

Writing, Grade 1

Assessment

Learning to write is a complex process. Students must not only learn to associate sounds with their spellings; construct words, sentences, and paragraphs; and learn different modes of expression, but they must also learn different forms of writing and critical revising and proofreading skills.

This writing course focuses primarily on the stages of the writing process and a particular kind of writing—friendly letters. As Mr. Ohmer assesses his students, he will certainly check to see that they understand the attributes of a friendly letter. More importantly, he will be able to assess his students' overall progress as English-language writers.

Typical first grade classrooms have students of widely varying abilities and knowledge. Understanding the progression most students follow in learning to write will help you assess their overall progress.

The Developmental Stages of Writing

It is the process, not necessarily the correctness, that you should focus on as you evaluate your students' writing. Look for changes that indicate growth in their understanding of and progression with writing concepts.

- **Drawing, scribbling, and dictating to teacher**

In kindergarten, writing instruction builds on students' tendencies to draw, scribble, and tell stories. Encourage and support their writing to help move them toward conventional writing and spelling.

During the early stages of writing, teachers often transcribe as students draw and dictate stories. Help students make connections between their drawings and your transcriptions.

- **Drawing, writing captions, and writing simple sentences**

The next writing stage develops as students acquire more phonemic awareness and alphabetic knowledge. In this stage, students begin to use random letters (usually those most familiar to them, as in the letters that make up their names) to represent words and numerals (1-10). Eventually they write groups of letters to make "words," and then group these words with spaces between them to approximate sentences.

In addition to drawing pictures, students may use beginning and ending consonants to label their drawings.

Each child's progress will be different at this stage. Some will begin writing letters and words right away; others may continue to use incomplete spelling. As students learn the sounds and spellings in first grade, their spelling becomes more conventional. You should understand this progression and be on the lookout for students who may have special needs.

- **Connected sentences and paragraphs**

In later stages of development, students begin to write connected sentences and paragraphs and consistently use conventional spellings for familiar words. In these stages, their writing often takes the form of captions for their pictures.

Kindergarten students will gradually increase the quantity of writing they produce in a sitting. They may not all work at the same pace. Some students will not be able to concentrate on writing for more than fifteen minutes.

Invented Spelling

You can determine a child's understanding of sound/spelling correspondences by observing the spellings a child uses to represent words (i.e., invented spelling).

- **Common deletions and representations**

Eventually, drawing and scribbling expands to include the use of temporary, or invented, spellings, which are based largely on what students are learning about sound/spelling correspondences.

Encouraging students to use invented spelling contributes to an understanding of the alphabetic principle by leading them to reflect on the sounds in spoken words and to relate the sounds to printed letters.

Frequently, students will use consonants to represent words, leaving out vowels entirely (e.g., *dg* for *dog*, *Mg* for *Meg*). In early writing efforts, students are more likely to write letters to represent long-vowel rather than short-vowel sounds (e.g., *bot* for *boat*, *lat* for *late*). They may represent short-vowel sounds with letters that have similar sounds (e.g., *tuk* for *took*, *wunfor* for *one*). Students' invented spellings are often phonemically accurate: they have sounded out the words and used letters to represent each sound. When students delete letters in their writing, it may be because they did not isolate a confusing sound (such as a vowel sound).

- **Addition of vowel sounds and representation of sounds**

As students progress in learning sounds and spellings, they begin to add spellings for vowels. Because vowel sounds in English have multiple and/or irregular spellings, adding vowel spellings to written words is usually more difficult than adding consonant spellings.

Phonics-related activities are important because they give students practice in isolating and identifying sounds. Give students guidance and the opportunity to figure out word spellings.

- **Use of invented spelling as an assessment tool**

Invented spelling is a valuable assessment tool—one which teachers and parents should use. Teachers can see evidence that students are picking up sound/spelling correspondences. Early attempts to tie oral language to writing can provide teachers with insight into their students' ability to use spellings that have been taught and those that may be more difficult for the class.

As with learning to read, there is enormous variation in students' progress as they learn to write. Track students' progress to determine whether some need extra help.

Examine student writing and analyze invented spellings. Point out deletions, additions, and replacements that occur in the invented spellings, and note which sounds and spellings have been taught in class.

Teacher Conferencing

Teacher writing conferences can provide informal opportunities for assessment. They support students' writing by helping students evaluate their writing and make changes. During conferences, focus attention on specific areas by asking simple questions, such as:

- What do you want to write about?
- What word would you like to write?
- What's the first sound you hear in that word?
- What letter do you need to use?

In addition, comment positively on some aspect of the writing:

- I like your first sentence. What do you think you can write next?
- Excellent! *House* does begin with the letter *h*.

Teachers may initiate conferences, but students should be encouraged to call conferences as they need them. Writing conferences are an excellent opportunity for teachers to observe students making decisions about their work and taking responsibility for its development and completion.

Writing Seminar

Writing Seminar can be used to determine how well students are participating. Evaluate the questions that students ask and how the Seminar leaders respond to the questions.

Writing Folders

Writing Folders provide a detailed record of your students' progress as they learn to write. Compare pieces, identify strengths and weaknesses, and allow the students to reflect on their own work and how it changes over time.

Formal Assessment

In addition to informal monitoring, which should be continuous throughout the year, formal writing assessments are available as part of ***Open Court Reading*** ©2002 and are located in the *Unit Assessment* books that accompany the program. They include End of Unit Writing Assessments for all ten units and Unit Writing Portfolio Assessments in Units 7-10. Rubrics are provided for all of these writing assessments.