



# Literacy development in milestones

Developmental guidelines are not exact and should be used only as a guide. All children develop at different rates and their oral language, reading and writing don't necessarily develop at the same rate or at the same time. The following features may be observed in children's early literacy development. Parents may find these useful for understanding what they observe their child doing.

If you think your child may not be meeting milestones talk to your GP or community nurse, as intervention may be useful.

## Beginning (0 to 3)

0 to 1 year old	1 to 2 years old
<p><b>Oral language</b></p> <p>1 to 3 months: Turns head or eyes to human voice. Makes repeated sounds such as cooing.</p> <p>4 months: Responds to 'no' and changes in tone of voice. Sounds have more speech-like babble.</p> <p>6 to 9 months: Imitates some sounds in their environment, imitates some commonly heard human speech that is meaningful to them (<i>Mummy, Daddy, biscuit, bye-bye</i>). Responds to their own name being spoken and some requests like <i>Come here</i>. Listens when spoken to and begins to recognise commonly used words (e.g. <i>cup, bottle</i>).</p> <p>12 months: More frequently uses speech sounds or non-crying sounds to get attention and have needs met. Says one or two recognisable words.</p>	<p><b>Oral language</b></p> <p>Babbling reflects the sounds and intonation patterns of their first language. Comprehends a wider range of words than is able to articulate.</p> <p>Can point to some body parts and to pictures of things when an adult names them.</p> <p>Begins to use 'telegraphic speech' e.g. <b><i>Daddy home. Get milk. Bottle fall.</i></b></p> <p>Asks some 1–2 word questions e.g. <i>What that?</i></p> <p>15 months: Says 4–5 words</p> <p>18 months: Says 9–20 words. Can pronounce most sounds within their first language.</p> <p>21 months: Likes rhyming games. Tries to share own experiences.</p> <p>24 months: Says 150–300 words.</p>

## 0 to 1 year old

### Reading

Listens to books read aloud.

3 to 6 months: Stares at pictures

9 to 12 months: Explores books by touching, looking, tasting, smelling and listening.

## 1 to 2 years old

### Reading

Listens to books read aloud.

Begins to participate more actively in stories read aloud.

Enjoys stories with lots of repetition and rhyme.

Enjoys information books with photographs of objects in their world.

### Writing

Learning to grasp and hold crayons, chalk and pencils.

Scribbles; slowly changing (1 to 2 years old) from large circular movements to drawing and writing-like scribbles. May 'read out' the message they have 'written'.

## Early emergent (3 to 5 years old)

### Oral language

2 to 3 years: Says 3-word sentences e.g. ***I do it. Mummy help me.***

3 to 4 years: Has large vocabulary and uses more complex sentence structures.

Can use plurals, may overgeneralise e.g. ***sheeps, childs.***

Can use past tense, may incorrectly apply *-ed* to irregular verbs e.g. ***runned, comed.***

Children may talk to themselves during play or articulate actions as they undertake activities e.g. *I'm brushing my hair. I'm drawing a good picture.*

5 years: Has 2500–5000 word vocabulary.

Some children have difficulty pronouncing /l/, /r/, /th/ and /sh/.

Talks a lot, actively constructs language to communicate. May make up words if they don't have one for a particular situation. Often makes amusing comments as they try to work out the sounds of words and their use in different contexts.

e.g. **4-year-old girl: I'm not being boisterous, I'm being girlstrous!**

e.g. **3-year-old: I love you, mummy.**

**Mum: I love you, too.**

**3-year-old: I love you, three.**

### Reading

Asks to have stories read to them.

Has favourite book, enjoys having it reread and reread.

Pretends to read, turning pages and using pictures to tell the story from memory or making up new stories using the pictures.

Recognises and tries to read print in their environment. May notice the letter that begins their name in their environment.

Knows some numbers and letters and recognises them in different fonts in the environment and in books.

## Emergent (Preschool/Kindergarten)

### Oral language

Has expressive vocabulary.

Says around 2600 words.

Understands about 20,000 words.

Speaks in well-formed and complex sentences.

Uses all parts of speech, i.e. questions, statements, declarations.

Can follow one- and two-step instructions e.g. *Take your shoes off and then put them away.*

### Reading

Listens attentively to stories.

Joins in reading aloud, recites from memory.

Begins to be able to predict words in a text based on rhyme.

Knows how books 'work', understands concepts like *cover, front, back, title, words, pages.*

Understands how pages are turned and the direction print is read i.e. top to bottom, left to right.

Behaves like a reader. 'Reads' familiar books.

Recognises and names the letters of the alphabet.

Understands the connection between letters and sounds.

Begins to understand punctuation.

## Early emergent (3 to 5 years old)

### Writing

Uses symbols (lines, circles or other shapes) to represent words.  
Knows the difference between drawing and writing.  
Understands print has a message.  
May label own drawings with letter-like symbols or letters copied from the environment.  
Experiments with letter shapes.  
Can trace letters and shapes.  
Begins to use real, though random, letters to represent words.  
Begins to understand the concept of different fonts, that the same letter can be written in several ways: e.g. 'A a a'  
Writes own name. May confuse upper- and lower-case letters and use them inconsistently.

## Emergent (Preschool/Kindergarten)

### Writing

Knows conventions of print, begins to start writing from top to bottom and left to right, leaves spaces between words.  
Begins to write some letters of the alphabet and well-known words.  
Writes own name. Beginning to have more consistency with upper and lower case letters.  
Sometimes there may be strings of repeated letters as they refine the way the letter is made.  
Begins to use the sounds of words to spell them when writing. Begins to use the initial sound to represent a word when writing.  
May use the letter name for a sound e.g. 'cAK' for 'cake'.  
Can type on a keyboard, copying handwritten words or words from books.

## Early (Kindergarten to Year 1)

## Transitional (Years 1 to 2)

## Extending (Years 2 to 4)

### Oral language

Uses increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structures.  
Can adjust their speech to meet the needs of a variety of situations.  
Uses language for an increasing variety of purposes and functions, such as to:

- satisfy personal needs and wants e.g. *Can I have a cup?*
- control the behaviour, feelings or attitudes of others e.g. *Don't do that.*
- interact with others and establish relationships e.g. *You want to sit with me?*
- tell about themselves and their experiences e.g. *I can draw.*
- learn new things and test their knowledge e.g. *Why did that happen?*
- imagine, create new worlds, make up stories e.g. *Let's be princesses.*
- inform, describe, explain e.g. *I'll tell you about the beetle.*

Can listen intently and follow multi-step instructions, for example: Go outside and check in the car for your hat. Then come and tell me if you can't find it.

Early (Kindergarten to Year 1)	Transitional (Years 1 to 2)	Extending (Years 2 to 4)
<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p>Reads books on concepts that are familiar to them or with simple story lines.</p> <p>Begins to read fluently through practice.</p> <p>Can predict some aspects of the story to come.</p> <p>Uses letter–sound correspondence, word parts, and context to help identify new words.</p> <p>Recognises known and high-frequency words in printed text.</p> <p>Uses picture clues to help with meaning-making while reading.</p> <p>Monitors own reading and self-corrects. Notices when they don't understand the text.</p> <p>Can discuss what they read, recalling the story line and some details.</p>	<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p>Reads books on topics that increasingly go beyond their experiences including a range of fiction and non-fiction.</p> <p>Reads with greater fluency and expression.</p> <p>Follows punctuation when reading aloud e.g. rising voice to indicate a question.</p> <p>Uses word identification strategies with greater ease and speed.</p> <p>Can make predictions about the story based on knowledge of stories generally.</p> <p>Self-corrects using strategies more efficiently. Identifies many words by sight.</p> <p>Rereads the text when does not understand.</p> <p>Discusses characters and events in stories.</p> <p>Reads non-fiction material for answers to specific questions or for specific purposes.</p> <p>Comprehends stories at a literal level. Beginning to infer more subtle meanings in books.</p>	<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p>Reads with further increased fluency and expression.</p> <p>Reads longer and more complex books independently.</p> <p>Uses word identification strategies appropriately and automatically when encountering unknown words.</p> <p>Uses a range of strategies when drawing meaning from the text.</p> <p>Needs less or no support from the pictures in books to gain meaning.</p> <p>Summarises major points from fiction and non-fiction texts.</p> <p>Makes connections between their own experiences, knowledge of books or the world and books read.</p> <p>Interprets texts for meaning and relationships.</p> <p>Increasing ability to infer meanings from books.</p>

Early (Kindergarten to Year 1)	Transitional (Years 1 to 2)	Extending (Years 2 to 4)
<p><b>Writing</b></p> <p>Creates own text for others to read.</p> <p>Writing reads like spoken language written down.</p> <p>Uses both invented and regular spelling.</p> <p>Uses word banks to assist with spelling.</p> <p>Usually the initial sound and sometimes the final sound is used to represent a word e.g. <i>pla</i> = playing.</p> <p>Accurately spells 3- to 4-letter words.</p> <p>Can blend or segment sounds in a one-syllable word e.g. <i>c-a-t</i>.</p> <p>Can hear and count number of syllables in a word.</p> <p>Spacing between words becomes more consistent.</p> <p>Uses full stops and capitalisation.</p> <p>Experiments with other punctuation such as exclamation marks and question marks.</p> <p>Begins to choose different forms or genres of writing for different purposes.</p> <p>Begins to type words and sentences in word processing programs.</p>	<p><b>Writing</b></p> <p>Writes a variety of text types or genres.</p> <p>Begins to use formal language instead of oral language, writing is beginning to sound more written-like.</p> <p>Writing sentences of increasing length and complexity.</p> <p>Uses developing knowledge of grammar to effect in writing e.g. uses adjectives to add description, <i>tall green tree</i>.</p> <p>Correctly spells studied spelling words.</p> <p>Begins to apply learnt spelling patterns to unfamiliar words.</p> <p>Can hear multiple syllables in words and use them to assist with spelling.</p> <p>Spells many high-frequency words correctly.</p> <p>Begins to use writing process to produce final work (draft, edit, revise).</p> <p>Attends to the mechanics of writing.</p>	<p><b>Writing</b></p> <p>Correctly spells studied spelling words. Begins to include more sophisticated vocabulary and book language in writing.</p> <p>Can include technical vocabulary when appropriate e.g. <i>marsupial, mammal</i> in an informative text about Australian animals.</p> <p>Produces different forms of writing. Chooses a structure that suits a particular purpose.</p> <p>Uses the writing process to produce work and share with peers.</p> <p>Presents own work to other students and offers suggestions to other students.</p> <p>Begins to use paragraphs to write longer texts.</p>

## References

The Agenda for Children, [Literacy development milestones](https://letstalkcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/Literacy-Development-Milestones-new-logo1.pdf) <https://letstalkcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/Literacy-Development-Milestones-new-logo1.pdf>

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