

Writing before reading – really?
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Montessori assumes a totally different way of teaching reading by teaching writing first. This approach is far more effective and efficient because by the time you learn to read you've already learned to write. Traditional education approaches reading through an intellectual process. Montessori begins teaching reading long before the intellectual process is ready giving it a great head start. Montessori education begins with the training of the senses. That is why there is tremendous emphasis on practical life and sensorial materials in the classroom. None of it "appears" intellectually stimulating but it is the basis of success in Montessori reading.

Montessori embraces all of the senses (and trains them all) to serve the acquisition of reading. Washing dishes, scrubbing clothes develop large motor skills. Polishing, spooning, sorting develop small motor skills. Both are essential for success in learning how to write. Then your child moves onto the sensorial materials. Each material develops different senses again reinforcing those needed for writing but also developing the senses for acquiring the sounds of language.

The reading process starts with the writing – one letter at a time, one sound at a time. It is not your ABC's but the phonetic sounds that create the building blocks for reading. The use of the senses with the sandpaper letters enhance the total process. Each sound, each letter is slowly marinated into the child's senses – audibly, visually, tactilely. This is fun – not pressure. Recognizing letters and signs along the street add to the child's delight in the process.

They begin to put the letters together with the moveable alphabet. They begin to sound words out one sound at a time. They begin to write them on chalkboards and on paper. They begin to discover the power and sounds in the marks they make on paper. They begin to read without pressure because the reading has had a long gestation period through the practical life materials, through the sensorial materials and through the writing exercises.

The hard work of learning to read has a magical element in Montessori. At first you don't and then you do, and you have a written record to verify the magic. You can read without learning how to write but you cannot write without learning how to read.