

Supporting At-Risk Writers In Nursery & Reception



The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

“You’re the most important writer-teacher a child ever meets because you’re their first one. The messages and lessons you teach them about writing, and what it means to be a writer, will stay with them forever”

Many children who start Nursery or Reception are already less experienced writers compared to their peers. As a result, they can struggle to keep pace with their classmates when it comes to key writing skills. Research highlights that students most at risk for writing challenges are those with limited experiences with:

- Oral language
- Phonological awareness
- Alphabet knowledge
- Early print concepts

This issue is a widespread concern that educators across the globe face. The challenge is clear: early and effective interventions in Reception are critical for supporting children to succeed. Simply waiting for children to ‘catch up’ is not a viable solution.

Identifying At-Risk Students

To support at-risk learners, teachers must be well-informed about the writing skills children should develop by the end of Reception. Knowing these benchmarks allows educators to identify students who need additional support early on.

Key Writing Skills For Reception

Children start developing their writing skills from birth, with progress dependent on their exposure to literacy experiences and concepts. By the end of Reception, students should:

1. Understand That Written Language Can Represent Their Oral Language

- Understand concepts about print, such as how sounds and words work on the page, how texts flow, and the purpose of making books/writing.
- Recognise book features, including titles, writing, illustrations and author names.

2. Develop Phonological Awareness

- Segment spoken words into smaller units (e.g. syllables and sounds).
- Use their phonological awareness to begin encoding the words they want to write down onto paper (or screen).

3. Recognise And Write Alphabet Letters

- Identify letters and their corresponding sounds.
- Print letters (with support from sound mats), write ‘informed spellings’ and write out high-frequency words, including their name.

4. Find Purpose & Pleasure In Making Writing

- See themselves as writers and makers of picturebooks.
- Write and make books for meaningful purposes.

5. Enjoy Reading Books As A Writer Of Books

- Actively study stories and informational books, before making their own.
- Explore books independently, with friends, and with their teacher - fostering a love for reading.

Cultivating A Strong Foundation

For students to succeed, schools must provide a robust writing programme that caters to all their learners, particularly those who may traditionally struggle. Effective early writing programmes should focus on the five points listed above.

Interventions should aim to build on what is already occurring in your writing programme. For example:

- Provide additional opportunities for children to develop their oral language skills through book-making.
- Strengthen children's phonological awareness by providing them with additional opportunities to make books alongside a teacher and their friends. Additional instruction during these sessions should focus on modelling encoding strategies and how to use sound mats to write down the words you say.
- Foster a sense of purpose and enjoyment for writing by giving children additional opportunities to write and make books alongside their teacher and friends, creating a positive attitude towards being a writer.

The Importance Of Early Success

Research underscores the significance of entering Key Stage One with a solid foundation in writing. As Snow (2017) emphasises, students who develop positive attitudes and essential knowledge about writing in the EYFS are better equipped to succeed at Primary School. By focusing on early interventions and evidence-based teaching practices, educators can help support their at-risk students, setting them on a path to lifelong literacy success.

Conclusion

As their first ever writing teachers, we play a pivotal role in identifying and supporting at-risk learners in Nursery and Reception. By developing foundational writing skills and providing targeted interventions, we can ensure that all children have the opportunity to thrive. With early support, at-risk children can transition into Key Stage One ready to continue learning, growing, and succeeding alongside their peers.

For more, download our publications: *Getting Children Up & Running As Writers In EYFS & KS1* [[LINK](#)] and *Supporting Children With SEND To Be Great Writers* [[LINK](#)]. These publications are free for our members. To become a member, click [here](#).