

Literacy in Early Childhood Education

Incorporating literacy into your day can seem daunting. The good news is that you do not need to have fancy materials to make it happen! Literacy can be taught using materials that are most likely already in your space.

If literacy practices are new to you as a provider or teacher, it may be a good idea to reflect on what you know about literacy in early childhood. It is also important to think about setting goals for your literacy activities and tailoring them to each individual child. Below are some examples of reflection questions.



Knowledge/Understanding	Practice	Planning
What do you know about importance of literacy in early childhood?	Have you incorporated literacy activities into your program? If so what types of activities?	What are your current literacy goals for your program? Individual children?
How did you come to form these opinions?	What were your goals regarding these activities?	What supports will you need to accomplish these goals?

Adapted from Framework for Reflective Questioning (Rush & Sheldon, 2011 p. 78)

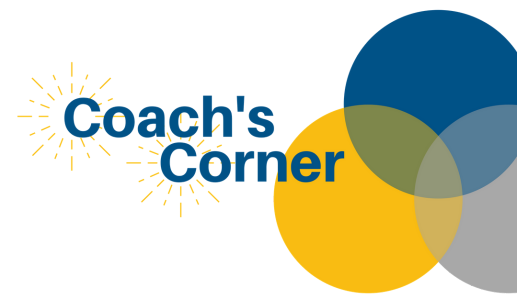
If you are wondering where to start with literacy, your own classroom environment is the best place! Setting up the environment is an important part of encouraging literacy concepts in early childhood. It's easy to assume that most literacy instruction occurs during storybook reading or when children spend time in the library center, but this is not always the case. While the library area is an important component of the early childhood environment, there are many other areas to encourage literacy.

For example, in the dramatic play area you could add literacy items to accompany various themes. Some examples include:

- *Restaurant: menus, notepads, play money, name tags, and signs*
- *Post office: paper, envelopes, pretend stamps, address labels, and postcards*
- *Grocery store: advertisements, coupons, receipts, grocery lists, and various empty food containers with product logos.*

Additional areas to include literacy items could be blueprints, pencils, and paper in the block area; alphabet puzzles for fine motor skill; magnetic letters and chart paper for science; magazines for collages, and letter stencils and stamps in the art area. Many of these materials will also help to foster an interest in writing skills.

TIP: If you have limited space try creating a "prop box" to store these items when they are not in use.



Writing tends to receive less attention in society due to the abundance of technology in our everyday lives. Years ago, children watched their parents, teachers, older siblings, and other adults in their lives writing frequently. Today, children are more likely to see adults emailing, texting, and using smart phone apps for to-do lists. Teachers and caregivers must be intentional about providing children with opportunities to practice writing and observe writing in their classrooms. Writing is most interesting to children when it serves a purpose. Consider having the children sign in when they arrive each morning. Encourage them to write while engaging in dramatic play themes even it is just scribbling.

In addition to the ideas above, alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness (word awareness, syllables, rhyming, and phonemes) can also be taught in a “hands-on” manner with materials in the classroom. Consider making letters out of play dough or with sticks found during outdoor play. Give older preschool children a word and then have them find something in the classroom that might rhyme with that word or have them clap out syllables.

For our littlest learners, keep in mind that language and literacy go hand-in-hand. Talk to infants during routine times such as diaper changes and feedings. Help toddlers learn words for items in the world around them. And of course, storybook reading is a great way to incorporate literacy at any age!