



Early Literacy Instruction Best Practices for Young Children with Disabilities (YCWD)

What is Early Literacy?

Early Literacy instruction uses intentional, evidence-based practices to build foundational skills that help children begin to understand to read and write.

Key Foundational Skills:

- **Oral Language:** The ability to understand spoken language and express ideas.
- **Vocabulary:** Learning new words and their meanings.
- **Phonological Awareness:** The ability to hear and play with sounds in spoken language.
- **Concepts of Print:** Understanding of how print words and how books are used.
- **Letter Knowledge:** The ability to recognize letters, name them, and understand their sounds.
- **Phonics:** Understanding the relationship between letters and sounds.
- **Early Writing:** Children begin expressing ideas through scribbles, drawings, letters, words and sentences.

Why Early Literacy Matters for YCWD?

Early literacy is crucial for learning and cognitive development by strengthening brain connections from birth. It improves school readiness by strengthening communication, attention, and the foundation for all academic success.

Best Practices:

- **Explicit and Systematic Instruction**
 - Clearly teach and model skills step-by-step utilizing visual supports and engaging lessons.
 - Guide students through practice, check understanding, and use data to differentiate instruction based on individual needs.
- **Multisensory Learning**
 - Enhance literacy activities by incorporating sight, sound, touch, and movement.
- **Print and Language Rich Environments**
 - Provide accessible and developmentally appropriate books for every child, label objects and use environmental print throughout the classroom, and embed writing materials and activities in centers.
- **Encourage Literacy Through Play**
 - Provide opportunities for children to practice literacy skills through play and exploration.

Incorporating Best Practices in Foundational Literacy Skills:

When selecting an activity for Young Children With Disabilities (YCWD), utilize data to meet the child at their developmental level and systematically bridge the gap towards more complex skills. Refer to the indicators in the [Louisiana Early Learning and Development Standards \(ELDS\)](#) to identify a child's developmental level on the progression chart (infant, toddler, preschool) and implement best practices to build their skills to their age appropriate level.

Early Literacy Skills	Key Points	What does instruction look like?
Oral Language	• <i>Receptive Language:</i> Understanding spoken language • <i>Expressive Language:</i> Communicating thoughts, feelings, and ideas	• <i>Receptive Language:</i> "Point to the ___." The child points to the object in a book. • <i>Expressive Language:</i> The child labels objects in pictures
Vocabulary	• Be intentional by teaching new words and meanings • Build background knowledge • Label objects/actions by modeling words during everyday interactions • Make it engaging by using visuals, motions, and themes	• Use in daily conversations: ○ "That's an enormous tower!" ○ "The horse is galloping, can you gallop?"
Phonological Awareness	• Focus on listening, not print • Incorporate during daily interactions or play	• <i>Word awareness:</i> Using a block in the block center the teacher models by tapping the block as she says each word in the sentence: "I-have-a-block" • <i>Syllable awareness:</i> The teacher models blending or separating syllables in words using objects in the dramatic play center. "Apple, A-pple"
Concepts of Print	• Model book handling • Teach directionality (left to right; top to bottom) • Help children distinguish letters vs. words	• Teacher models holding the book in the correct orientation and turning one page at a time. The teacher guides the child to hold the book in the correct orientation and turn the pages one at a time.
Letter Knowledge	• Introduce letters in small set, adding new letters once the previous are learned • Start with the letters in their name • Use multisensory activities • Connect letters and sounds in daily interactions and routines	• Build letters with tactile materials or stamp letters in playdoh. • Sing songs that connect letters and sounds, such as "The M says /m/, the M says /m/, every letter has a sound the M says /m/". • Have children line up if their name starts with S.

Early Literacy Skills	Key Points	What does instruction look like?
Phonics	Build phonics instruction by phonological awareness and letter knowledge	Using a sensory bin filled with letters and objects that begin with those sounds, the teacher models matching the letter to the initial sound by saying, "A says /a/ like the beginning of apple".
Early Writing	- Encourage expression through writing and drawing - Provide multiple materials such as crayons, chalk, and shaving cream. - Practice pre-writing strokes - Include fine motor activities such as playdoh, beading, and stacking.	Using shaving cream on a table, the teacher models directionality when writing a horizontal line. Students practice making horizontal lines which is a foundational skill to write letters such as T, H, and L.