

Guidance for Observation and Target Setting in Literacy (EYFS)

Ofsted Definition of Teaching in the Early Years:

Teaching is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities, communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment that adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children's next steps in learning and to monitor their progress.

5 Key Questions to ask when observing Literacy:

	Question (no more than 6)	<i>Additional Information</i>
1	How does the teacher discuss books with children and develop their understanding of print?	For example, how does the teacher: • discuss characters and events, encouraging children to predict outcomes, compare plots and relate feelings to their own experiences? • focus on meaningful print (a child's name, a cereal packet, a book title) to discuss similarities and differences between symbols? • help children understand what a word is, using labels and pointing out words in the environment and in books? • model the language of print (letter, word, page, beginning, end) using big books, and provide instructional texts (e.g. a recipe) to follow?
2	How does the teacher build a rich reading culture and support children to seek and share information?	For example, how does the teacher: • read aloud every day from a wide variety of books and talk about the books shared? • model responding to texts, drawing on experiences and knowledge of the world? • allow some choice and child agency re: the books that are read aloud? • engage children in 'back and forth' conversations about characters and events?

	Question (no more than 6)	Additional Information
		• encourage children to tell their own stories in their own way? • model finding information from non-fiction texts, in print, digital and online sources? • provide everyday signs and written texts (labels, lists, recipes) in play areas for children to use in their play?
3	How does the teacher develop children's phonological and/or phonemic knowledge through play (depending on the stage of development)?	For example, how does the teacher: • develop rhyme and alliteration knowledge through oral play? • play games linking letters (graphemes) to speech sounds (phonemes), e.g. letter bingo, linking actions with sounds? • model segmenting simple words into sounds and blending them together? <i>If this is prior to reception year and the introduction of formal phonics teaching then the emphasis must be on oral blending and segmenting.</i> • include playful, multi-sensory experiences that build interest in reading and phonics, and demonstrate decoding using visible text (e.g. big books)?
4	How does the teacher model purposeful writing and mark-making within play?	For example, how does the teacher: • model and include children in using signs and writing within play (e.g. a shop, car wash, taking-turns list)? • model the application of phonics knowledge if children are at the stage of formally learning GPCs? • write down what children say, to support their understanding that speech can be written and read back? • set up environments (office, den, library, shop) where children spontaneously engage in writing?
5	If children at at the stage where they are formally learning about the written links between letters and sounds, how does the teacher support	For example, how does the teacher: • encourage children to apply grapheme/phoneme knowledge to what they write in meaningful contexts?

	Question (no more than 6)	Additional Information
	children to apply their phonic knowledge in meaningful writing?	• support and scaffold individual children's writing as opportunities arise? • provide opportunities to write for different purposes about things that interest children, e.g. resourcing role play with writing equipment for a real purpose? • plan for children to write to real audiences or in role e.g. a letter of thanks following a trip to the zoo; a message in a Christmas card; a letter from the giant to Jack? • provide regular playful, multi-sensory, systematic phonics activities to help children represent phonemes in writing?
	If children at the stage where they are formally learning about the written links between letters and sounds, how does the teacher support children to apply their phonic knowledge in meaningful reading activities?	For example, how does the teacher: • use assessment knowledge of children's current decoding skills and knowledge to help create written teaching resources so that children get the chance to apply their knowledge? • model, by thinking aloud, how to apply phonic skills and knowledge when children are reading decodable texts? • model, when appropriate, how to use decoding skills and knowledge to read words/phrases in books that are at a level beyond children's current reading knowledge?

Potential **Literacy** Specific Targets on Lesson Analysis Forms.

Lesson design and delivery, including sequencing and choice of teaching methods Next Steps:
Plan daily read-aloud sessions using a wide range of quality texts, including opportunities for shared reading.
Build meaningful print and mark-making opportunities into role-play areas (e.g. labels, recipes, signs with a real purpose).
Plan playful, multi-sensory phonics activities that link graphemes and phonemes through games, actions and songs.

Include opportunities for children to dictate or scribe their own stories, which are then read back and enacted.

Plan for children to apply their developing phonic knowledge in a meaningful writing context, e.g. a list, sign or card.

Adapting planning and teaching to ensure that individual needs are met Next Steps:

Plan additional phonics support (e.g. small-group intervention, multi-sensory resources) for children who are not yet secure with grapheme-phoneme correspondence.

Consider how you will adapt reading and writing activities for children with EAL or additional needs, e.g. dual-language books, visual supports, scribing.

Identify how you will extend reading and writing opportunities for children who are confident readers and writers.

Pupil progress in this lesson and use of assessment (including questioning) Next Steps:

Note children's use of story language and their ability to predict, sequence or retell events, comparing to Development Matters expectations.

Observe children's phonic knowledge in context, e.g. segmenting/blending simple words or linking letters to sounds during play.

Assess children's growing understanding of writing for a purpose, e.g. their attempts at mark-making, labels or messages during child-led play.

Comments about student teacher's developing Subject Knowledge and Pedagogy Next Steps:

Develop secure knowledge of the two Literacy strands (Reading; Writing) and how they build on Communication and Language.

Extend your knowledge of systematic synthetic phonics teaching, including how to model segmenting and blending clearly.

Reflect on how you use concepts about print (e.g. word, letter, page, beginning, end) explicitly in your teaching.

<https://birthto5matters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Birth-to-5-Matters-Doc-LINKS.pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-in-life-a-research-review-for-early-years>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

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- Whitebread, D. & Coltman, P. (2015), *Teaching and Learning in the Early Years*. Routledge
- Whitehead, M. (2023). *Developing language and literacy with young children* (5th ed.). SAGE.