

# Layers of Literacy

In order to provide preschool students with a strong early literacy foundation, focus your instruction on four key areas of development.

<u>Phonological Awareness</u> The ability to recognize, manipulate, and use sounds in words, including the ability to hear and discriminate sounds.	<u>Letter-Sound Knowledge &amp; Early Word Recognition</u> The ability to recognize and visually discriminate the shape of letters and know the sound(s) associated with each. Includes alphabetic principle and the notion that letters, when put together, make words.
<u>Oral Expression/Vocabulary</u> The ability to use words to communicate ideas and thoughts, and to use language as a tool for deeper understanding.	
<u>Print and Book Awareness</u> The understanding of the basic forms and functions of print. Such as how books are read from front to back, and text is read from left to right. Also includes emergent writing.	

The skills noted above encompass an important domain of development. Much like cognition, fine and gross motor, these early literacy skills:

- Are fundamental to the development of the whole child.
- Can occur simultaneously during an activity.
- Should be embedded throughout the day so children have repeated exposure to written materials and other language and literacy experiences.
- Follow a developmental continuum and vary from student to student.

If targeting early literacy is new for you or you want to expand your current practices, think of early literacy instruction as another layer to your daily activities. It does not need to be complicated or time consuming to be effective. Try adding a literacy layer to your **room**, your **routine**, or your **instruction** as a simple way of making literacy a top priority for your students this year.

## *Layer your room*

- Label common items in your room. Read labels regularly and consider switching monthly to avoid them becoming like wallpaper to students.
- Leave writing materials in centers. Students can scribble road signs in the block center, write grocery lists in dramatic play, and write their name using letter shaped cookie cutters with playdough in the art or writing center.
- Make your reading nook engaging by providing different genres of books, props and puppets for acting out stories, and copies of books created by students about field trips and other experiences.

## Layer your routine

- Ask children to “sign in” when they arrive and keep their products in a portfolio to track progress. Some students may use letter stamps, need a written model to copy, or select their printed name from a group and paste it to the page.
- Dismiss children from group activities by holding up name cards or calling the first letter of their name. (Some may need their picture paired with their written name.)
- While waiting for classmates to arrive or announcements to begin, bring out a book bin and allow children to peruse the books and “read” to themselves.

## Layer your instruction

- Re-read favorite stories often. Repeated readings of books allow children to focus on new concepts each time, pick up new vocabulary and gain confidence in answering comprehension questions or making predictions.
- Provide practice in conversation and vocabulary development by utilizing “teacher talk” during play situations. Teacher talk can involve asking children open-ended questions, expanding on their answers by adding new vocabulary words, or simply providing a narration of what they’re doing as they play.
- Make writing a class book a monthly activity. Books can use photographs or student illustrations to review field trips, classroom visitors, or group projects. Consider a simple book to start the year, such as *My Friends at School*, featuring student pictures and dictated text about their favorite things.

### References

- Bennett-Armistead, V., Duke, N., & Moses, A. (2005). *Literacy and the youngest learner: Best practices for educators of children from birth to five*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Dunst, C., & Shue, P. (2005). Creating literacy-rich natural learning environments for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. In E. M. Horn & H. Jones (Eds.), *Supporting Early Literacy Development in Young Children* (Young Exceptional Children Monograph Series No. 7) (pp. 15-30). Longmont, CO : Sopris West.