



# Emergent Deaf and Hard of Hearing Writers of All Ages

Recommendation Report

05.27.2021



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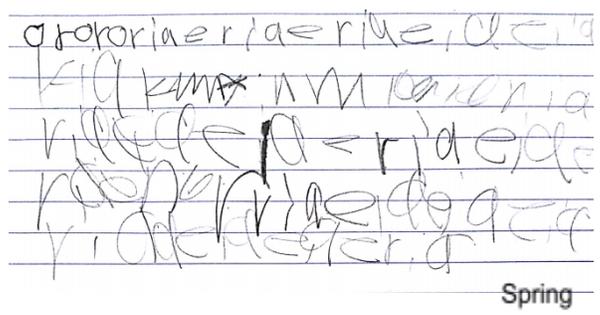
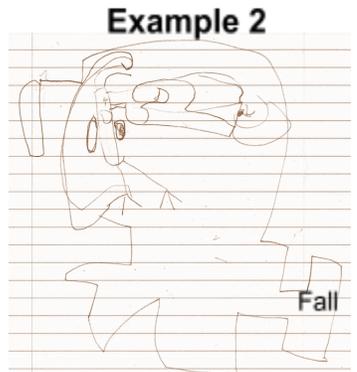
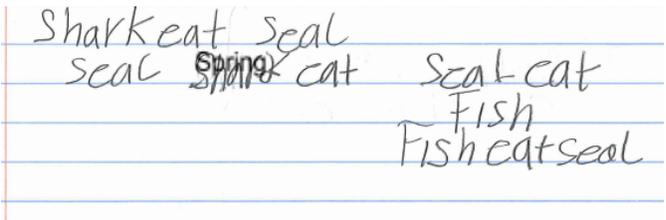
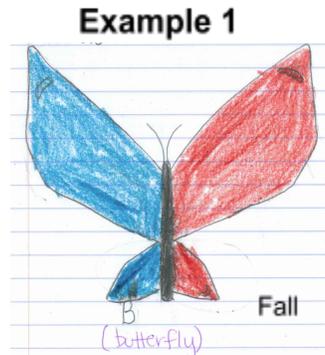
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# What is an Emergent Writer?

An **emergent writer** is when a child, typically two years old, becomes aware that language can be turned into writing and that print has meaning. The child begins their first steps into learning to write by going through the developmental stages of drawing pictures, scribbling lines, making letter-like shapes, copying words, and eventually, writing words independently.

Sometimes we come across deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) emergent writers in 3-6<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. While every DHH student has their own background and life journey, it is helpful knowing what experiences they have had that led them here. For example, they might have disabilities that require highly individualized support tailored to their needs. It is also possible that they do not have additional disabilities, but did not have sufficient access to language during the early language acquisition period to achieve age-appropriate language milestones. A student who does not have adequate access to spoken language and received late exposure to ASL, for example, may exhibit delays in expressive language for their age, as well as considerable delays in written English, resembling an emergent writer.

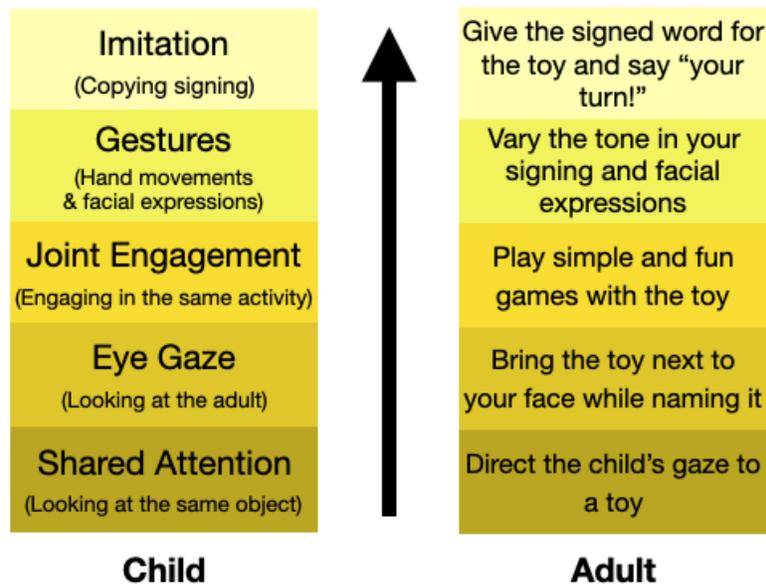
We have seen various stages of DHH emergent writers participate in our study. Regardless of their ages, it is important to be encouraged by the gains emergent writers are making. In the first example presented to the right, we can see the student move from labeling a drawing with the initial letter of the word in fall to writing words in spring. In the second example, another student from the same class went from drawing a picture to writing letter strings.



# Pre-Language Skills Come First

**What can we do to support DHH emergent writers?** We need to consider what early childhood teachers do to build language and writing skills, and start there!

## Pre-Language Skills



Before learning to write, children use language to express their wants, needs, and thoughts. And before using language, children exhibit **pre-language skills** such as using eye contacts, gesturing, and imitating during social interactions. If pre-language skills are foundational to language and writing development, then we need to make sure our students have those skills first and foremost!

Language development begins with pre-language skills. First, children learn to regulate their eye gaze and attention to look at objects and adults. Next, children participate in activities using joint engagement with adults. Then, they use gestures to express their wants and needs. Finally, they imitate words that adults use. Children typically go through these foundational stages before they are able to independently sign or speak words for communication.

Some DHH students in grades 3-6 do not have pre-language skills yet due to multiple factors, including long-term experiences of language deprivation. With those students in mind, we can help them move through the pre-language stages using the strategies listed in the yellow columns above during games and activities that promote meaningful social interactions until they gain skills in eye contacts, gesturing, and imitation.

# Receptive and Expressive Language

When our students consistently use eye contact, gesturing, and imitate words, this indicates that they are ripe for **receptive and expressive language**! We can employ strategies to get students to develop receptive language for understanding and expressive language for effective communication. Here are some tips to build receptive and expressive language.

Receptive Language Strategies	Expressive Language Strategies
1. Follow students' <u>interests</u> .	1. Follow students' <u>interests</u> .
2. <u>Tap and wave</u> to get students' attention and <u>maintain eye contacts</u> while talking.	2. <u>Show excitement</u> in what students are saying, even if their expressions are unclear.
3. Consistently and repeatedly <u>point</u> and <u>name</u> concrete objects or pictures in the environment.	3. Ask students to provide signed words for <u>concrete objects</u> or <u>pictures</u> in the environment. If they don't know, sign the word and then ask them to repeat after you.
4. Use explicit <u>pointing</u> , <u>gesturing</u> , <u>facial expressions</u> , <u>drawing</u> , and/or <u>ASL classifiers</u> to support the concepts we want to express, and then bridge understanding to <u>model language</u> .	4. Use the <u>expectant look</u> by raising eyebrows and putting hands out to indicate that we want students to express their response, thoughts, or ideas.
5. Keep our signing <u>big</u> , <u>clear</u> , <u>short</u> , and <u>simple</u> .	5. Give students <u>time</u> (e.g. 5-8 seconds) to respond.
6. While students participate in an activity, engage in <u>parallel talk</u> by providing language to describe what they are looking at, are playing with, or are doing at that moment.	6. <u>Expand</u> on students' comments using model language. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. E.g., The student says, "Dog!"</li> <li>b. The teacher responds, "Yes, a big black dog is running!"</li> </ol>
7. Engage in <u>self-talk</u> . Sign out aloud what we are thinking, feeling, and doing as we navigate the classroom. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. E.g., "I need my scissors. Where are they? Oh! I remember they are in the other classroom. I need to walk over quickly to get it..."</li> </ol>	7. Intentionally <u>sabotage</u> situations to get students to correct you, ask for help, or communicate their needs. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. E.g., Omit some materials required for an activity</li> <li>b. E.g., Make silly and obvious mistakes</li> </ol>

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8. Develop students' attention and comprehension through language games with simple commands and directions.

- a. E.g., "Where is the door?", "Where is the pencil?", "Where is the teacher?"
- b. E.g., "Give me two markers", "Point to a circle", "Put on a hat"

8. Ask open-ended questions and provide response choices if students struggle to express themselves.

- a. E.g., The teacher asks, "What do you want to do next?"
- b. If the student doesn't respond, provide response choices, "Do you want to read a book or eat your snack?"

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9. Provide real-life experiences by engaging students in hands-on activities, going on field trips to grocery stores, parks, zoos, and then model rich language to match the experiences. Take pictures!

9. While reading aloud children books or viewing short and simple ASL videos, ask students to retell and answer questions about what happened in the story.

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10. Recount the field trips using pictures as visual aids. Have students imitate your signed words and sentences.

10. Film students signing about various topics, including their field trips or personal experiences, and have them re-view the video.

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11. Make language input fun and accessible by reading aloud picture books, viewing ASL videos, role-playing stories, and providing ASL interpretation while watching movies.

11. Ask students to help us read aloud picture books, role-play stories, and provide ASL interpretation while watching movies.

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## The Language Experience Approach

As students are developing receptive and expressive language, expanding their vocabulary and expression through explicit language modeling during concrete and tangible shared experiences is helpful. Although spoken language input is everywhere, students who experience language deprivation are unable to access it fully, leading to frequent missed opportunities to match language to their experience through natural acquisition processes that many hearing people take for granted. Hence the reason why **the language experience approach** is popular with DHH students of all ages. This approach re-creates opportunities for students to undergo natural acquisition processes through ASL exposure while going to the park, playing a game, or cooking a meal.

While engaging in the experience, we explicitly model language that describes the happening and take pictures or videos. In this way, students will have support of visual scaffolds (e.g., pictures or videos) when they recount their personal experiences later in the classroom. Their newly acquired vocabulary and signed expressions about that experience can become a form of published ASL text. ASL text can either be pictures or videos of students' signed expressions. To help students internalize and retain language, we can re-view the ASL text and talk about the experience over and over again throughout the year. The language experience approach is especially useful during interactive signing activities, which will be discussed later.

## Language Play and Language Awareness

Arousing children's interest, engagement, and creativity with language can lead to increased receptive and expressive language, generating positive social interactions and expressions of feelings, thoughts, ideas, and humor. **Language play** and **language awareness** through singing songs, viewing ASL rhyming and rhythmic videos, and reading aloud rhyming books can be fun ways to enrich children's language experience.

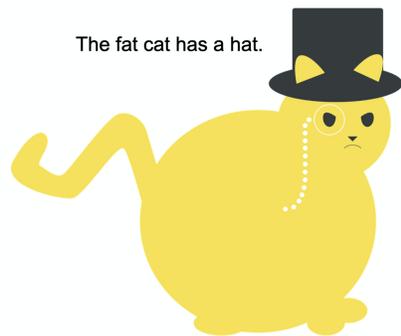
Rhyme and rhythm can be used for multiple purposes in the classroom such as introducing a new unit, helping children retain vocabulary, or assisting with routine and transitions. To generate rhyming and rhythmic ASL, we repeat the same handshape, movement, and/or location across different signed words while swaying our body to a visual beat with or without drums. Here is one such example using the Y-handshape. Research shows that deaf children, regardless of their language skills, respond favorably to rhyme and rhythm (Crume, 2013; Holcomb & Wolbers, 2020).



**HELLO! – HELLO!**  
**I AM HAPPY – I AM HERE**  
**I AM HAPPY – YOU ARE HERE**  
[pointing to a student]  
[that student takes a turn  
to sing the same lines above]  
**HELLO! HELLO!**  
**I AM HAPPY – I AM HERE**  
**I AM HAPPY – YOU ARE HERE**  
[pointing to another student]  
[that student takes a turn  
to sing the same lines above]

We can take advantage of the fun of language play to bring children's attention to the linguistic patterns in ASL and English. For instance, call and response cadences can promote receptive and expressive language. The 'Hello' song is one such example. As

mentioned earlier, the skill of imitating and repeating words is a part of the stepping stones of language development. This activity prompts imitating behaviors in ways that feel natural and fun. Children are called to attend to language and participate in positive social interactions. Indeed, language play can make the complexity and challenges of learning language enjoyable!



Activities that support metalinguistic awareness include: recognizing rhymes in songs, books, or videos, categorizing words based on similarities in phonemes (e.g., bat, cat, fat in English; dad, tree, farm in ASL), and producing rhyming words. These activities can empower children to look at language as an object of exploration and play. Metalinguistic awareness can be reinforced in any and all languages and has found to have multiple benefits for literacy development.

One of our SIWI team members, Leala Holcomb, runs a non-profit organization called Hands Land. Check out their [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page to learn more about the ways you can integrate rhyme, rhythm, and metalinguistic awareness in your classroom.



## Print Awareness

When children are aware of language being used around them, they become curious about the existence of written language. They notice letters on signposts, newspapers, apps, and juice cartons, and they realize those texts carry meaning and are different from pictures. They observe letters being separated from each other, and words being separated by spaces. They notice that writing is done linearly from left to right, sentences are written from top to bottom, and pages are turned to the left. They realize that people can translate their ideas in ASL or English into print. **Print awareness** is what children know about the forms and functions of a written language. The print awareness of children as young as three and four years is linked to later literacy outcomes (Piasta et al., 2012). There is a consensus among researchers that print awareness is an introduction to reading and writing (Justice et al., 2009).

Children, however, do not naturally acquire print concepts by themselves without language, modeling, and support. While reading, children often focus on pictures and it is helpful for adults to bring attention to the text and link it to language. A study found that if adults encourage children to look at print while reading stories for 10 minutes daily, children subsequently become attentive to print 20,000 times more than without this added support (Justice et al., 2008).

### So, what practical strategies can we use to improve emergent writers' print awareness in 3rd-6th grade?

**Explicit print referencing** is an evidence-based practice for young children, and this technique can be applied to older children. During read-aloud, print referencing is used by explicitly talking about how print functions (Zucker et al., 2009). See below for an example of a teacher using print referencing throughout a read aloud session.

"Where is the front of this book?"

"I did not write those words. The author of this book did. Look here, her name is Jennifer."

"Show me which way I need to read."

"I see a word on this page that starts with the first letter of my name - L!"

"These bubbles are ducks' words. They are complaining."

"These words are bigger because they are yelling."

"Who can tell me what I need to do if I want to find out what happened to the ducks?"

"This bowl has the word 'milk' on it."

"What letters in these two words 'milk' and 'duck' are the same?"

"Let's read what is on the signpost in the picture."

"This is the letter F. The letter F is in both words 'find' and 'fall'."

"Vegetable is a long word. There are a lot of letters!"

"Look at the word 'carrot' written below the picture of carrot."

"Do you notice how often the word 'a' is used in the book? A lot!"

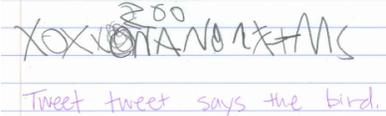
"This is a capital E, and this is a small e. Edgar has a capital E in his name."

We know that there are multiple benefits to daily read-alouds such as story sequence, genre knowledge, and comprehension of linked ideas. We can add print-referencing techniques to our toolbox to scaffold children’s print awareness along with other essential literacy skills.

It is worth mentioning that print-referencing is not only limited to read-aloud; it can be used in casual interactions while walking through school hallways, going on field trips, or watching movies. The overarching goal is to bring children’s attention to how print functions in authentic contexts that are meaningful to their lives.

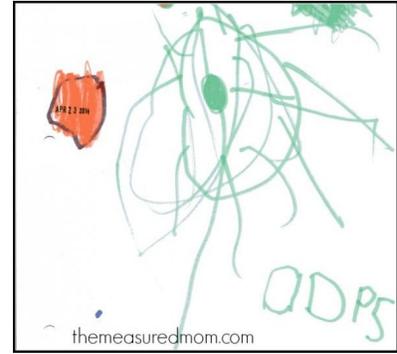
## Stages of Writing Development

After understanding that print has meaning, emergent writers go through different **stages of writing development**, from scribbling to writing words. We gathered some examples from our collection of students’ written pieces to share with you.

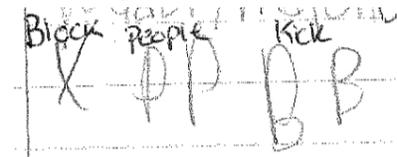
<b>Experimental Scribbling</b>	Students make lines and circles detached from meaning. <i>When asked what those scribbles mean, they do not know.</i>	
<b>Meaning-Making Scribbling</b>	Students make scribbles attached to meaning. <i>When asked what those scribbles mean, they provide meaning to the lines and circles.</i>	
<b>Pre-Writing</b>	Students make letters or shapes that are very similar to actual alphabets. <i>They read aloud (by fingerspelling, signing, and/or speaking) what they wrote, indicating their early understanding of letter or word production.</i>	
<b>Invented Spelling</b>	Students attempt to write words based on what they have heard, lipread, and/or seen in print, fingerspelled words, signed words, and/or spoken words. <i>Their attempts at spelling</i>	

**Invented Spelling**  
(continued)

words may be very different from how the words are conventionally spelled. They may follow the way signed words look or written words sound phonetically. For example, they may attempt to write words based on phonemes of spoken words (e.g., 'WL' for would) or handshapes of signed words (e.g., F-F for cat).



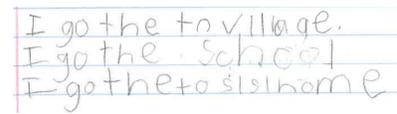
(English phonetics)



(ASL phonetics)

**Conventional Spelling**

Students write high-frequency words and common nouns. They begin to internalize spelling patterns and can make good guesses of how words are spelled.



When children are in the Meaning-Making Scribbles, Pre-Writing, or Invented Spelling stages we can help them expand their vocabulary both in ASL and English using different strategies. Repeated exposure in meaningful contexts is essential for vocabulary development. For example, “bug” along with other common words are a part of a learning unit on insects. Students can learn the word “bug” through signing, fingerspelling, writing, and if applicable, speaking.

Notice how the worksheet in the picture has:

- a drawing of a bug
- a picture of the signed word “bug”
- a dotted outline of the written word “bug”
- a blank line

Additionally, we can purposefully provide frequent opportunities for them to see the word “bug” being used in real contexts during songs, reading alouds, field trips, and social interactions throughout the day.





The teacher points to printed text 'sports' on the board.

The teacher says, "TEAM SPORTS (fingerspells) S-P-O-R-T-S"

The teacher expands, "BASEBALL, BASKETBALL, FOOTBALL, ETC."

The teacher role-plays and gestures without using language, "HITTING A BALL WITH A BAT, DRIBBLING A BALL, THROWING A FOOTBALL..."

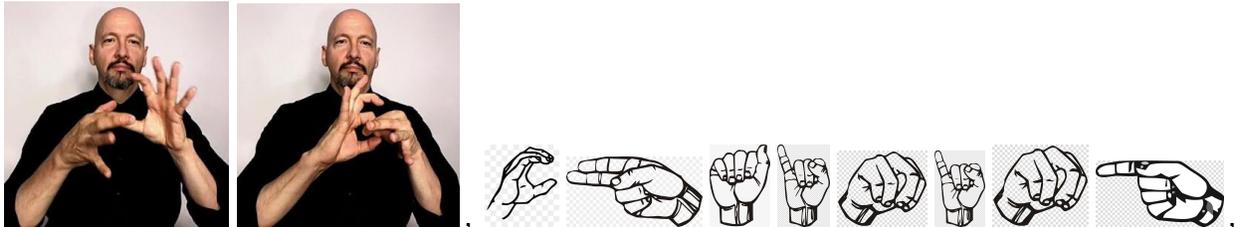
The teacher shows pictures or videos of baseball, basketball, football, etc.

The teacher says, "THESE ARE CALLED SPORTS (fingerspells) S-P-O-R-T-S."

The teacher points to printed text 'sports' again.

As you can see, while discussing a concept using *chaining*, both languages in various modalities are compared, contrasted, and kept separate. Interestingly, Quinto-Pozos and Reynolds's study found that deaf teachers used this strategy with students every ten seconds. Imagine the richness of input being conveyed that is multilingual, multimodal, and multimedia! When working with emergent writers, *chaining* can be used anytime to bring attention to the labels in the environment, during social interactions, and while reading aloud books.

To summarize: *chaining*, the linking of different inputs,



(click to view the video), is a great

pedagogical tool!

[See what I did there?!](#)

## Interactive Signing and Writing

Interactive writing is a powerful tool for all ages and skill levels. **Interactive writing** involves meaningful writing assignments, in-depth conversations about a topic, sharing the pen, and rereading what has been written. There are additional strategies that we can utilize to support emergent writers in 3rd-6th grade.

Depending on where children are at in their language and writing development, we can make decisions on whether to spend more time signing and/or writing through guided (teacher-led), shared (peer-to-peer-led), and independent (student-led) activities. It can be beneficial to focus entirely on ASL if this is the most accessible language for the student, especially when they are still developing expressive and receptive language skills.

**Interactive signing** uses the same processes as interactive writing but through published forms of ASL. As teachers, we can model the process of thinking aloud the topic we want to sign about. Considering emergent writers' language needs, we may want to pick a topic that they have personal experiences with. The language experience approach, as mentioned earlier, is useful here because shared experiences have already been recounted and translated into ASL text. This means when the topic we choose to talk about during interactive signing is based on students' experience, students are able to contribute to the process more because the topic is familiar to them. Familiarity boosts confidence and engagement.

We can guide students through the signing processes using guided or shared activities that involve brainstorming, signing, and revising. For example, brainstorming can involve "sharing the pen" with students while drawing pictures on the board, showing real pictures, or finding pictures from the internet. We can film ourselves signing one or two words about the topic, and then invite students to help us complete the signed expression by filming them and editing together our clips. We can guide students through the process of re-viewing the signed expression on video and discussing how it can be revised for greater clarity. We can sabotage the situation by purposefully signing a word incorrectly (e.g., using the wrong handshape or location) and then asking students to help us edit our signed expression in the video. A co-construction of ASL text can be accomplished through interactive signing with the magic touch of editing softwares like iMovie. Whatever we typically do during interactive writing, we can do the same for interactive signing!

Here are some more ideas and examples for interactive signing and writing that are specific to older emergent writers.

**First**, consider forming a small group so that emergent writers can participate more and receive more encouragement from the teacher and peers. While engaging emergent writers in conversation about the topic, use role-playing, gestures, pictures or videos, and ASL classifiers to expand students' world knowledge and comprehension, and then link it to signed language, written language, and/or spoken language. The chaining method is especially beneficial here!

**Second**, we can use the Smartboard to record class ideas in ASL and/or English. For example, we can draw pictures on the board and have students help with labeling using ASL pictures/videos and/or English print. If students do not know how to sign and/or spell the words, we can sign and/or fingerspell the words and have them film themselves signing or fingerspelling the words independently. We can encourage students to look at the ASL and/or English word wall for support for picking words that match the pictures.

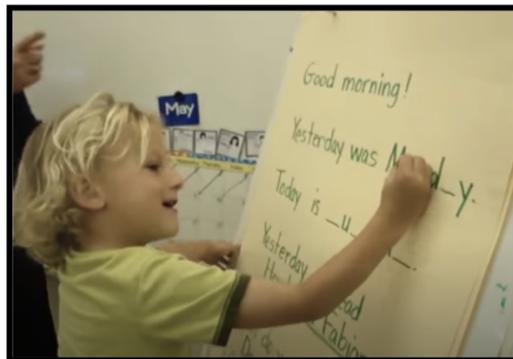
**Third**, we can re-view the ASL videos and/or re-read English labels as we translate ideas into complete sentences in ASL and/or English. We can take turns filming our sentences in ASL and/or take turns writing our sentences in English. When we begin to sign and/or write, model the process of translating our ideas into ASL and/or English by thinking out aloud how certain concepts can be signed and/or written or looking at mentor texts in ASL and/or English.

**Fourth**, stick with simple phrases, which can also be repetitive if needed, like this example: 'I see a \_\_\_\_\_,' and have students take turns contributing to the sentence construction in ASL and/or English. You can differentiate instruction by having a student add a letter to a word such as 'c' for cat (e.g., \_at), having another student write the whole word 'dog', and having another student write the whole sentence 'I see a cow'.

**Finally**, re-view the text in ASL and/or re-read the text in English. While re-viewing ASL text, sign aloud by copying the signing in the video. While re-reading English text, sign aloud by using print-based signs at first and then demonstrating the equivalent ASL translation. Students should copy what we are signing in both approaches (print-based signing and ASL translation) to develop implicit knowledge of English and ASL structures.

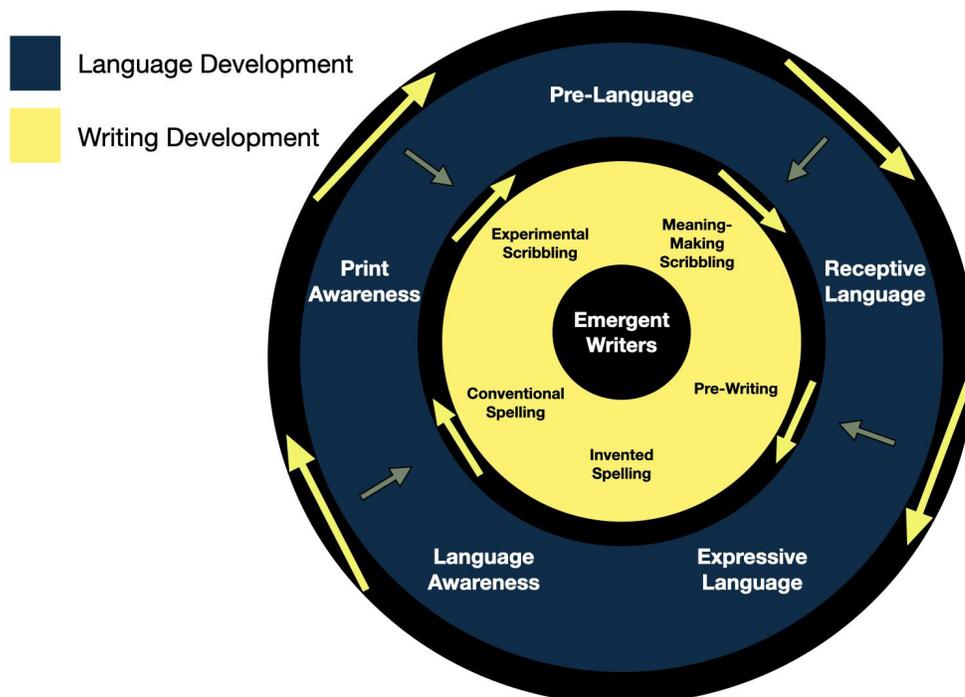
Don't forget to remind students about the purpose of this activity and who will get to read their writing, which should be as authentic as possible. If we can get a response from the audience, that is even better!

Here is a [video](#) documenting emergent writing development for deaf children between three and five years old in ASL/English bilingual early childhood classrooms. The video also shows different kinds of interactive activities that promote writing development bilingually. Consider how their methods can be applied to classrooms with older children who are also emergent writers.



## Emergent Writing Development

In summary, bilingual development can be enriched through building a strong foundation in receptive and expressive language and utilizing bilingual approaches during interactive writing. Whenever emergent writers, regardless of their ages, try to make meaning through writing, even if they scribble, calls for praise and encouragement! See below for a visual model of the inter-relational nature of language and writing development (Holcomb, 2021).



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