



The development of mark making

From birth to 2 years

Early mark making is not the same as writing. It's a sensory and physical experience. Children of this age do not understand that forming marks communicates any meaning.

Preliterate mark making

The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework recognises the ability to handle and control a pencil is still a physical development rather than a communication at this stage.

To be able to control fine muscles, young children need to develop the larger muscles in their body. So create opportunities for crawling, lateral rolling, jumping, running, hopping, skipping, climbing, hanging from a bar, pushing and pulling. It's really important for young children to develop core strength. Babies "coordinate their arm muscles from the shoulder, then the elbows and then the wrists. Skilful manipulation of the fingers or fine motor skills, comes last" (Meyerhoff, 2013).

Children need to have strength and control over at least 25 different muscles to be able to write a word!

From 2 years



The most common way of holding a crayon/pencil is by a whole fist/hand grip. This grip is overly tense with a fairly stiff elbow and wrist, which restricts control and movement. Marks go straight up and down, horizontally or vertically, as well as in large circles and dots.

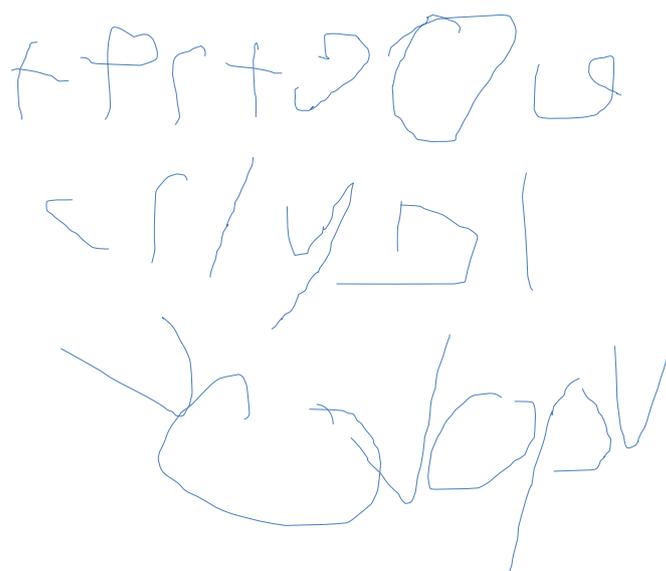
Children of this age need lots of opportunities to practice in a space that is big enough to accommodate their range of movements. This is a great time to explore all the different things that they can make marks with.

2-3 years mark making for meaning



Children begin to make marks for meaning, which are usually for writing and drawing. They are starting to make connection between print and drawing within the environment and the fact that symbols they see, carry meaning. Even though their marks making often bears no resemblance to print, they are gaining more control over their muscles and the direction they want their marks to go. They can often tell you about the marks they make. It is useful to give meaning to the marks they tell you about.

3-4 years directional through to symbolic writing

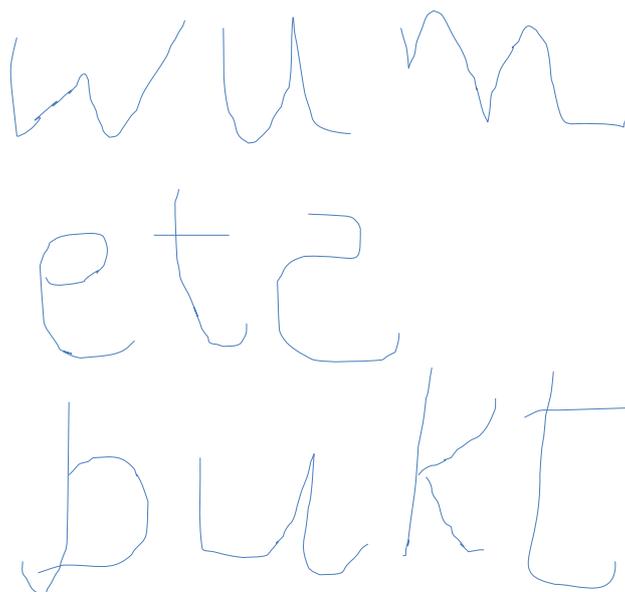


Even though children's marks do not fully resemble recognisable letter and number shapes, they will often make marks in the direction print is being read, written or displayed in front of them. Children who are very familiar with print and are read to on a regular basis often

display this stage of mark making. But children who are less familiar with how print is written and read often miss this stage out altogether.

When children write they are not linking letter shapes to sounds in words, they are just attempting to copy words they see around them. Children need opportunities to experiment with their symbolic writing and need familiar and recognisable resources for them to write on or in, such as letter, posters and books, they are known as copy writers.

4+ years emergent writers



Once children have developed their symbolic writing they move onto the emergent writing stage. The big difference between symbolic writing and emergent writing is children are starting to produce letters linked to the sounds they make. Children will not understand all the sounds in a word but will understand some, these are quite often the letters linked to the sounds in their name.

You may see a string of letters that at first glance make no sense at all, when in fact the child may have written a story in their head and recorded the first sound of each word on paper.

For more information about supporting children's writing skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage go to www.surreycc.gov.uk/eyfs