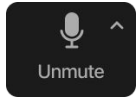


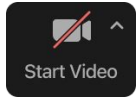
Best Practices for Literacy Instruction



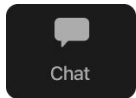
Zoom Meeting Preparation



- Please make sure your phone or computer is muted to minimize background noise.
 - To do this, hover over the bottom left-hand side of your screen and click “Mute.”



- Please make sure you have turned off your camera to save bandwidth and prevent any connectivity issues.
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- Please submit questions during the presentation in the “Chat” function located on the bottom of your screen.

If you require an interpreter or have other accessibility needs for future LDOE meetings, please contact LDOEcommunications@la.gov.



Purpose

The monthly Young Children with Disabilities Community of Practice is designed to allow early childhood special education administrators and leaders to:

- collaborate with others on current trends and practices in servicing and supporting young children with special needs
- problem solve challenges
- share and celebrate successes



Agenda

- I. The Importance of Early Literacy for YCWD
- II. Featured Topic:
Best Practices for Literacy Instruction and Supplemental Activities
- III. Upcoming Events





The Importance of Literacy Instruction for Young Children with Disabilities

What is Early Literacy Instruction?

- Early literacy instruction is intentional, evidence-based practices designed to build foundational skills such as print concepts, vocabulary, phonological awareness, and letter recognition that help learners begin to understand reading and writing.
- For example:
Clapping out the words in a sentence
(phonological awareness)



Why is Early Literacy Instruction important for Young Children with Disabilities (YCWD)?

- Early Literacy is critical because it forms the foundation for all future learning, cognitive development, and academic success by strengthening brain connectivity from birth.
- The high plasticity of young children’s brains from birth to five makes it easier for them to create neural pathways, or “connections,” necessary for learning.
 - Each time a child participates or engages in a literacy activity, learning is taking place.
 - Young children with disabilities may need to engage in literacy instruction more frequently or in different ways to help their brain make those connections.



Why is Early Literacy Instruction important for Young Children with Disabilities?

- Early literacy instruction improves school readiness in young children by:
 - helping children develop the ability to sit, pay attention, and participate in learning;
 - strengthening vocabulary, comprehension, language, and communication skills;
 - cultivating a love for reading and creating positive interactions between caregivers, teachers, and children;
 - and building the foundation for success in other academic skills such as mathematics.





Core Early Literacy Skills Instruction

Why is Early Literacy Instruction important for Young Children with Disabilities?

Early literacy instruction directly supports core early literacy skills, including:

- Oral Language
- Vocabulary
- Phonological Awareness
- Concepts of Print
- Letter Knowledge
- Phonics
- Early Writing



Oral Language Instruction



- **Oral language** is defined as the skill to understand spoken language (receptive language) and to express ideas through speech (expressive language)
- Expressive Language may look different for a YCWD, as it may be communicated through gestures, AAC devices, pictures, or sign language.
- Examples of oral language instruction:
 - **Receptive Language:** Have a child point to a specific object in a book
 - **Expressive Language:** Have a child label objects they see in the pictures

Oral Language Activities

	Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Receptive Language Activity: <i>Using Picture Books to follow directions</i>	Respond to simple commands with gestures or tone of voice. <i>Example: Model labeling an object and pointing to it</i>	Follow simple 1-2 step directions with gestures. <i>Example: "Point to the frog."</i>	Follow 2 or more directions using visual cues as needed. <i>Example: "Touch the dog, then clap."</i>
Expressive Language Activity: <i>Picture descriptions</i>	Use gestures, vocalizations and sounds to express their thoughts. <i>Example: Model labeling objects in the pictures and encourage verbal expression</i>	Respond to simple statements and questions about pictures, people and things that are present. <i>Example: "What color is the balloon?" "How many fish?"</i>	Ask/Answer questions about a variety of familiar topics, activities or concepts. <i>Example: "He has a ball...what do you do with a ball?"</i>

Vocabulary Instruction

- **Be Intentional:** Purposefully teach new words and their meanings so children can understand and use them in their vocabulary.
- **Build Background:** Introduce a wide range of vocabulary to build background knowledge and language, which later supports comprehension.
- **Label Objects and Actions (Infants/toddlers):** Model labeling objects or actions during interaction and give young children opportunities to practice using the new words.
- **Make it Engaging:** Use thematic lessons, visuals, or motions to make vocabulary instruction more interesting and memorable.
- **Use Everyday Conversation:** Integrate new vocabulary naturally into daily conversations and play. For example: “That’s an enormous tower!”



Phonological Awareness



- **Phonological Awareness** is defined as the ability to hear, recognize, and play with sounds in spoken language.
 - **Focus on Sounds:** Engage children in activities that focus on hearing, recognizing, and playing with the sounds in spoken language.
 - **Avoid Print:** Avoid using letters or written words, as these activities should rely only on listening and can be completed with your eyes closed.

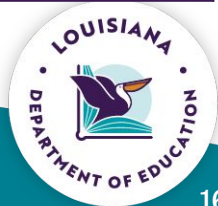
Phonological Awareness Instruction



- **Examples include:**
 - **word awareness**-clap for each word in a sentence
 - **syllable awareness**-blend or separate syllables in a word
 - **alliteration**-recognizing when words begin with the same sound
- For Toddlers, activities like clapping to the rhythm of a song sets a foundation for Phonological Awareness.

Phonological Awareness

	Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Activities	<p>Sing songs and nursery rhymes with rhyming words: <i>Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star</i> <i>Hickory Dickory Dock</i></p>	<p>Repeat or fill in rhyming words in songs, fingerplays and rhymes: Teacher: “Open, shut them, Open shut them, Give a little clap... Open, shut them, Open shut them, put them in your ___.” Student: “lap...”</p>	<p>Identify and produce rhyming words: Teacher: “Give a thumbs up if these words rhyme cat/hat; Can you think of another word that rhymes with cat/hat?”</p>
	<p>Hold a toy and repeat the initial sound Show a ball; say “<i>b-b-b-ball</i>”</p>	<p>Alliteration & Recognize the same initial sounds: Teacher: “Sally sings silly songs.” “What sound do you hear at the beginning of all of those words?” Students: /s/</p>	<p>Identify initial sounds: Teacher: “What is the first sound you hear in Bug?” Student: /b/</p>
		<p>Segment sentences into words with guidance: Using blocks, move one up as they say a word in the sentence</p>	<p>Segment sentences into words: Teacher: “The dog runs.” Student: “The-dog-runs.”</p>
		<p>Segment syllables: Teacher: “table” Student: “ta-ble”</p>	<p>Blend syllables: Teacher: “foot-ball” Student: “football”</p>



Concepts of Print

- **Print Awareness** is defined as a child's understanding of how print works and how books are used, including the idea that print has meaning and rules for how words are organized.
 - **Model Book Handling:** Demonstrate how to correctly hold and use a book such as turning pages one at a time.
 - **Teach Directionality:** Explicitly model and point out the direction of print (left to right/top to bottom)
 - **Develop Word/Letter Awareness:** Focus activities on distinguishing between words and a single letter.
 - **Provide Exploration Time:** Giving children opportunities to explore various types of books on their own.



Letter Knowledge Instruction

- **Alphabet knowledge** refers to the ability to recognize letters, name them, and understand sounds they represent.
 - Introduce letters in small sets, adding new ones only after the previous group has been mastered. Start with the letters in their names.
 - Use multisensory activities.
 - For example: Stamp letters in play doh or build them with blocks or pipe cleaners
 - Connect letters to sounds in daily interactions.
 - For example: Use songs that make letter sound connections. “The M says /m/, the M says /m/, every letter makes a sound, the M says /m/.
 - Incorporate in their daily routine.
 - For example: Have children line up if your name starts with S.



Letter Knowledge Activities



- Sing the abc song paired with visuals such as an abc chart and letters
- Go on a letter hunt in a book or in the classroom to find a specific letter.

Phonics Instruction

- **Phonics** teaches the relationship between letters and the sounds they represent, which enables children to read (decode) and write (encode).
 - Focus on phonological awareness and letter knowledge skills as a foundation before teaching phonics.
 - An example would be understanding that A says /a/ and pairing it to the apple which begins with /a/.



Early Writing Instruction



- **Early Writing** is the stage when young children begin to express their ideas through scribbles, drawings, letters, and eventually words and sentences.
 - **Encourage Expression:** Provide opportunities for children to express their ideas in writing.
 - **Encourage Practice:** Include various modes for practice, by using crayons, chalk, magnetic writing boards, paint, or shaving cream.

Early Writing Instruction



- **Prioritize Pre-writing Strokes:**
To develop the correct formation and directionality, have students work on horizontal, vertical or slanted lines and circles prior to letter formation.
- **Incorporate Fine Motor Activities:**
Fine motor activities strengthen the muscles in young children's hands and fingers which are needed in writing.
Examples: playdoh, bead stringing, stacking blocks, cutting

Supporting YCWD in Early Literacy Instruction



- When selecting an activity for young children, consider their developmental level, and use data to choose the appropriate activity for that skill. Meet the child where they are developmentally and systematically bridge the gap by working towards more complex skills.
 - Just because a child is in preschool does not mean that they are ready to begin at that level; an infant or toddler activity may be more appropriate.



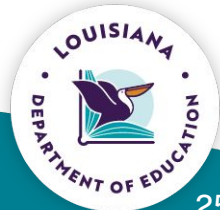
Best Practices for Early Literacy Instruction

Best Practices for Early Literacy Instruction

Effective early literacy instruction is built on several different foundational best practices.

These include:

- Explicit and Systematic Instruction
- Multisensory Learning
- Visual and Environmental Supports
- Encourage exploration of literacy skills



Explicit and Systematic Instruction

The first foundational best practice for early literacy instruction is to use explicit and systematic instruction.

Explicit and systematic instruction is when educators:

- Clearly teach, model, and practice core literacy skills frequently.
- Ensure lessons are engaging and supported with visuals.
- Differentiate instruction based on current data and individualized needs.
 - For example:
 - When working in a small group with specific children on letter knowledge, plan ahead using data to identify which letters have not yet been acquired.
 - The teacher should be clear and direct, “Today we are learning the letter B. B makes the /b/ sound like in the word ball.”
 - The lesson should include modeling, guided practice with feedback and independent practice. Be sure to review and practice previously learned material and skills.



Multisensory Approach

Another foundational best practice for early literacy instruction is using a multisensory approach.

- Literacy activities can be enhanced by incorporating sight, sound, touch, and movement.
- Educators can use tactile materials and incorporate body movements, singing, and dance. They can also use songs, nursery rhymes, and fingerplays, such as “Pat-a-cake” and “Open shut them.”
- Incorporate sensory bins that include letters, tactile objects for phonological awareness games, and thematic materials geared around a book that helps a child build vocabulary and comprehension.



Print and Language Rich Environments

It is important to create print and language rich environments to encourage early literacy by:

- ensuring all books are accessible and developmentally appropriate for every child;
- labeling objects and use environmental print (for example nursery rhyme posters) throughout the classroom and centers;
- and embedding writing materials and activities, for example, a grocery list in dramatic play center, for hands-on practice.



Encourage Exploration and Literacy through play

The final foundational best practice is to encourage exploration and literacy through play.

- Educators can provide opportunities for children to practice literacy skills through play and exploration.
- For example: Utilize board books paired with tactile manipulatives.
 - Match real objects to pictures of objects to build vocabulary.
 - Use tactile objects to retell or re-enact the story.





Closing

Key Takeaways

Implementing best practices for literacy instruction is essential to improve outcomes in early language and literacy for young children. Educators can have long term impacts on young children with disabilities when they:

- prioritize explicit and systematic instruction;
- engage in utilizing a multisensory approach to teaching and learning;
- cultivate a print and language rich environment;
- encourage exploration and opportunities that focus on literacy;
- and commit to meeting each child where they are developmentally and systematically to close gaps in development.



Questions





Upcoming Events

Monthly Young Children with Disabilities Community of Practice

The early childhood strategy team conducts a monthly Community of Practice on various topics related to young children with disabilities. These webinars include professional development and updates regarding young children with disabilities in early childhood settings.

Attendees can access the webinar using the information below:

- **Webinar Date/Time:** Tuesday, April 28, 2026 at 3 p.m.
- **Webinar Link:** <https://ldoe.zoom.us/j/99301224453>
- **Phone Number:** 1-312-626-6799
- **Meeting ID:** 993 0122 4453
- **Passcode:** 497464

Upcoming Events and Deadlines

Please contact Emily.Coussou@la.gov with questions.

