

Write Away

Cost: Under \$5

Mess factor: Some

Suggested location: Kitchen or playroom

Experiences your children will have

- Making marks and scribbles
- Writing letterlike forms

Materials

- Washable markers or chubby crayons
- Paper
- Tape (optional)

Beginning

Cover your table (see “Hints” on the facing page), and make sure your child is safely seated. Place a piece of paper in front of your child (you can tape the paper onto the table so it doesn’t slide). Let your child choose which color marker or crayon to use. (Toddlers often have more success with writing with a marker because they don’t have to press as hard to make a mark.) If this is your child’s first time using a writing tool, you may need to show them how to use the marker/crayon and help take the cap off of the marker (note that marker caps may be a choking hazard).

Middle

Younger toddlers may simply make random marks on their papers. While this might not seem significant, this exploratory stage is a very valuable step in their development of learning how to write. Keep in mind that it is common for toddlers to put items (e.g., crayons) in their mouths. If your child does this, offer a gentle reminder that crayons and markers are for writing on paper.

Demonstrate on your piece of paper how to make marks with a marker/crayon. Talk about what your child is doing, and use your own writing tool to imitate your child’s actions.

End

When your child begins to lose interest, introduce a different color marker or crayon. If your child still seems uninterested, help your child down, and hang up your child’s creations at toddler-height.

Cleanup

Wash your child's hands with warm, soapy water and wipe off their face and mouth with a warm washcloth to remove any marker smudges.

Younger children

To prepare infants' hands for a future of writing, give them lots of opportunities to practice grasping and holding objects (e.g., rattles, plush toys, stacking cups).

Older children

Expect to see older children writing letterlike forms and recognizable letters or numerals, especially if they have had plenty of practice using writing tools as toddlers. Give older children plenty of opportunities to practice writing by letting them make grocery lists, notes, cards, signs, and stories so they learn that that writing is much more than the rote practice of forming letters; it is a way of expressing themselves and a way of communicating with others.

Hints

- Consider purchasing a plastic tablecloth or shower curtain lining to place over your table for working on messy projects. Parents who cover their tables and are confident that their furniture is protected may feel more at ease letting their children explore art materials.
- Take this activity to a different level by taping a large sheet of butcher paper onto the floor of your kitchen (you may want to place the tablecloth or plastic lining underneath to protect your floor). Your toddlers might enjoy lying down on their stomach or sitting in the middle of the paper to write.

More!

Take this activity outside, and use crayons or sidewalk chalk for scribbling and writing on the sidewalk or driveway. Cleanup is as simple as washing toddlers' hands (and perhaps dusting off their pants). Children will enjoy seeing their writing displayed and will have a clean surface to repeat the activity after it rains!

Special needs accommodations

For toddlers with motor delays, consider purchasing a slant board (available from occupational therapy websites). Slant boards naturally place your child's wrist and hand in an optimal position for writing. Although a slant board may not be necessary to use when your child begins exploring writing tools, you may find it helpful as they become more interested in and purposeful about forming letters. You can also place a plastic needlepoint canvas sheet (available at most craft stores) underneath your toddler's piece of paper. Feeling the texture under the point of the marker or crayon while writing offers toddlers some sensory feedback.