Activities to Support Teaching the Alphabet
(Hanser, 4/2005)

Early childhood research has shown that students learn best when the alphabet is taught with other letters and in the context of meaningful activities (McGee and Richgels, 2001). Because students with significant disabilities have had such limited independent manipulation of the alphabet, it is critical to work from students' interests and to talk about how letters are a part of reading and writing. The following are a list of just a few fun activities. Typical emergent writers and readers have hundreds of hours of exposure to the alphabet before they are expected to name and know letters. It is important to give students with significant disabilities the same opportunities before asking them to correctly identify letters whether in print or braille.

Read Alphabet Books- It is essential to read ABC books together with students and talk about the items and relate them to what students know. Also, provide opportunities for students to explore ABC books independently. For students with vision impairments, include Braille and tactuals.

Talk About Role of Letters When Modeling Writing- During group and one on one writing activities, the adult or peer can model writing for students. While writing, they can be talking about the different letters and how they make words.

Write With the Alphabet- Give students daily opportunities to write with the whole alphabet using a pencil that is easiest for them. Writing does not have to include handwriting. “Alternative pencils” can be used, such as the IntelliKeys, a print flip chart, an eye gaze frame or an AAC device. See the "Writing With Alternative Pencils" CD for more options.

Put Up & Use Environmental Print- Label items/places in the room that are of important to students. When selecting items/places, consider student access to the print. Typically, students with disabilities have missed out on opportunities to use environmental print because it may be in places that they cannot easily see or feel. Once it is in place, it is important to call attention to it, and use it for a reason. For students with vision impairments, add Braille and tactuals.

Make Environmental Print Books- Emergent readers typically begin “reading” by recognizing print that has logos and names of things that are important to them. For example, getting excited when they see a McDonald’s, Burger King, or Dominoes Pizza sign. Create books using remnants, parts of bags or tops/fronts of boxes. When reading through them, talk about the name, the letters and relate them to students' personal experiences.
**Names Activity**– (from Cunningham & Allington, Classrooms That Work)

When using student names, many letters can be introduced within a context that they are interested in—their name! All you need is a pocket chart, sentences strips, a marker and single message devices!

Write all students names on sentences strips & place in a container. Each day at meeting time, draw one to be the focus of the day. Read the word out loud and give students the opportunity to say it in their head. Interview that student by asking them yes/no questions about things they like to do; can record that information for a class book. Return to the name and read it out loud, always giving students the opportunity to say it in their heads. Briefly, talk about the following:

- A name is a word; it is made up of many letters.
- Name the letters and together count them.
- Clap and chant the name and letters (Casey-C-A-S-E-Y); easy to program on a single or listing message device. For older students, turn it into a rap. For visually impaired students, can have their name brailled and/or in raised letters velcroed onto device.
- Letter positions (first, middle, last).
- Using a blank sentence strip, have students chant the letter spelling using devices while you model writing the name. Cut apart name into individual letters and mix up on a pocket chart.
- With original name on pocket chart, model and work with students to rearrange letters to spell the student’s name. Students can join in with chanting throughout.
- Each day after that, another students’ name is added. Can put the names in a column and compare them for different features (length, names that have the same letters, words that can rhyme with names).
- Can do this same process with other common words being studied.

**Alphabet Actions Chant/Rap- (Adapted from Musselwhite, 1995)**

This fun chant works with most letters of the alphabet. The chant: “We’re going to (verb), (verb)! (Verb), (verb) for (letter that verb starts with)! Example: “We’re going to dance, dance! Dance, dance for d!“

Students need to have a way of picking one letter (light tech letter board, eye gaze frame, voice output system or IntelliKeys with talking word processor). Students can take turns choosing different letters for the class to chant and act. Single message devices can be re-programmed with: “We’re going to“ for students to lead chant and explaining partners and adults fill in action and help students engage in that action. It’s important to pick actions that students will be able to experience.

*Sample actions:* bump/brush/bend, clap/cry/cough, dance/drink, eat, frown/fly, go/grip/grin, hug/hold/hop, itch, jump, kiss/kick, laugh/lean/look, move/mix/mist (can carefully use misting bottle), nod, pinch/push/pop (can use bubbles), rest/run, smile/sing/sit/sign/smell (can use concentrated fragrances), tap/tickle/tug/turn, wash/wiggle, yodel, zoom.

*If students enjoy this, can create a notebook of actions from them to pick from. Each page can have choices of actions that begin with that letter.

**Alphabet Scavenger Hunt-** Student picks a letter and then you have to find something in that room that begins with that letter. Have student explore the item, while you talk about it. Write down things as you find them and talk about them.
Make Letter Containers - Label shoeboxes or plastic containers, each with a letter (and raised letters & braille if needed). Assemble small items that begin with that letter, using things that the student is familiar with. Can play the above ABC Scavenger Hunt to find, introduce and talk about these things. Sample items: actual magnetic letter, book, CD, cup, keys, pen, pillow, spoon, switch (good use for the old broken ones!!!), tape, towel).

Words About Things I Know - Student picks a letter and then together you make a list of words that begin with that letter - that are related to things the student knows. Write them down and talk about them. It can be especially motivating to select actions, places and foods that the student is familiar with. Can later create a short letter/object book with the things you talk about.

Create Personally Meaningful Letter Books/Alphabet Books/Posters - Can make the writing of this book interactive and meaningful to the student by having them collect the items/tactuals through a scavenger hunt, make container for them and then use them to create short books. Can make books around a particular theme depending on students' interests; actions and foods are popular themes.

Tongue Twisters - Student picks a letter and then you make up a short tongue twister using that letter. Write it down and talk about it. These can also be typed into a talking word processor for the student to reread later (using a switch as needed). Can later create a short book with the things you talk about; especially fun in an electronic book where you can record your own voice (talking books can be made in programs such as, PowerPoint, IntelliPics Studio, My Own Bookshelf).

Wheel of Fortune/Hangman - You think of a short word or phrase that the student is familiar with and draw the lines for the letters. Give student the category that it is in (person, place, animal). Students need to have access to a method of writing/selecting letters. As the student picks letters, you either write them on the correct line or in a separate space where un-needed letters are collected. As the letters are selected, you could cover them on their adapted keyboard with small sticky-notes - this will help the child know which letter it is not. Keep track of how many letters the student must select in order to complete the word. Make it fun by recording a game show buzzer on a single message device, and ask the student to indicate when they are ready to pick another letter (Free sound effects available on web).
North Carolina Extensions Addressed During Alphabet Activities

Grade 1-5
Competency Goal 1: The learner will develop and apply enabling strategies and skills to read and write.
Extension: The learner will develop and apply enabling strategies and skills to read and write.
• Kindergarten: Develop book and print awareness, Develop phonemic awareness, Attend to pictures, text, environmental print or symbols.
• Grade 1: Demonstrate awareness of letters and non-letters, Develop phonemic awareness, Demonstrate awareness of symbol/letter-sound relationships, Increase vocabulary
• Grade 2: Demonstrate awareness of symbol/letter-sound relationships, Demonstrate sustained attention to text.
• Grade 3: Demonstrate sustained attention to text, Increase sight-symbol vocabulary, Connect experience and text.
• Grade 4: Use word identification strategies, Increase sight-symbol vocabulary.
• Grade 5: Expand and refine vocabulary, Demonstrate awareness of key words in text.

Competency Goal 2: The learner will develop and apply strategies and skills to comprehend text that is read, heard, and viewed.
Extension: The learner will develop and apply strategies and skills to comprehend text that is read, heard, and viewed.
• Kindergarten: Demonstrate awareness of different forms of text (e.g. pictures, text, environmental print or symbols), Follow oral-graphic directions.
• Grade 1: Demonstrate comprehension of text, Demonstrate an awareness of variety of texts, Understand simple symbol/written instruction.
• Grade 2: Make connections between ideas and text, Demonstrates an awareness of variety of texts, Derive meaning from visual representations.
• Grade 3, 4, 5: Interacts with a variety of texts, Demonstrate active listening.

Competency Goal 3: The learner will make connections through the use of oral language, written language, and media and technology.
Extension: The learner will make connections through the use of oral language, written language, and media and technology.
• Kindergarten, Grade 1: Connects text to self, Connects text to world.
• Grade 2: Connects text to self, Connects text to world, Increase sight-symbol vocabulary.
• Grade 3: Connects text to self, Connects text to world, Examine/explore visual representations, Explore a variety of information sources.
• Grade 4: Connects text to world, Examine and use visual representations, Explore a variety of information sources.
• Grade 5: Connects text to world, Examine and determine purpose of a variety of media, Use a variety of information sources.

Competency Goal 4: The learner will apply strategies and skills to create oral, written and visual texts.
Extension: The learner will apply strategies and skills to create oral, written and visual texts.
• Kindergarten, Grade 3: Use new vocabulary words and/or symbols, Maintain or attend to conversations, Write and/or participate in writing behaviors.
• Grade 1: Use new vocabulary words and/or symbols, Write and/or participate in writing behaviors.
• Grade 2: Use expanded vocabulary, Write and/or participate in writing behaviors, Explore visual representations.
• Grade 3: Write and/or participate in writing behaviors, Compose visual representations, Explore technology as a tool to produce a product.
• Grade 4: Participate in pre-writing activities, Write and/or participate in writing behaviors, Use technology as a tool in preparing a product.
• Grade 5: Demonstrate self-determination skills through a product, Write and/or participate in writing behaviors, Use technology to produce a product.

Grade 6
Competency Goal 1: The learner will use language to express individual perspectives drawn from personal or related experience (oral and written expression-expressive and not informational, use journal).
Extension: The learner will use language to express individual perspectives drawn from personal or related experience (me).
• Communicate an expressive event orally and in writing, incorporating personally relevant details and feelings.
• Explore and comprehend expressive materials that make connections between events and feelings.

Competency Goal 2: The learner will explore and analyze information from a variety of sources.
Extension: The learner will explore and make connections with a variety of sources.
• Explore, interact with, and/or demonstrate comprehension of informational materials that are read, heard or viewed.
• Make connections between self and informational materials.
Competency Goal 5: The learner will respond to various literary genres using interpretative and evaluative processes.
Extension: The learner will explore and respond to a variety of print and non-print texts (functional and literary).
  • Extend understanding by creating products that exemplify specific types of texts.

Grade 7
Competency Goal 1: The learner will use language to express individual perspectives in response to personal, social, cultural and historical issues.
Extension: The learner will use language to express individual perspectives in response to personal and social issues (me and my community).
  • Communicate an expressive event orally and in writing, incorporating point of view.
  • Respond to and comprehend expressive materials that make connections between events and feelings.

Competency Goal 2: The learner will synthesize and use information from a variety of sources.
Extension: The learner will explore and use information from a variety of sources.
  • Explore, interact with, and/or demonstrate comprehension of informational materials that are read, heard or viewed.
  • Make connections between and/or determine importance/relevance of sources of information.
  • Use information from sources to communicate or create an informational product.

Grade 8
Competency Goal 1: The learner will use language to express individual perspectives through the analysis of personal, social, cultural and historical issues.
Extension: The learner will use language to express individual perspectives through the analysis of personal, social, cultural and/or historical issues (me in the world).
  • Communicate an expressive event orally and in writing, showing connections between self and others.
  • Interact with and comprehend expressive materials that make connections between events and feelings.

Competency Goal 2: The learner will use and evaluate information from a variety of sources.
Extension: The learner will explore, organize and use information from a variety of sources.
  • Explore, interact with, and/or demonstrate comprehension of informational materials that are read, heard or viewed.
  • Make connections between and/or determine importance/relevance of sources of information.
  • Use information from sources to communicate or create an informational product.

Grade 9
Competency Goal 1: The learner will express reflections and reactions to print and non-print text and personal experiences.
Extension: The learner will explore and express reflections and reactions to print and non-print text.
  • Communicate personal experiences orally and in writing (product), expressing student’s personal voice.
  • Comprehend and respond to expressive materials that make connections between text and experience.

Competency Goal 2: The learner will explain meaning, describe processes, and answer research questions to inform an audience.
Extension: The learner will explore, organize and use information from a variety of sources.
  • Explore, interact with, and/or demonstrate comprehension and/or sharing of informational materials that are read, heard or viewed.
  • Make connections between and/or determine importance/relevance of sources of information.
  • Use information from multiple sources to communicate or create an informational product.

Grade 10
Competency Goal 2: The learner will evaluate problems, examine cause/effect relationships, and answer research questions to inform and audience.
Extension: The learner will explore, organize and use information from sources to generate and answer questions.
  • Explore, interact with, and/or demonstrate comprehension and/or sharing of informational materials that are read, heard or viewed.
  • Use information from sources to communicate or create an informational product.