

Handwriting Instruction: How We Talk to Children Matters!

The first kindergarten handwriting priority is to teach children how to hold a pen efficiently and print their first name. This provides the foundation for a year of multisensory and engaging handwriting lessons as a part of our comprehensive kindergarten writing program. Proficiency in Common Core Writing Standards is our goal.

- Encourage children to fingerspell their name before they show you their daily name ticket—especially with children who do not have strong finger writing muscles. Fingerspelling reinforces letter knowledge while building fine motor handwriting skills for a firm pencil grip. Many highly kinesthetic children soon become fast and accurate with fingerspelling, which builds pride and confidence—especially for harder-to-accelerate learners. We want all children to build an “I can do it!” growth mindset for future learning.

How we talk to children matters! Powerful handwriting instruction involves close coaching by teachers and volunteers. They are learning “habits of mind” and attitudes about learning that may last a lifetime:

- *How did you learn how to make that L so well?*
- *Wow, you remembered that capital letter!*
- *The “r” is a “**continuous motion letter**.” Let’s make it again without lifting our pencil. Repeat after me, “down, up and around.” I bet you can remember how to make that letter – write your name one more time (or write the letter several times) and teach your brain to remember it!*
- *What is the focus letter that you have been working on? Yes, “y” is a “**lift the pen**” letter. How have you been teaching your brain to remember that?*
- *Stop and look at the Name Ticket model. Focus. Do your very best name writing!*
- *You paid attention and worked hard. That’s what good kindergarten writers do. What letter are you going to remember how to make? Let’s say the language and do the motion together.*

When the child shows you his finished Name Ticket, always start instruction with a specific positive comment about what the child can do. Then help the child remember the target letter or motion they are working on. When they show you their finished Name Ticket, give them one specific letter to improve. This is why we must be assessment-driven. The teacher, child, and parent need to know what the next name writing goals are. Expect improvement every day.

Have High Expectations

If you expect students to write their first names perfectly, like your model, rather than just legibly, most students, with enough guidance and practice, will learn to write it very nicely. And for those who cannot and may never be able to write their names perfectly, your expectation will result in them writing it much better than they may have otherwise. Moreover, such an expectation at this point will result in neater handwriting throughout the year as well as an overall heightened quality of work in general. (Ranee Bergen from Teaching

Writing in Kindergarten, A Structured Approach to Daily Writing That Helps Every Child Become a Confident, Capable Writer.)

For children who need more time developmentally, or children who are harder-to-accelerate, consider letting them do rainbow writing over their name on large sheets of newsprint attached to an easel, build play dough coils to shape letters over a large name ticket model, or work one-on-one with a specialist learning how to fluently shape letters. Seek guidance from the district occupational therapist. Lying on the floor and using a white board may be helpful. Another strategy to teach handwriting motions with children who are not able to manipulate a pencil is ideally taught in a one-on-one setting: Cover a tray with shaving cream so the child can finger paint the letters using the index finger. **Work with school literacy teams and parents: give them information on how to help their child with handwriting—and why it matters!** (See helpful links on our Nellie Edge website and Pinterest handwriting board.)

Incorrect muscle memories are hard to unlearn later. Encourage efficient letter formation from the first day of school, beginning with the most important thing a child will write—their name. Engage parents in nightly name writing review until fluency is achieved (fluency = speed and accuracy). Our high expectations and authentic handwriting practice is driven by careful assessment: both student self-assessment, and ongoing teacher observation with systematic record keeping.

Why We Teach the Vertical Alphabet

The alphabet system that children use to write and read needs to be visually consistent. If you are using italic (*D'Nealian*) manuscript for handwriting, you are actually expecting young children to learn two different visual alphabet systems: one for reading and one for writing. This makes learning much harder. **Which handwriting system is best for kindergarten?** A summary of independent research from the Eric Clearinghouse concludes, "The vertical alphabet, which according to research is more developmentally appropriate, easier to read, and easier to write for young children." Consider sharing the following article with district curriculum leaders:

Research from the Eric Clearinghouse

<http://www.areasonfor.com/HomeSchool/Products/Handwriting/ERICstudy.pdf>



Katie Nelson coaches a harder-to-accelerate student.

Because "practice makes permanent," our goal for kindergarten is to use instructional techniques and systematic assessment that ensure our children are practicing efficient handwriting strokes and owning the improvement process. This supports their developing stamina as a kid writer.

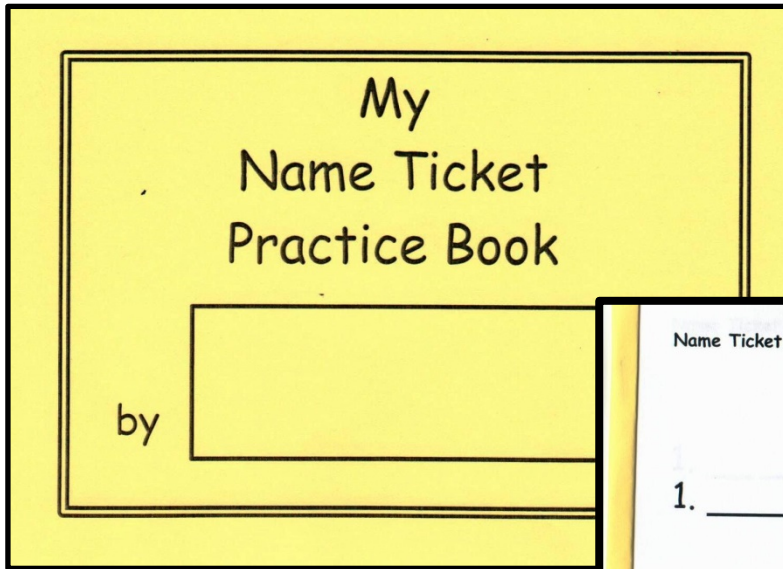
"A child's name is an island of security in a sea of unfamiliar print."

—Marie Clay

From *Kindergarten-Friendly Handwriting, Phonics, and Word Work*
Teachers' guide by Nellie Edge, ©2013.

"Parents as Partners" in Daily Name Writing Practice: The First Key to a Successful Handwriting Program

We give families a sample of their child's "name ticket" with handwriting directional arrows and *My Name Ticket Practice Book* and invite daily practice at home.



Name Ticket home practice: Please help with careful, correct letter formation.

1. _____

2. _____

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday _____

(Date) Initials

Circle the day Thank you for being "Parents as Partners"!

Guidelines for Parents as Partners: Name Writing Practice

Thank you for supporting good handwriting development

- Ask your child to look closely at the "name ticket" model.
- The goal is to form every letter carefully and correctly.
- Please help your child to **stop**, **think**, and **focus** before shaping each letter of their name. It is important that you supervise, as your guidance will assure efficient practice.
- Say the language cues **with** your child as they form each letter.
- This activity may be done in pen or pencil.
- Help your child do their very best name writing, twice every day.
- Ask your child to look closely at the model of his or her name. Compare his or her handwriting with the model. Choose one letter to improve on every day. We will continue to do the same at school until your child can accurately print their name.
- Students should aim for letter size as shown in the name ticket model.
- Please record the date each night and return the book to school.

If handwriting skills are not automatic, it interferes with the whole writing process.

It is Sometimes Helpful to Send Home an Additional Name Writing Letter to Parents Showing Their Child's Progress

Name Ticket Scholar Letter

Dear Parents,

Our kindergartners are learning to print their first names with efficient and accurate letter formation. We practice every morning and some of the children are already "Name Ticket Scholars." That means they form every letter in their name correctly and automatically.

Incorrect muscle memories can be hard to unlearn later. Our aim is to encourage efficient letter forms right from the start—beginning with a child's name.

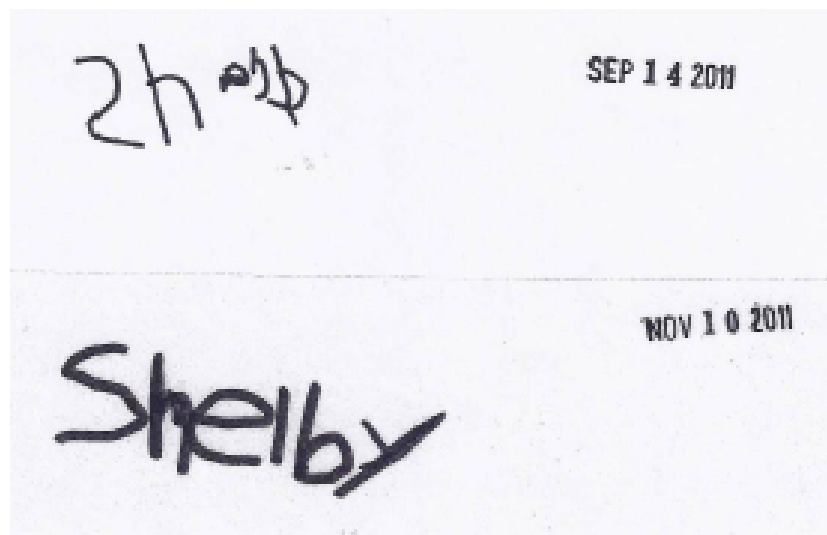
Please continue to help at home. We are sending you another Name Ticket Practice book. Please sit down with your child and help him or her accurately print their name every day. Pay attention to the following letters:

A child's name is one of the most important words he or she will ever learn to write. Once children gain mastery over these letter formations, they will have internalized many handwriting principles, and other letters will be easier to form efficiently.

While good handwriting is not the most important focus for young writers, learning to automatically control letter forms within one's name and a growing collection of high-frequency "heart words" frees the child to focus more energy into expressing their ideas in daily "kid writing."

Thank you for being partners in kindergarten learning.

With appreciation,



Special thanks to Winter Curry for collaboration on our Handwriting action-research.

A Nellie Edge Parents as Partners letter, 2011. Permission is granted for teachers to adapt and make multiple copies with credits noted.

Talking to Kindergartners about Their “Name Ticket” Printing

- **This is how we are going to print your name every day in kindergarten from now on.** You get to practice at home and at school, and your handwriting will get better every day! You will get faster and your letters will begin to look just like the “name ticket” model.
- **Wow!** How did you learn how to make those “L”s so well?
- **Remember the first week of school** when you used lots of capital letters? Now you remember to use lowercase... That’s good handwriting progress!
- **Yes! You did it! You used lowercase letters!**
- You remembered the capital letter at the beginning of your name and then all lowercase letters—**good remembering!**
- **Wow! How did you remember** the direction for making “O”?
- You made every letter accurately and they are easy to read. Congratulations!
- **Wow!** Your name writing looks like our kindergarten “name ticket” model. You formed every letter correctly. **You are becoming a name writing “expert.”**
- That’s right—we **start at the top** and the letter goes down.
- Your name writing is getting better every day—you **sure are working hard!**
- Oops! You forgot and made a capital “A” instead of a lower case “a”. **That’s okay...**take another ticket and print your name again. That’s how we learn.
- You remembered to start all of your letters at the top! That makes good kindergarten handwriting!
- Your “b” is facing the correct direction. How do you remember that?
- **You worked hard on those “M”s.** Which one do you think is your best? Why?
- Oops—think about the direction that “O” goes. **Let’s remind your brain** by making an “O” in the air again.
- I can tell you **remembered what we learned** about always starting our letters at the top!
- **How did you remember** the best way to make a “y?” Did you say “Short diagonal, long diagonal?”
- That was a harder letter to learn, and you just kept practicing until you got it. **Aren’t you proud of your hard work?**

To build emotional resilience, research says, “Praise children’s efforts, perseverance, and willingness to try new things—not how smart they are.” Specific encouragement is much more helpful than generic praise!

Kindergarten Name Ticket Handwriting Assessment and Goals

Date _____

GOALS	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
I can name each letter.										
I can fingerspell each letter.										
I make a capitol letter at the beginning of my name.										
I use lower case letters in my first name.										
I can print every letter in my name correctly.										
I always start my letters at the top.										
I make a counter-clockwise "o". Curve up, around, and close.										
I can write "I". (top to bottom, left to right)										
I hold my pencil firmly with a tripod grip.										
I can write "love".										
I can write I love you!										
I leave spaces between words.										
I can fingerspell and print letters abcd efg hijk lnop...										
High-frequency "heart words" and sentence patterns:										
Mom Dad cat dog we like the to from see										
I love Mom. I see the cat. I like my dog. I can see Dad.										
I have a dog. I can see the cats. This is my house.										
My Book by ___ To ___ from ___ Dear ____										
The end Thank you because friend favorite										
* My friend and I are going to play. Today is Monday. My favorite book is... Once upon a time there was...										
I know heart words: pink purple yellow green *blue										
ABC/Phonics Mastery:										
Level 1: I can sing, sign, fingerspell										
Level 2: Fluency naming letters. I can write CVC words.										
Level 3: a-z fluency writing in 40 seconds										
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z										
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z										

*High-proficiency writer challenge

Teach Children about the Size and Position of Letters and Expect Approximations

This little movement song/chant and practice page builds size awareness and develops the common handwriting language of "small", "tall", and "fall"...

Ask children to identify which letters in their name are "small", "tall" and which letters "falls" below the line.

Some Letters Are Small

(Say the rhyme and dramatize movements. Practice printing small, tall, and letters that fall...)

*Some letters are small, small, small.
Some letters are tall, tall, tall.
And some letters just fall, fall, fall.
And we like them all, all, all!*

Some letters are small.



a c e i m n o r s

Some letters are tall!



b t f l k d h

And some letters just fall...



g y j q p

And we like them all, all, all!



Original source of this rhyme is unknown.

Dear Families,

Your child will be writing every day in kindergarten. You'll be amazed at how much they learn to love writing and drawing this year.

It is not uncommon for kindergarten children to still be developing good finger muscle control for writing and drawing, however, how a child holds a crayon or pen is important. A firm pencil grasp makes it easier to properly form letters. That is one more reason to practice the ABC Phonics song with fingerspelling every day, and to use a handwriting helper such as this C.L.A.W.

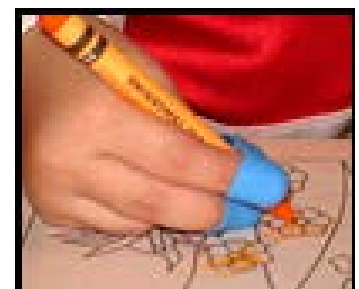
Until your child's finger muscles are comfortable holding a pencil with an efficient grip, please have your child use this handy C.L.A.W. when you are practicing name writing and heart word sentences each day at home. Soon he or she will no longer need it.

It is much easier to learn to love writing if you can hold a pencil firmly. Thank you for being "Parents as Partners". Your help does make a difference.

Smiles!

Your Kindergarten Teacher

Sample letter shared with parents whose child needs a kinesthetic reminder for holding a pencil correctly.

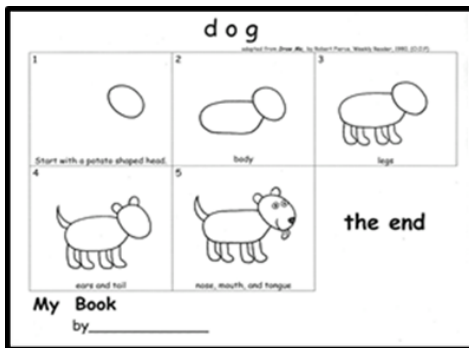


This photo shows an efficient pencil grasp using the C.L.A.W.

Prevent Confusion Between "d" and "b"

Use Language Cues and Different Beginning Movement Patterns

Here are some tips on teaching "d" from Reading Recovery® Research.



Help children memorize the language cues for "d" (through choral singing) and internalize the movement pattern (through crepe paper arm dancing).

While children perform crepe paper arm movements, sing (to *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* melody),

"d" curves around, way up, and down,

"d" curves around, way up, and down.

"Saying and doing" creates strong memory hooks.

Reinforce the directional pattern for "d" by connecting it with authentic writing experiences: Teach "dad," and "dog" early in the year. Do quick writes for fluency, learn to draw and label "dog". **Wait a few weeks before introducing "b,"** until most children can efficiently write words with "d." Then introduce "book," "by" and "boo!" with writing-to-read strategies.

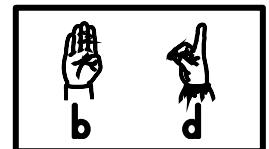
Introduce "b" using a different set of beginning movement patterns and language cues: chant

"b goes down!, up, and around..."

"b goes down!, up, and around..."

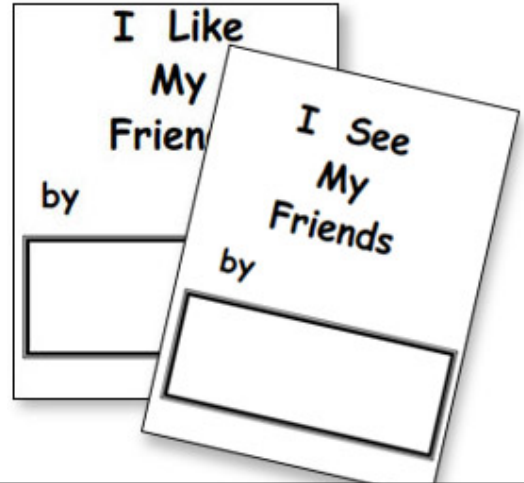
Things to notice:

- "d" starts with a **counterclockwise motion** just like the o and g in "dog."
- "b" starts with a **straight "down" motion**... "book," "by," "boo!," and "bat," are good words to use when integrating this letter into authentic writing.
- Fingerspell "d" - and you see the round shape like a donut.
- Fingerspell "b" and you see a straight line like a bat.
- "Bb" at the beginning of a word is always looking toward the other letters.



Children Learn Capital Letters by Writing the Names of Their Friends and Writing Messages:

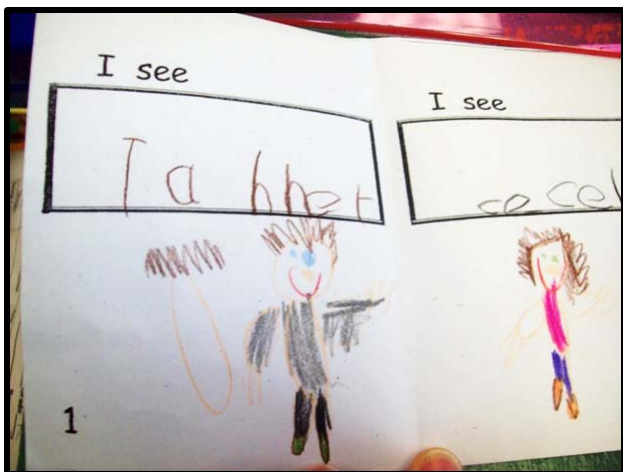
All You Need is a Name/Photo Chart (See page 70 for example)



Friends Name Book templates are included in the beginning handwriting practice pages. We print these on 11"x17" paper and use the following folded book pattern.



"I," "see," "my," "friends," and "like" are all *Sing, Sign, Spell, and Read!* "heart words" that we introduce for handwriting



Sing, Sign and Read Nellie Edge Big Books™ and Little Books
How to Fold Nellie Edge Little Books

Each Nellie Edge Read and Sing Little Book™ comes with black-line masters for child-size Little Books that match the text and illustrations of the Big Book. The child-size Little Book format is designed to best accommodate the Big Book text. Find the layout that matches the Little Book you have purchased and follow the instructions.

Fold-A-Book Instructions
Make Friends with Mother Goose, Volumes 1 and 2 and I Have A Cat (Yo Tengo Un Gato) are the Little Books using this format. Eight small pages are printed on one side of the master copy. If instruction is given in small groups with guidance, even kindergarten-age children can learn to fold these books. Once children master the fold-a-book technique, they will eagerly use it to create blank books (any size) for their own writing and illustrating purposes.

1. Fold a rectangular sheet of paper in half lengthwise. (We sometimes call this the "hot dog" or "horizontal" fold.)
2. Fold in half again, as for book. Crease tightly.
3. Fold in half again. Crease tightly.
4. Unfold the sheet - hold it vertically* (up and down)
5. Fold in half width-wise. (The "hamburger" fold.)
6. Cut along the center crease from the folded edge to the X.
7. Open the sheet again.
8. Return to the original lengthwise fold (as in #1).
9. Push the end sections together, and it will fold itself into the child-size Little Book. Four sections are formed.

** Cut is here*

Cut-And-Staple Book Instructions
 All black-line masters, except those listed above, are printed with illustrations and text back to back. After photocopying back to back, the sheet or sheets are cut in half or thirds and stapled to form an 8, 12, or 16-page child-size Little Book.

** Give children voracious vocabulary habits.*

Soon children will be able to write their own books using good handwriting with sentence patterns: I love, I see, I like, I can, I have...

Parents: How to Help Your Child Develop the Small Muscles for Writing Control



Play dough

Play with play dough - squeeze, roll, pinch and knead...

(See [Play Dough](#) Recipe)

Create finger exercises to playfully do together with your child.

Make a fist, practice keyboarding motions, and use fingerspelling.

Fingerspelling and Sign Language

Teach your child to form the ABC's in sign language. See *ABC Phonics: Sing, Sign, and Read!* Learn to fingerspell words. Sing the traditional ABC song or see free instructional ASL video clips at www.nellieedge.com.



Provide Many Activities that Involve Fingers, Hands and Arms

- Color (inside the lines) with crayons.
- Use pop beads and unifix cubes.
- Do finger plays (*Where is Thumpkin, Five Little Monkeys*).
- Finger paint and draw.
- Use short chalk or crayon pieces to draw
- Cut paper with scissors.
- Play the piano.
- Use puzzles with pegs.
- Engage the child in **dancing, handjiving, skipping and even crawling to develop strength and coordination.**

Create a Pattern with Tweezers and Beads

Give each child a round, suctioned soap holder and tweezers. Have a basket of with assorted plastic beads. The child can select beads with their tweezers and place them in the individual suction cups to create a brilliant pattern. Carefully remove each bead using tweezers, while the child counts them.



From *Parents as Partners in Kindergarten and Early Literacy: Family Connections that Multiply Our Teaching Effectiveness* by Nellie Edge ©2014, updated 2017.

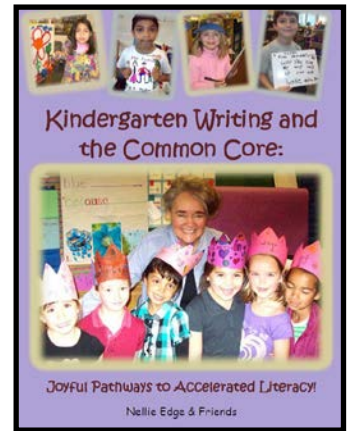


10 Best Writing-to-Read Strategies

What are the high-impact writing practices that accelerate writing development? How do we differentiate instruction to simultaneously challenge and support diverse learners within the same kindergarten? How do we teach more intentionally, systematically, and create joyful pathways to the Common Core Standards? Authentic, meaning-centered literacy is the answer!

- Strategy 1 **Bond with Children, and Create a Joyful Learning Community, Rich in Songs, Poetry, Sign Language, and Celebrations.** Use collaborative experiences in the arts and deep connections with nature to engage the child in reading, writing, thinking, speaking, listening, and creating. (Read about the SMILE approach to joyful accelerated literacy.)
- Strategy 2 **Use Multisensory ABC and Phonics Immersion** with American Sign Language and Parents as Partners: Teach for 3 levels of mastery!
- Strategy 3 **Begin Kindergarten-Friendly Handwriting with the "Name Ticket:"** Teach basic handwriting patterns through memorable songs, chants, and movement techniques using "heart words."
- Strategy 4 **Teach for Fluency with High-Frequency "Heart Words" and Provide Authentic Phonics Practice!** Sing, sign, spell, and write real words—systematically, playfully, and with great intention.
- Strategy 5 **Create a Culture of Engaged and Purposeful Writers** with kid writing workshop and authentic writing experiences across the curriculum. Use anchor charts and graphic organizers to inform narrative, information, and opinion writing. Provide engaging minilessons that touch the heart and imagination of children. Systematically teach writing skills.
- Strategy 6 **Invite Children to Use Independent Writing and Drawing Centers** to practice their craft in a meaningful context and develop writing stamina. Make lists, messages, and "really cool" books. Thoughtfully provide "choice words" and responsive feedback to your children.

"We can choose to spoon-feed our children or we can teach them to be independent, self-regulated learners." - Nellie Edge
- Strategy 7 **Introduce Well-loved Song Picture Books, Quality Fiction, and Nonfiction as Mentor Texts:** Build oral language patterns, voracious vocabulary learning habits, and a love of books. Involve children in book clubs, science exploration, and family research projects. Integrate Next Generation Science Standards.
- Strategy 8 **Publish Children's Books and Celebrate Young Authors in Simple and Delightful Ways!** Invite children to write, illustrate, revise, edit and publish their own books. Discover the powerful affirmation through word and song, ♪"Prolific Writers Are We!"
- Strategy 9 **Use Ongoing Authentic Assessment** culminating in student-led parent conferences. Be systematic and intentional. End the year with simple and memorable celebrations of learning!
- Strategy 10 **Involve Parents as Partners** to nurture a love of writing and drawing, and to reinforce foundational literacy skills through authentic writing activities at home. Family literacy multiplies our teaching effectiveness.



Create a culture of engaged young writers: Keep writing real!

Teach High-Frequency "Heart Words" — Their Way

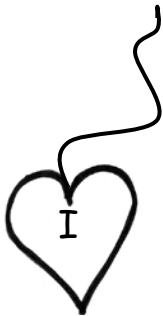
"Heart Words" Provide Visual, Emotional, and Motivational Handwriting Practice.

We call our high-frequency words "heart words" because we want to learn these words "by heart." Other teachers call them "star" words because knowing these words will help you be a "star reader." Whichever imaginative format you use, follow through with a memory necklace and wall display or word wall. If the words have magnets on the back, or are attached with Velcro on laminated hearts or rectangles, they can be moved around the room for teaching purposes.

Instant recognition of a growing collection of sight words is still the hallmark of a confident, successful reader...

Send home a heart necklace featuring the first few words the children learn to instantly read, efficiently write, and accurately spell. They can proudly affirm to their families, "I can read!"

We start with "I" since it is used most often by young "Kid Writers," and it is the easiest word to successfully print. Jacque Verrall chants with her kindergartners, "If you know the letter I, then you know the word I."



Teach What is Most Important: The Words Kids Write and the Words Kids Read

The Nellie Edge high-frequency word list has some words that are often not on the more traditional word lists (love, Mom, Dad, cat, dog, book...). **These are the words kindergartners write over and over again. These are important words emergent readers will see in quality predictable literature.** (We suspect the developers of most traditional basal or Dolch word lists have never taught kindergartners to read through writing or they would have known about these powerful words...) A dictionary of high-frequency "heart words" is kept in each child's writing notebook and one is sent home so families can celebrate their child's mastery of a growing collection of the most frequently used words. We want children to instantly be able to read, write and spell these words—and form the letters efficiently. **Our goal is Fluency: Automatic spelling • Instant reading • Efficient handwriting.**

High-Frequency "Heart Words" That Kindergartners Actually Write and Read

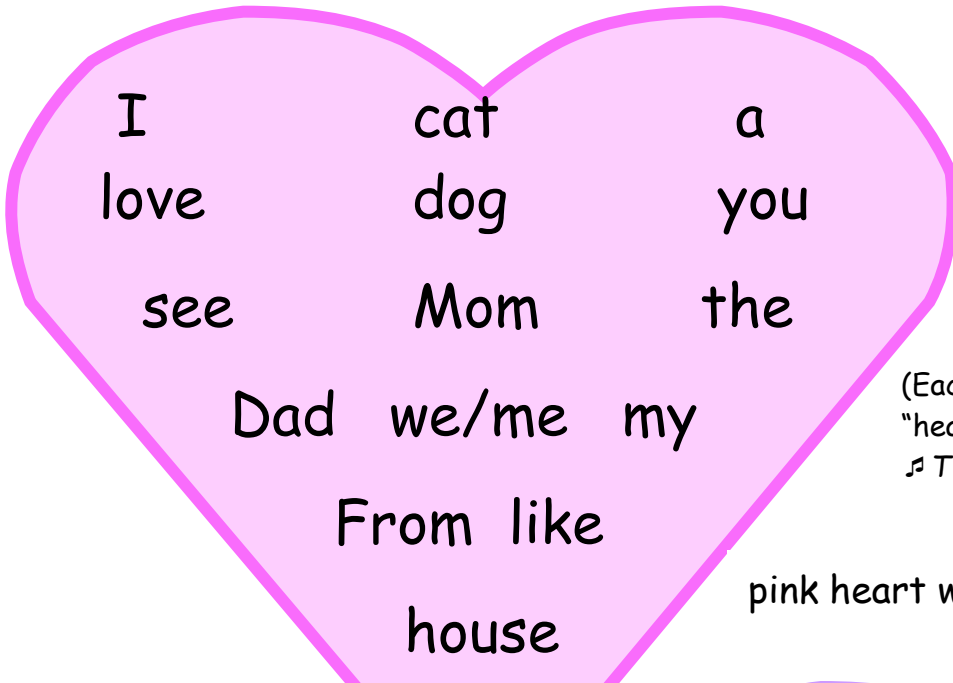
*This evolving list of 62 words comprises more than 70% of the actual words young children initially write and read. We challenge children to sing, sign, and spell **grand words**: "because," "friend," and "favorite."


I	me/we	is/it	and	book	Dear	for	with	girl
love	the	this	go/going	look	today	was	his	boy
you	see	that	stop	to	he/she	are	her	and
Mom	a/A	like	yes/no	from	get	on	they	said
Dad	cat	can	by	have	thank	am/an	at/as	in/if
my	dog	end	house	went	said	because	friend	favorite

*An ongoing fluency action-research project with Nellie Edge and colleagues

Teach Handwriting with Pink and Purple "Heart Words"

Give Students Crystal-Clear Learning Targets: Have Large Posters on the Wall
Once children can read, write, and spell these 31 words with good handwriting, they will have mastered all lowercase letters except j,p,q, x, and z.

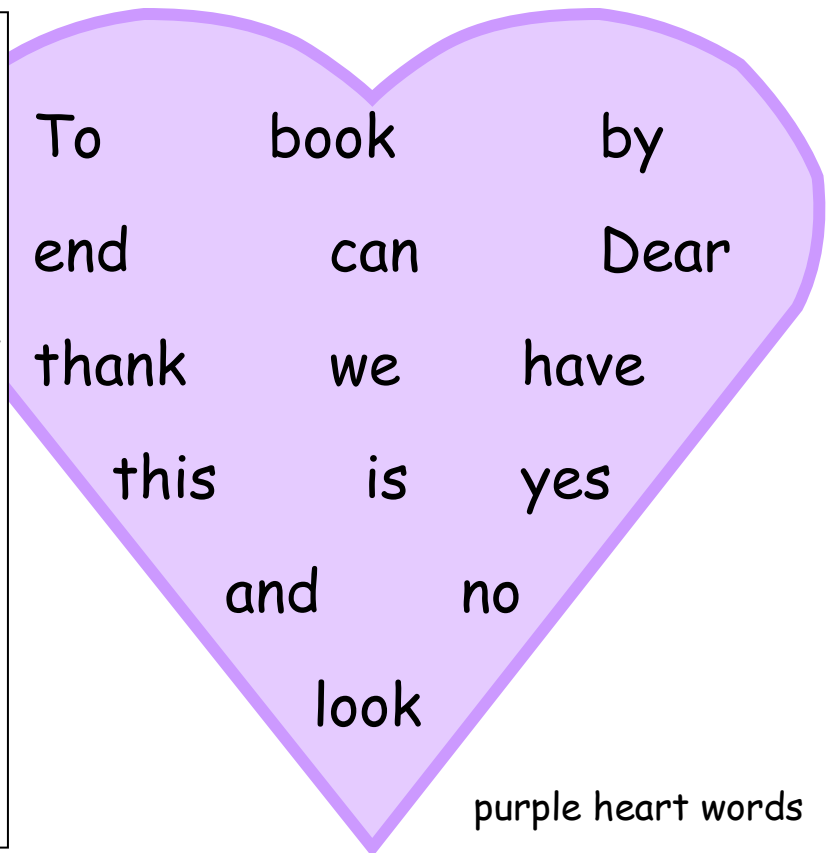


 And—of course—I can isolate, pronounce, read and write three-phoneme (CVC) words!
(cat, pen, dot, tub pig, ...)

(Each collection of 15-16 pink or purple "heart words" can be sung to the tune of ♪ Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star ♪)

pink heart words

- The old "look and say" method of teaching important sight vocabulary is **not nearly as effective** as the engaging, multisensory writing-to-read approach, recorded on the *Sing, Sign, Spell, and Read!* CD with accompanying "I Can Read" pages.
- We **sing, sign, and write with good handwriting**, engaging the **whole brain**—not just the visual cortex.
- We **differentiate** learning and teach children to set goals and monitor their own progress. They are acknowledged for their achievements.
- Children know what they have **mastered** and have a crystal clear picture of what their next **goal** is.
- Most children are first **kinesthetic and auditory** learners...left-brain visual skills come later.



purple heart words

End of year documentation in our comprehensive writing program shows over 70% of the words kindergarten writers use are high-frequency "heart words." They write words using phonics-based spelling approximately 30% of the time! **We intentionally build fluency with both kinds of words right from the start.**

The Optimum Learning Model for Handwriting is a Gradual Release of Responsibility

First use a multisensory approach to handwriting with large movement patterns and language chants to build auditory and muscle memory hooks. Sing, dance, and continue to fingerspell. **Next** model good handwriting and provide meaningful practice on white boards. Repetition builds fluency. **Finally** give children an authentic and meaningful reason to use their new skills.



Katie Nelson models how to write our first power sentence: "I love you!" Notice children are doing "sky writing" while she provides the demonstration.



In our integrated kindergarten-friendly handwriting model, we give children "power sentences" for handwriting practice. Then we apply our skills and write secret "I love you" messages that are taken home and hidden for families to find! New handwriting skills directly transfer to writing workshop, building stamina and fluency. **Handwriting is not taught in isolation.**