

# Improving Early Literacy

Consider using this guide to incorporate routines for literacy instruction into your schedule. Add a new routine month-by-month until instruction in these key areas of literacy development is second nature!

MONTH-BY-MONTH

 Retelling familiar stories offers children the opportunity to practice new vocabulary and demonstrate their listening comprehension. Children can retell beloved stories, like nursery rhymes or books with repetitive text, using flannel board pieces, puppets, or costumes. Allow children the opportunity to “read” the book to their classmates by describing the pictures or create masks during art that children can wear when dramatizing a familiar book. Encourage children to “talk like the book” by imitating key phrases with the same expression they have heard during read alouds (Pinnell & Fountas, 2011).

 Rhyme is a familiar concept in preschool thanks to many books, chants, and songs, but it is easily overlooked as a learning opportunity. Next time you encounter words that rhyme in text or song, take a moment to explain their significance. *Cat and hat are rhyming words. Listen, cat/hat! Rhyming words sound alike at the end. What other words rhyme with hat?*

 Writing takes many forms in early childhood as children progress from drawing and scribbling, to attempting letter-like forms, and conventional letters. Children should be encouraged to represent their ideas in each of these stages. Offer meaningful opportunities for children to practice writing throughout the day and for different purposes. Children can “sign in” for attendance, add their name to a waiting list at a popular center, write down restaurant orders or take phone messages in dramatic play, create traffic signs in blocks, or create greeting cards for classmates’ birthdays.

 Daily read alouds offer the perfect opportunity for embedding instruction on book features and print concepts. Book features to highlight during read aloud include how to hold a book, turn pages, recognize the difference between the front and back covers, and the role of the book’s author and illustrator. Print concepts such as directionality (reading from left to right and top to bottom), tracking print by pointing to words as they are read, distinguishing print from pictures, and understanding that words are made up of letters can also be targeted during read aloud by prompting children to point out letters and words, answer questions about print, and help to track print as it is read.

 In order to be successful readers, children must have an understanding of the sound structure of words (phonological awareness). This understanding progresses from large units of sound (words, syllables, rhymes) to smaller units (individual sounds or phonemes). Target phonological awareness at the word level by tracking print during read alouds and clapping or counting syllables in words or words in sentences. Syllables can also be identified by clapping, hopping, or tapping. *How many claps are in your name? Who else has three claps in their name?*

**ABC** Authentic and meaningful instruction on letters and features of print begins with something every child is excited to use and share: their name! Explore new ways of allowing children to interact with their names. Create name puzzles, chart classmates’ names by first letter, count and graph the number of letters in each child’s name, or add a list of names to the writing center so they can write letters to friends.

 Revamp read alouds by incorporating dialogic reading prompts. In dialogic reading, the adult prompts the children by asking questions about the story or pictures in the book. Five different prompts may be used: *completion* (pause while reading and children fill in the blank), *recall* (remember aspects of the book), *open-ended* (describe in their own words what is happening in the story), *wh- questions* (talk about the what, where, who, and why aspects of the story), and *distancing* (make connections to personal experiences outside of the story).

 Choose two to three new vocabulary words to target related to your unit of study. Introduce each word in context (i.e. when it is read in a book) and ask children to repeat the word and guess its meaning. Encourage them to act out or demonstrate the word when applicable. Prompt children to clap or make a special noise whenever they hear the target words throughout the day or during the story.

**ABC** Immersing children in the study of letters begins with their environment. Label objects in the classroom, add alphabet puzzles and books to centers, and post the alphabet at eye level. Encourage children to send in examples of environmental print (e.g. restaurant logos, food labels, catalogs) and create books or post them in an area of the room. Find opportunities throughout the day to point out text around the room, discussing what letter a word starts with and asking children to find other words with the same letter.

 Create class books to include in the reading center. Write about events or create new versions of favorite books. Allow children to dictate sentences and illustrate pages. Model spacing between words and punctuation.

## LEARN MORE

### Available from the T-TAC ODU Lending Library:

*Words Their Way for PreK-K* by Francine Johnston, Marcia Invernizzi, Lori Helman, Donald Bear, and Shane Templeton

This book offers a hands-on, developmentally-driven approach to word study that illustrates how to integrate and teach phonics, vocabulary, and spelling skills to the youngest readers. This hands-on approach motivates children, keeps them engaged, and helps them build literacy skills. The word study approach is a developmentally-driven instructional method.

*Literacy Beginnings: A Prekindergarten Handbook* by Gay Su Pinnell and Irene C. Fountas

Tap into young children's excitement and introduce them to the world of literacy in joyful, engaging ways. This book provides detailed descriptions of language and literacy behaviors and understandings for teachers to notice, teach, and support, while offering practical strategies for the prekindergarten classroom. Full of resources like songs, rhymes, and finger plays, *Literacy Beginnings* also includes 35 ready-to-use lessons to introduce young children to reading and writing.

*Ladders to Literacy: A Preschool Curriculum* by Angela Notari-Syverson, Rollanda O'Connor, and Patricia Vadasy

Help the children in your preschool become successful early readers with this field-tested, activity-based curriculum, that provides an effective way to supplement children's instruction without giving up current language arts programming. Included in the book are more than 60 creative games, crafts, role plays, and other activities that improve children's basic pre-literacy skills such as writing words, recognizing letter sounds, and breaking words into syllables and phonemes.

### Available online:

Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL)

Resources for teachers, including literacy activities and adaptations for children with disabilities

<http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/classresource1.php>

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

*Position Statement on Learning to Read and Write*

[http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/learning\\_readwrite](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/learning_readwrite)

*Where We Stand Summary: Learning to Read and Write*

(Joint statement with the International Reading Association)

<http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/WWSSLearningToReadAndWriteEnglish.pdf>

Reading Rockets

Pre-K Guide: Learning to Read and Write

[http://www.readingrockets.org/teaching/prek\\_guide](http://www.readingrockets.org/teaching/prek_guide)

## REFERENCES

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