A GUIDE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

The Jigsaw Method

Simpler Summative Assessments for Educators



Four steps to turn the documentation 'evidence' you already have into a clear, family-friendly summary of each child's learning.



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WELCOME

Welcome, and Thanks for Downloading

Thank you for downloading The Jigsaw Method. If summative assessments are sitting on your to-do list right now, you're in the right place.

This guide walks you through four simple steps to turn the documentation you already have into a clear, family-friendly summary of each child's learning. You'll also find safe, simple ways to use AI if you choose to, plus a checklist of next steps at the end.

Work through it in order, or jump straight to the page you need. The illustrated pages are designed to print on their own, so you can keep them beside you while you write.



Hi, I'm Jodie

I'm Jodie Clarke, founder of The Empowered Educator. I've worked in early childhood education for more than 30 years, across early learning centres, Family Day Care, preschool and OSHC, as an assistant, room leader, director, coordinator and manager.

These days I help educators and services work out where AI can help with planning and documentation, and where your knowledge of each child has to lead. I know how heavy that end-of-year pile can feel. My hope is that this guide makes it lighter.

Inside This Guide

- What a summative assessment is (and isn't)
- The four jigsaw steps
- A simple structure to write with
- Using AI safely, with an EASE prompt

GETTING STARTED

You've Already Done Most of the Work

If there's a pile of summative assessments waiting and you have no idea how to start, take a breath. You're not starting from nothing.

All year you've been collecting the pieces - observations, learning stories, photos with a line or two, a comment from a family at pick-up. A summative assessment is the moment you step back and put those pieces together to see the whole picture of a child's learning journey.

That's what this guide is about. Not more writing. Better use of what you've already written or documented.

THE ONE RULE

If you can't find the piece, it doesn't go in the picture.

That one rule keeps your summaries genuine, saves you from writing things you can't back up, and makes the job a whole lot faster (and less stressful).



THE BASICS

What a Summative Assessment Is (and Isn't)

A summative assessment is a summary of a child's learning and development over a period of time. It shows where the child is now, how far they've come, and what comes next.

It is:

- A summary of learning across a term, a few months or the year
- Created from the documentation you already have
- Written so families can read it and recognise their child
- Linked to the EYLF V2.0 learning outcomes where the evidence shows it

It isn't:

- A new observation
- A checklist of developmental milestones
- A list of every outcome, whether or not you saw it
- Something you write from memory on a Sunday night

Where It Fits in the NQF

Assessing and documenting children's learning is part of the National Quality Framework. For children preschool age or under, Regulation 74 requires approved providers to ensure that assessments are documented covering each child's developmental needs, interests, experiences, participation in the educational program and progress towards its outcomes.

A summative assessment brings together evidence gathered over time to help educators recognise progress and plan what comes next.

THE BASICS

What the Rules Do (and Don't) Ask For

Four things worth knowing before you start, so your reports meet the requirements without doing more than you need to.

1

No set report or timetable.

The National Law and Regulations don't prescribe a documentation method, or how much to document over a set period. Twice-yearly reports are your service's choice, not a regulation.

2

The EYLF names summative assessment.

It describes reviewing children's achievements and capabilities at selected points, such as mid-year or transitions, to show progress over time. These are examples, not a required schedule.

3

It belongs in your planning cycle.

NQS Element 1.3.1 links assessment with observation, analysis, documentation, planning, implementation and reflection. Use your summary to decide what to offer or support next.

4

Clear language matters.

Regulation 74(2) asks you to consider the child's time at the service and how educators will use the documentation, and to write it so educators and families can readily understand it. Under Regulation 76, families can ask for a copy.

References: National Regulations, reg. 74(1)(a), 74(2) and 76; NQS Element 1.3.1; EYLF V2.0, p. 25.

Checked 30th October 2026 against official sources, including ACECQA's July 2026 Guide to the NQF. This is general information, not legal advice.

The Jigsaw at a Glance

Four steps, in order. Each one answers a single question.

1. **Gather the pieces.**
   Which records do I already have?

2. **Find the pattern.**
   What does the child keep coming back to?

3. **Show the distance travelled.**
   What has changed since the first record?

4. **Add the family's view.**
   What does the family see at home?

Then you write.
With the four steps done, the writing is mostly joining the dots.



STEP 1 OF 4

Gather the Pieces

Which records do I already have?

Pull together several records from across the period. Label each one with a letter: A, B, C and so on.

- **A** Observations and anecdotal notes
- **B** Learning stories
- **C** Photos with a line or two about what was happening
- **D** Work samples: drawings, constructions, mark-making
- **E** Family comments, conversations and notes from home
- **F** Notes from other educators who know the child

> One record is a moment. Three or more start to show a pattern. If you only have one or two for a child, that's useful information too: it tells you who to watch more closely next term.

Quick Tip

Quickstep 1 in your free tool, the **Documentation Puzzle Box**, gives you a place to sort these pieces for each child.

STEP 2 OF 4

2 Find the Pattern

What does the child keep coming back to?

Lay your lettered records side by side and look for what repeats:

- The interests the child returns to, again and again
- The words and phrases they use
- How they approach something new: do they watch first, jump in, ask for help?
- Who they play with, and how
- What they persist with, and what they walk away from

> Group your records into two or three themes, and write the record letters under each theme. Where you see lots of letters, your evidence is strong. Where you see only one, keep that claim small, or leave it out.



STEP 3 OF 4

3 Show the Distance Travelled

What has changed since the first record?

Put the records in date order and describe the change, not just the end point. Families love to see the journey.

A fictional example: Ari, aged 4

A — **February**
Ari changes the height of the ramp and watches the car roll down.

B — **May**
Ari compares two ramps: "This one is slower."

C — **September**
Ari starts testing materials: "Will this roll?"

The summary might say:

Over the year, Ari has moved from trying things to see what happens, to comparing and predicting. Ari now asks questions to test ideas (A, B, C).

That's the distance travelled:

from doing → **to noticing** → **to asking why**

STEP 4 OF 4

Add the Family's View

What does the family see at home?

Families see what you can't observe. Ask them before you write, and add their words yourself.

Three easy ways to ask:



A quick chat at drop-off or pick-up: "What has [child] been into at home lately?"



One question in your app or newsletter



A short note in the child's bag with two questions

⚠ If you don't have the family's view yet, list it as a gap to follow up. Never fill this part in with a guess, and never ask AI to write it. **It belongs to the family.**

WRITING IT UP

Putting It Together

A simple structure that works for most services, and that families can read easily:

1. **About the child:** strengths and interests, in a few warm sentences
2. **Learning and development:** your two or three themes, with the EYLF V2.0 outcomes your evidence shows
3. **Distance travelled:** what has changed over the period
4. **The family's view:** in their words
5. **Next steps:** two or three ideas for the next term or the next educator

Working copy vs family copy. Keep the record letters in your working copy so you can check every claim. Take them out of the version families see.

Quick Tip

Quickstep 2 in your free kit has two family-friendly templates including the **Narrative Learning Journey** and the **EYLF Snapshot**. Quickstep 4 has 25 copy-and-paste phrases for explaining EYLF links in plain language.

Print and keep beside you while you write

Build your summary

Five parts to bring the learning together

1 About the child
Strengths and interests, in a few warm sentences.



2 Learning and development
Two or three themes, with EYLF links your evidence supports.



3 Distance travelled
What has changed over the period?



4 The family's view
Their contribution, in their own words.



5 Next steps
Two or three ideas for what comes next.





Check your working copy
Keep record letters while you check each claim. Remove them from the version families receive.

Using AI Safely for Faster Summative Assessments

AI can help you sort records and draft a first version. It can't know the child. These habits keep you in charge.

Before You Start

- De-identify first. Use initials or a made-up name, and add the real name back yourself.
- Paste only the records you'd be happy for your service to see.
- Never upload photos of children into AI, even with faces blurred. Describe the moment in words instead.
- Follow your service's policy on AI and digital technology.

What Is a Prompt?

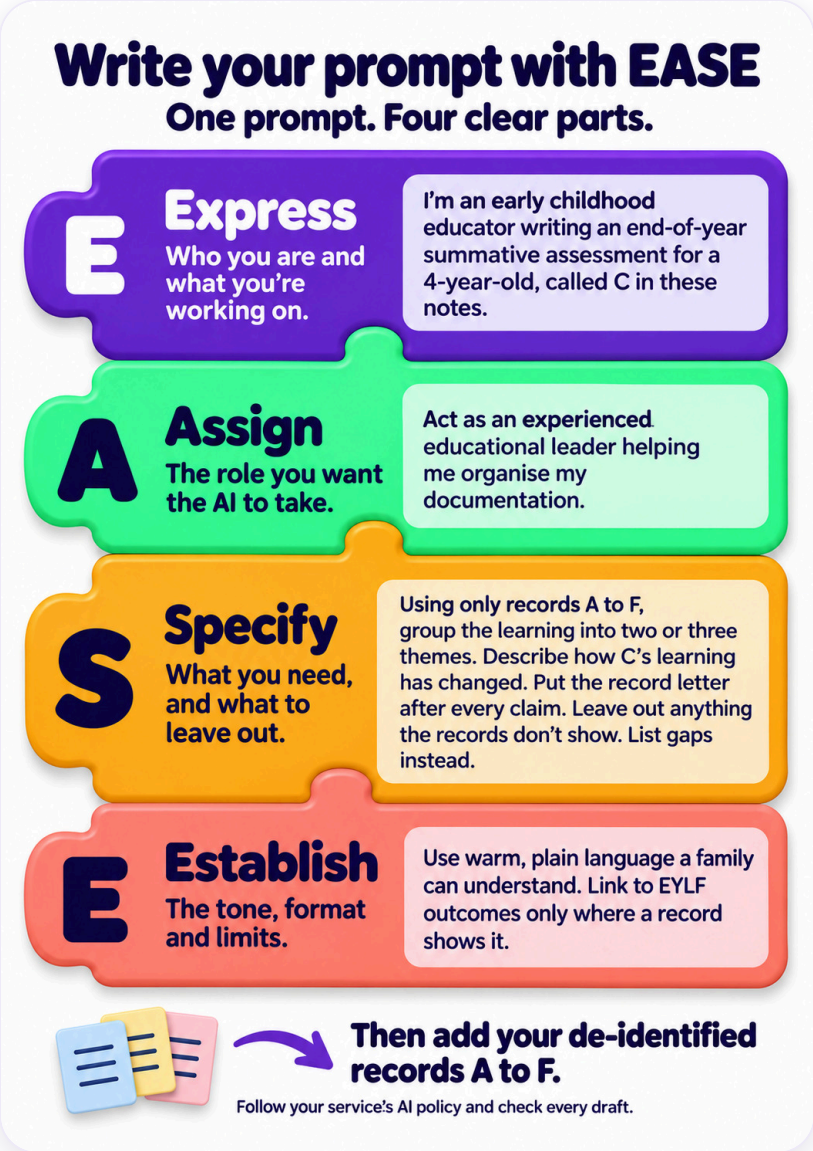
A prompt is the message you type into an AI tool such as ChatGPT, Claude or Copilot. Think of it like a handover note to a casual educator, so the clearer the note, the better the result. A vague prompt gets you a vague answer.



EASE is my four-part framework for writing clear prompts, so you're not starting from scratch each time.

EASE gives the AI the same context a colleague would ask for, which means less rewriting and fewer made-up details. Copy the example on the next page, swap in your own records, and adjust it to suit.

An EASE Prompt You Can Copy



Copy and paste this prompt

Express: I'm an early childhood educator writing an end-of-year summative assessment for a 4-year-old (called C in these notes).

Assign: Act as an experienced educational leader helping me organise my documentation.

Specify: Using only records A to F below, group the learning into two or three themes. Describe how C's learning has changed over the year. Put the record letter after every claim. If something isn't in the records, don't include it. List any gaps instead.

Establish: Warm, plain language a family can understand. Link to EYLF V2.0 outcomes only where a record shows it. [Paste records A to F]

USING AI

Spot What AI Invented: Five Things to Check

AI tools can fill gaps with things that sound right but aren't in your records. Read every draft with these five in mind.

1. **Big progress claims.** "Has mastered" or "significant growth" with no record letter.

2. **Feelings the child didn't show.** "Felt proud" or "loves" when your records don't say so.

3. **Labels or diagnoses.** Any word that sounds clinical. Remove it.

4. **Family views you weren't given.** AI often adds a family comment. Delete it and add the real one yourself.

5. **Links to every outcome.** A summary linked to all five outcomes usually means it's guessing. Keep the links your evidence shows.

→ **Then run the 3-Question Quality Check on every draft (next page).**



The five checks on the previous page catch what AI has made up. These three questions check what's left: that every line matches your records, reads in your own voice, and could only be about this child.

I teach this check to every educator using AI because it's quick, works with any tool, and means nothing goes to a family until you're sure it's right.

TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

Transition to School Statements: Four Safe Habits

If you're writing Transition to School statements this term, the same jigsaw works. Add these four habits:

1. **De-identify first.** No names, dates of birth or other identifying details in any AI tool.
2. **Add names back yourself,** in your service's own document.
3. **Check every line** against your records, and use the five checks on page 15.
4. **Follow your service policy** and your state or territory's statement format.



WRAPPING UP

Putting the Pieces Together

The Key Pieces

- **Start with what you already have.** If you can't find the piece, it doesn't go in the picture.
- **Follow the four steps:** gather the pieces, find the pattern, show the distance travelled, add the family's view.
- **Write for families,** linking to EYLF V2.0 outcomes only where your evidence shows them.
- **If you use AI,** de-identify first, use an EASE prompt, then run the five checks and the 3-Question Quality Check.

Your Next Steps

- [ ] Choose one child and gather their pieces in Quickstep 1, the Documentation Puzzle Box
- [ ] Ask that child's family one question about home this week
- [ ] Draft one summary using the four steps, then run the 3-Question Quality Check
- [ ] Share the four steps with your team at your next staff meeting



YOUR WORKBOOK

Your Printable Jigsaw Workbook

Seven pages that take you from sorted pieces to a finished summary, with a pen or alongside AI.

1 PAGE W2

Jigsaw Planning Sheet

One for each child. Print it, or type straight into the boxes on screen. All four steps on one page.

2 PAGE W3

Family's View Note

Two to a page. Send it home a week before you write, so the family's words are ready.

3 PAGES W4–W5

Sentence Starter Bank

Openers for all five parts of your summary, plus vague lines and what to write instead.

4 PAGES W6–W7

A Complete Worked Example

Ari's filled-in planning sheet and finished summary, so you can see the whole journey.

How to Use These Pages

1. **A week before you write,** send the Family's View note home (or copy the two questions into your app).
2. **Print or type one planning sheet per child.** Fill in Steps 1 to 4, giving every record a letter. Prefer working on screen? Sort the pieces in Quickstep 1 of your free kit, then copy your themes across.
3. **Write each part of the summary** with a starter from pages W4 and W5. Finish every sentence with what your records show.
4. **Compare with Ari's example,** then run the 3-Question Quality Check before anything goes to a family.

Working copy vs family copy. Keep the record letters in your working copy so you can check every claim. Take them out of the version families see.

Quick Tip

Print page W2 on A3 if you like more room to write, or print it double-sided with W3 on the back so the family note is never lost.

Print one for each child, or type straight into the boxes

Jigsaw Planning Sheet

Child (initials or first name)	Age	Period covered	Educator

1 Gather the Pieces

Which records do I already have? Give each one a letter.

	Date	Type of record	What it shows
A			
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			

2 Find the Pattern

What does the child keep coming back to? Lots of letters = strong evidence.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
Records	Records	Records

3 Show the Distance Travelled

What has changed since the first record?

Then (record letter and date)	Now (record letter and date)

The change, in one sentence

4 Add the Family's View

What does the family see at home? Their words, never a guess.

In the family's words

☐ Still waiting? Follow up by:

Print, cut and pop one in each child's bag a week before you write

We'd Love Your View

We're putting together a summary of your child's learning, and families see things we don't. Two quick questions, in your own words:

1 **What has your child been into at home lately?**

2 **Is there anything you'd love us to know, or to focus on next?**

Child's name _____ **Please return by** _____

Thank you! From _____

✂ CUT HERE

We'd Love Your View

We're putting together a summary of your child's learning, and families see things we don't. Two quick questions, in your own words:

1 **What has your child been into at home lately?**

2 **Is there anything you'd love us to know, or to focus on next?**

Child's name _____ **Please return by** _____

Thank you! From _____

YOUR WORKBOOK

Sentence Starter Bank

Pick a starter, then finish it with what your records show. Add the record letters in your working copy.

1 About the Child strengths and interests, in a few warm sentences

- [Child] brings … to our group every day.
- [Child] is at their most absorbed when …
- Something we've enjoyed seeing is the way [child] …
- This year, [child]'s interests have included …
- Friends often come to [child] for …

2 Learning and Development your two or three themes, with EYLF V2.0 links

- Across the year, [child] has shown growing … For example, …
- We often see [child] … when …
- Through their interest in …, [child] has been exploring …
- [Child] is building their … as they …
- This links to Outcome … : [outcome wording], because [child] …

3 Distance Travelled what has changed over the period

- At the start of the year, [child] … Now, [child] …
- Over the year, [child] has moved from … to …
- Earlier in the year … More recently …
- One change we've loved seeing is …
- [Child] now …, where once …

Quick Tip

Only use a starter if a record backs it up. If you can't find the piece, it doesn't go in the picture.

YOUR WORKBOOK

Sentence Starter Bank (continued)

4 The Family's View in their words

- At home, [family member] has noticed that [child] ...
- [Child]'s family shared: "..."
- [Family] told us [child] has been ...

Use the family's own words. Never guess, and never ask AI to write this part.

5 Next Steps two or three ideas for the next term or educator

- Next, we'll support [child] to ... by ...
- [Child] might enjoy ... to extend their interest in ...
- For [child]'s next educator: [child] responds well to ...

Swap This ... For This

Vague lines sound like every other child. Specific lines, backed by a record, sound like this child.

Instead of		Try
Ari is very smart.	→	Ari compares, predicts and tests ideas, asking "Will this roll?" C
Ari has made significant progress in all areas.	→	Ari has moved from trying things to comparing and predicting. A B C
Ari loves science.	→	Ari returns to ramps and rolling objects again and again, at the service and at home. A B C E
Ari is meeting all five outcomes.	→	Ari's records show Outcome 4 (confident and involved learners) and Outcome 5 (effective communicators). B C

Ari's Planning Sheet

A fictional example: Ari, aged 4

Child (initials or first name)	Age	Period covered	Educator
Ari	4	Feb to Oct	Sam

1 Gather the Pieces

Which records do I already have? Give each one a letter.

	Date	Type of record	What it shows
A	Feb	Observation	Changes the ramp height and watches the car roll down
B	May	Learning story	Compares two ramps with Mia: "This one is slower."
C	Sept	Photo + note	Tests materials: "Will this roll?"
D	July	Work sample	Draws a racetrack plan with arrows
E	Aug	Family comment	Building ramps from couch cushions at home
F	Oct	Educator note	Invites Mia to test ramps; they take turns timing
G			

2 Find the Pattern

What does the child keep coming back to? Lots of letters = strong evidence.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
Testing how things move	Sharing ideas with friends	Drawing plans
Records	**Records**	**Records**
A, B, C, E (strong)	B, F	D only: keep it small

3 Show the Distance Travelled

What has changed since the first record?

Then (record letter and date)

A, Feb: tries things to see what happens

Now (record letter and date)

C, Sept: predicts and asks why

The change, in one sentence

Ari has moved from doing, to noticing, to asking why.

4 Add the Family's View

What does the family see at home? Their words, never a guess.

In the family's words

Mum (E): "Ari's turned our hallway into a racetrack and keeps asking why the heavy cars win."

☐ **Family's view collected**

Ari's Finished Summary

The planning sheet, joined into five parts. This is the working copy, so every claim still carries its record letters.

Ari's Learning Journey, February to October

WORKING COPY

1 About Ari

Ari brings curiosity and energy to our group every day. Ari is at their most absorbed building ramps and tracks, and often invites friends to join in. A B F

2 Learning and Development

Testing how things move. Ari changes ramps, compares speeds and predicts what will happen, asking questions like "Will this roll?" A B C

EYLF V2.0 Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

Sharing ideas with friends. Ari explains ideas to friends ("This one is slower") and takes turns timing the cars with Mia. B F

EYLF V2.0 Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

Ari has also started drawing plans for racetracks. D

3 Distance Travelled

Over the year, Ari has moved from trying things to see what happens, to comparing and predicting. Ari now asks questions to test ideas. A B C

4 The Family's View

Ari's mum shared: "Ari's turned our hallway into a racetrack and keeps asking why the heavy cars win." E

5 Next Steps

We'll offer cars of different weights and new surfaces, so Ari can test the "heavy cars" question. We'll invite Ari to record predictions with drawings or photos. For Ari's next educator: Ari responds well to open questions like "What do you think will happen?"

Making the family copy: delete the record letters, check the spelling of every name, and add the real name back if you used initials with AI.

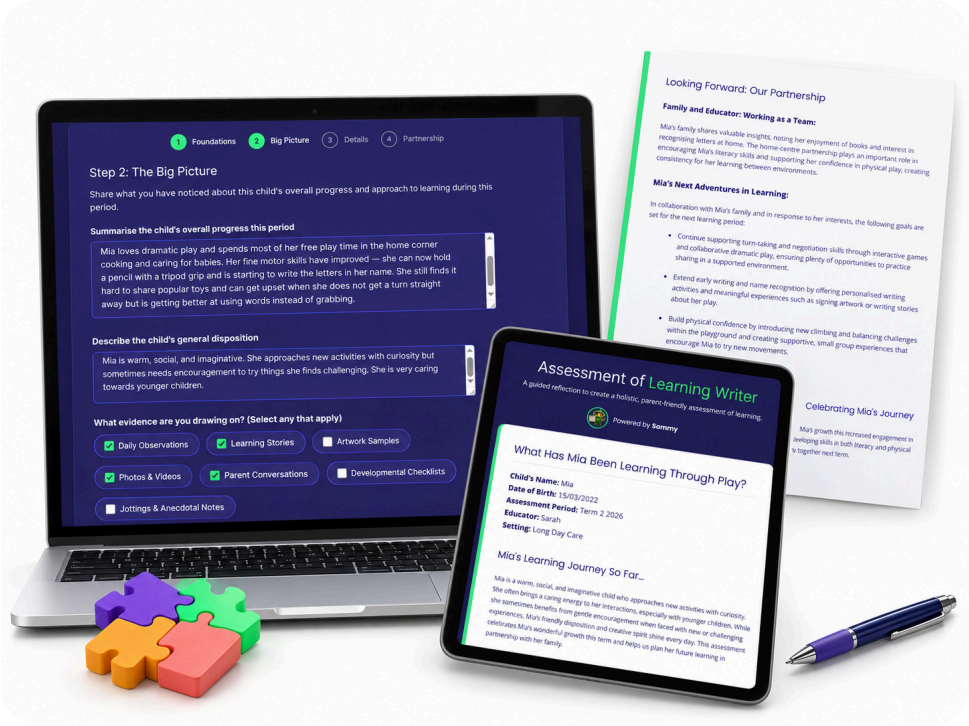
- Is it accurate?
- Does it sound like me?
- Does it connect to this child?

WRAPPING UP

Want Help With the Drafting?

If you'd like help with the drafting, the AI Empowered Educators membership includes two AI powered SmartForms created to make completing assessments at this time of year easier:

- **Assessment of Learning Writer:** you answer guided questions I've provided for you about the child's strengths, interests and learning, and Sammy Summative, the AI helper behind the form, drafts a family-friendly summative assessment from your answers.
- **Transition To School Writer:** the same approach for Transition to School statements.



Sammy works from what you tell it, so the jigsaw steps still matter because the better your pieces, the better the draft. You check and finish every draft yourself.

$39 a month or **$297** a year

Join the Membership →

You don't need to be tech-savvy to use it, you just need to be educator-savvy and know your children.



Thanks for Reading

You've already collected the pieces. Now you know how to put them together.

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