

Module 4





Writing Workshop

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Learning proposals

Correct posture

Shapes and movements

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Sounding out letters





Writing Workshop

Writing Workshop helps to give children the best start on their writing journey, looking at posture, seating position and pen holds so that they feel comfortable and supported to carry out simple writing exercises.

Writing workshop

Children already possess the skills for writing; we just need to support the development of these skills with know-how based on proven scientific findings from research into motor skills for writing. When it comes to carefree scribbling and writing letters, marks should be made using all possible types of movement and a variety of writing instruments.

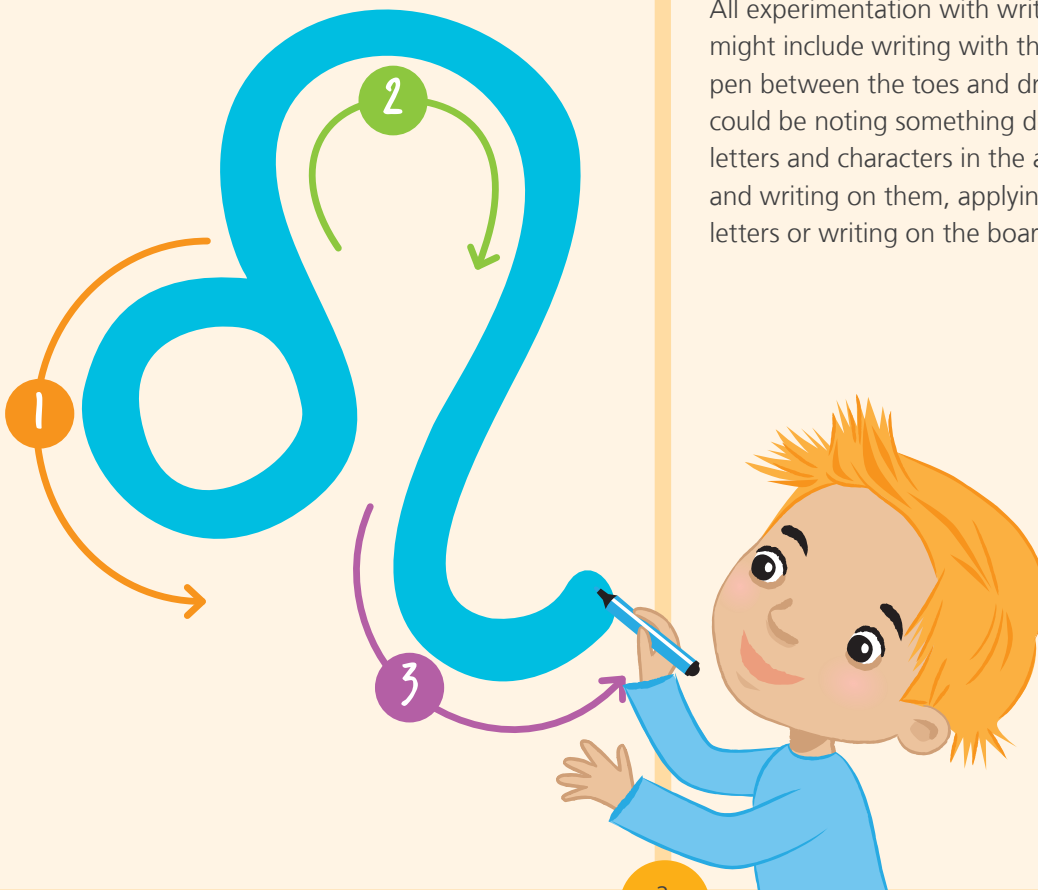
Children who know how a letter is constructed, who have noticed the shape thanks to pictures, images and motor-skill based systems, and who have an idea of the movement pattern can then trace these movement sequences on paper at different speeds.

The first writing instruments that a child uses are key. They support all writing exercises in the long-term, and they help children reach their goals. The basis for writing can be introduced playfully in early education. This stops children who have little experience of writing or support at home from falling behind.

It is also important to pay attention to the basic pre-requisites for successful writing. A child's posture and seating position must be taught and corrected. Hands and fingers move differently when writing than when threading beads or cutting out pictures. These foundations can be taught early on and supported at home.

Take advantage of all opportunities to make writing meaningful. Show the children how you write something down, for example a note to their parents, a reminder, or something that the child has done particularly well that day. Label things in your group, for example, the names of plants and collection points for writing and painting instruments. Create lists of names of who has borrowed something, and let children sign their pictures and drawings.

All experimentation with writing is to be welcomed. This might include writing with the other hand, holding the pen between the toes and drawing circles on the paper. It could be noting something down with eyes closed, tracing letters and characters in the air, blowing on glass panes and writing on them, applying cream in the shape of letters or writing on the board using a wet sponge.





Writing Workshop



Perfect posture

Activity outline:

This exercise helps children to use and understand the correct seating and writing position.

Warm up:

Encourage the children to try out lots of different ways of sitting at the table, for example, sitting up tall, sitting sideways, sitting with the chair turned around, laying on the table top or supporting their head. Their imagination should know no bounds. A digital camera can be used to record inventive seated postures.

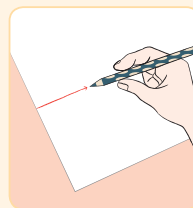
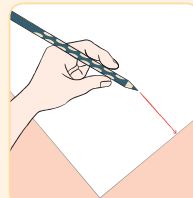
Next try different pen holds. How many ways can they hold a pen? What is easy, and what is difficult? Ask the children to try out favourable and less comfortable writing positions in pairs. On an A4 sheet, ask the children to draw all of the shapes that they know and while doing so make a mental note of the positions they are using. Are there positions that are easier and more comfortable? Does their hand tire quickly? Following the experiment,

Main task:

Help the children to find their correct writing posture.

1. Let the child's hand fall on the table in a writing-like position.
2. A pen can then be inserted into this hand from above, gripped gently and moved softly across the paper.
3. The pen is best held in a three-finger grip using the index finger, thumb and with support from the middle finger from behind.
4. Through a combination of wrist and finger movements, the pen can now be moved easily in all directions.
5. Pens with moulded grips are particularly suitable for this.

Ask the children to practice writing in this position and compare it to their earlier experiments.



Materials required:

- A variety of writing instruments, preferably with a moulded grip
- Paper



Extension:

Set the same task for the children to complete at home. Where is the best place for them to write and draw? What writing instruments do they have at home which they like to use?

Observation points:

- Is the pen hold correct and can the pen be held for increasingly lengthy periods?
- Am I sure about which hand the children prefer to use when it comes to making lines and writing?

Follow up:

It is preferable that children work with thicker pens or pencils, or with pens or pencils with soft, ergonomic grip zones. This allows them to achieve an optimal balance between a sufficiently firm grip and finger dexterity. Some other points to discuss with the children which can help with their pen hold are:

- A relaxed body posture is important, an awkward posture causes children to tire unnecessarily and restricts the freedom of hand movements.
- An appropriate pen hold and unrestricted hand movement are important requirements for writing.
- Ideally, the child should sit up straight in front of the desk with their shoulders relaxed. The height of the desk and chair should mean that the child's feet have complete contact with the floor. The forearms are at a 90° angle and are relaxed on the table. The elbow is not raised, the hand is not exerting any pressure on the writing surface.
- The paper should be laid out in a suitable way for each individual. The sheet of paper does not have to be laid out straight on the table. For right-handed children, the paper can be rotated to 30° anti-clockwise, and for left-handed children it is a lot easier when the piece of paper is rotated to 45° clockwise.



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Writing Workshop



Movement sequences

Activity outline:

To recognise that letters are made up from different shapes which are drawn using a variety of different movements.

Warm up:

The children become “letter researchers” using the example of a Chinese character. The children are shown this Chinese character. It means “person” and is a basic graphic element which is also present in many other Chinese characters – in a similar way to the basic elements in our alphabet. Discuss with the children how they would write this character. Give them a few chances to draw the character, do they all do it in the same way? Why have they chosen to do it in a certain way? Then show the children how it is correctly drawn. (*Solution: first the left-hand and then the right-hand stroke*).

Main task:

Explain how all our letters are written using a limited amount of shapes and movements. Demonstrate with a letter of your choice. Now give the children a selection of five letters to practice forming. The alphabet poster has examples of how to correctly draw each letter. Children should experience again and again that they have to be clear about the necessary shapes (line, curve, oval) needed to form letters. As soon as the children are confident about remembering the shapes, they can start making more rapid movements. Once the letters have been mastered and the movement has been recorded on paper for the first time, the children should practice picking up speed. Only then, do the children intuitively feel what the optimal speed is, the speed at which the shape remains clear. The children can then work their way through the alphabet, drawing out all the letters. These can then be gathered on the alphabet tree (*see Module 1: World of Writing*). Following this, the children should try out other movement sequences and see how the letter in question can be written from bottom to top or from right to left. Only then will it become clear why letters are written in the conventional way. Pens with a moulded grip are ideal for this.

Materials required:

- Paper
- Writing instruments, preferably with moulded grips



Examples:



Follow up:

Discuss with the children what they have discovered about the movements and strokes they have used to draw their letters. Has it become easier to draw the letters now they have had a few chances to practice them? Are there any letters which they find harder to draw than others? Can they draw some letters now without having to look at the alphabet poster?

Extension:

Movement sequences should also be tried out and reflected upon for shapes like rectangles and circles, and for numbers.

Observation points:

- Can the children quickly record the movement sequences for line-curve-oval on paper?
- Are the children confident enough to draw rectangles and triangles quickly so that the corners become rounded, and are they able to adjust their speed for the corners?
- Do the children recognise the points at which they need to pause?
- Do the children always remember to assume the correct seating and hand posture, and the correct pen hold, when writing?



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Writing Workshop



Memorising letters

Activity outline:

In this activity the children are encouraged to use whole body movements to “act” out writing letters which helps trigger motor memory. This can help with shaping written letters and speed up their writing in the future.

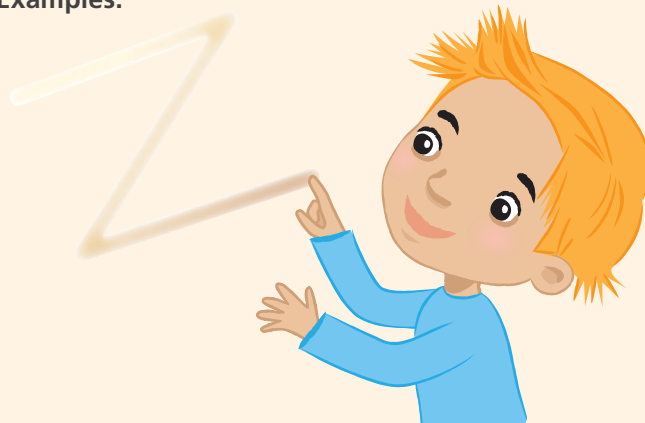
Warm up:

Standing in front of the children, slowly write a letter in the air with your arms, hands or with all of your body. Say the letter out loud before you shape it. Verbalise the movements as you do them, for example, for “M”, go diagonally up - diagonally down, diagonally up - diagonally down. Then ask the children to join in with the air writing, verbalising the letter name and the actions as they shape it. They can try with their eyes open and then with their eyes closed to help them focus on the movements.

Main task:

Having practised a few movement letters now play a game of letter charades. Act out the movements of a letter in front of the class but this time without telling them which letter you are shaping. You can still verbalise the movements at this point. Can they guess which letter you are shaping? When someone guesses correctly they can then come up to the front to act out a letter for the others to guess. To make it harder try doing it in silence without verbalising the movements.

Examples:



Materials required:

- A variety of writing instruments, preferably with moulded grips
- Paper

Follow up:

Enjoying doing something is an important pre-requisite for activating the motor memory. Success is when children are no longer thinking about the movement sequence for a letter, but instead remember the movement at speed. Discuss with the children their experience of the charades game and how they will now think about shaping letters.

- Do they feel more confident with their letters now?
- Can they relate a funny movement to one of the letters they shaped?

When writing letters it is always important to remember that they never have to be written exactly the same way twice. Children have a tendency to want everything to look nice, and the desired, carefree movement needed for constructing letters should be emphasised.

Extension:

The children should be as confident as possible about recognising letters. What the shape looks like and how it is constructed must always be clear to them. Discuss with the children how they can use creative solutions and pictures to remember the shapes of letters. Whether the “H” looks like a rope ladder, or the “R” like a slide – any association is an important memory aid. What do they use to help them remember letters?

Observation points:

- Do the children become better at recognising the letters?
- Do the children develop their own ideas about how to remember letters, allowing them to write quickly?
- Do they listen to the instructions about writing more quickly, or is it more important to them that the shapes look nice?



4

Writing Workshop



Writing movements

Activity outline:

To look at writing letters without taking the pen off the paper.

Warm up:

Ask the children to practise drawing designs on paper without lifting their pencil off the paper. Try the simple exercises such as illustrations – lines of “eee”, lines of “ooo” or lines of “mmm”. Now demonstrate how some pictures can be drawn in one movement without lifting the pencil off the paper, like a ball which is a simple circle and drawn in one

Main task:

This can also be done with other things, for example, a tree. Show the children how to draw a tree in one movement, start at the edge of the paper and draw a straight line from the left, then draw a line straight up, (that's the trunk), now make a big curve (like the shape of the ball) and go straight down to make the other side of the trunk, then along to the right until it reaches the edge of the piece of paper. Ask the children to now draw the tree in just one movement without lifting their pencil off the paper, following these instructions.

Once the basic tree has been drawn by the children, ask them to use other colours to draw this shape again and again enlarging the size of the original (*see illustration*) with new contoured lines

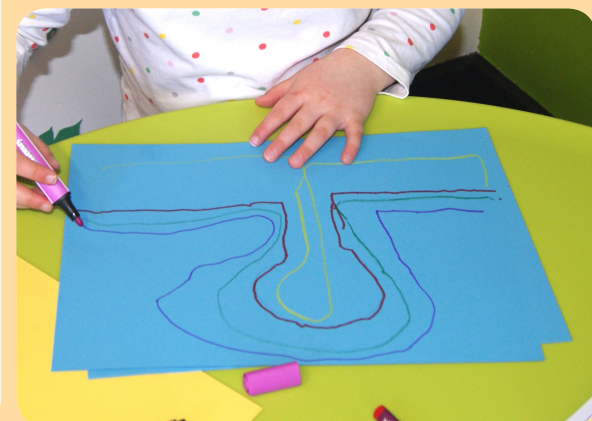
Extension:

Now ask the children to draw letters from the alphabet using their new skills and not lifting their pencils off the paper. Start with uppercase and move to lowercase letters if appropriate.

Writing letters using the right movements is important and will stick in the children's memory. Lines which are made by movements in different directions and in varying sizes without lifting pen from paper also encourages children to plan how they will make partial movements.

Materials required:

- A4 and A3 sized paper
- Different pens and pencils



Follow up:

Discuss with the children how they got on with the task:

- What happened when they made new contour lines?
- Were they able to keep the shape of the tree? Or did the shape of the tree change?
- Were they able to draw all the letters without lifting their pen off the paper? Which ones were difficult to do?

Discuss how they had to retrace their lines in some cases to complete their letters.

Extension:

The children can try creating more images in a simple movement without lifting their pencil. Maybe drawing a fish, a dog or a cat? What are they able to draw?

Observation points:

- Are the children able to carry out the instructions and draw and write as fast as possible without lifting their pencil from the paper?
- Are they able to make the contours in such a way that after two to three times they still clearly represent the original?



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Writing Workshop



Writing with all the senses

Activity outline:

When writing letters it can help to sound out the shape as it is written or drawn. Talking while doing is useful in helping children remember movements. Sounding out a letter controls the process of construction and allows the teacher to hear what the child is thinking. What is important is the process and not whether the result is right or wrong.

Warm up:

Work with the group to sound out all the letters of the alphabet phonetically so that they are aware of what they sound like. Place emphasis on the sounds and movements you make with your face when sounding out the letters. For example, make your mouth round when sounding out or humming "O" and extend the sound with letters such as "SSS" or "ZZZ".

Main task:

Now move on to shaping the movements along with the sounds using your fingers and writing in the air. Give the children a chance to have a go at shaping the letters without you showing them first and see if there are any letters which appear more difficult than others.

Next move on to using pencil and paper and shaping the letters as they sound them out. You can work through the whole alphabet or give the children a selection of letters to start with and see how they progress. Encourage them to be loud with their sounding out and to make exaggerated movements when shaping their letters; the more creative and expressive they are the more the memory will be stimulated.

Materials required:

- A blank sheet of paper
- Writing instruments, preferably with a moulded grip

Examples:



Follow up:

Large-scale writing movements using the shoulder and arm are always easier for children than movements using hands and fingers only. Movements using the small joints are usually learned later. The flowing nature of large-scale movements can, however, be transferred to small-scale movements, if both types of skill are merged. Writing in the air is an effective exercise for achieving this.

Extension:

Children choose a letter and if they feel confident about the sequence of movements, then they can draw their letter on a piece of paper with their eyes open and sound the letter out. Next try the same activity but with eyes closed. Does the letter appear the same? Encourage the children to always sound out the letter they are drawing in their heads.

Observation points:

- Are the children able to sound out all the letters?
- Does it help the children to comment on their work or hum along? Does this make it easier for them to remember the construction and the sequence of movements required to write the letter?
- Are the children able to write the letters increasingly quickly and without lifting pencil from paper? Where does the movement falter?
- Writing speed should be about the same as talking speed, neither too slow nor too fast.