nursery rhymes/songs at the end of the day • Daily drawing club • Daily story time • Daily literacy lesson • Daily topic lesson • Daily phonics lesson • Weekly circle time lesson • Many activities to encourage speech, language and communication within the continuous provision including- role play, puppets and story play, reading area, science and investigation area, nature area, sand and water play, messaging centre, mud kitchen and more. • Adults model clear sentences when teaching and within continuous provision. • Adults plan for and use high level vocabulary, modelling this within the continuous provision • Use of STEM sentences in mathematics • Repetition planned for to embed structure of a sentence & new vocabulary.

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Confidence and motivation

- Daily drawing club
- Daily Adventure Island time
- Messaging centre
- Range of mark making resources and invitations to write in the continuous provision
- Adults who encourage and suggest ideas to scaffold and prompt children within the continuous provision
- Bag of joy to spark awe and wonder
- Enhancements added to the continuous provision to motivate and inspire the children
- Characters from Adventure Island provide motivation and a purpose for writing.