

Your School or District Name Here

*What Parents  
Can Do at Home to  
Help Students With*  
**Writing**

ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENT



**W**riting is essential for success in school. Strong writing skills help students do well on essays, research papers, lab reports and creative writing assignments. In fact, effective writers make better students in nearly any subject. They can organize and express their thoughts. They can think clearly and logically.

Writing is important outside school, too. Whether writing to grandparents, composing email or applying for college or a job, students need writing skills to communicate.

This booklet includes writing games and activities to help your child become a stronger writer. You can help your child master the skills of effective writing—and even develop a love of writing. All the tips come from parents, experienced writing teachers and experts who work every day with students who struggle with writing.

It doesn't matter whether your child uses pencil and paper or the computer for writing. This booklet can help you encourage and improve your child's writing skills in *and* out of school.



# Make the Connection Between Speaking and Writing

To make it clear that writing is simply a way of recording thoughts and ideas, ask your child to tell you a story. Write it down exactly as your student dictates:

*I have a dog named Buffy. He is black and has a pink nose.*

*Today we had ice cream after dinner. Chocolate is my favorite kind.*

Have your child illustrate the story and read it back to you. Each time you do this, encourage your child to reread some earlier stories. The pictures will help your child remember what the story says—and common words will become familiar. You can also record your child reading the story. Play it back as your child follows along on the page.

## Involve Your Child in Writing

Make writing an enjoyable everyday activity for your child. Here are some ideas:

- **Keep paper, notepads, pencils and pens handy.**
- **Hang up a message board** where family members can write notes to each other.
- **Get a set of magnetic letters** for the refrigerator and encourage your child to spell familiar words.
- **Have your child help you organize** and write a grocery list.
- **Ask for your child's thoughts** or suggestions if you are writing a letter or email. Read a paragraph and ask how you can make it better.
- **Develop a secret code** and send messages back and forth.

## Practice Writing Directions

**H**ow do you make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich? How do you walk from your house to where your child's best friend lives? Learning to write step-by-step directions will teach your child how to break down a task into smaller steps. Ask your child to write directions for a familiar activity. Then follow them together—exactly as written. Are any steps missing? Have your child revise and try again.

### Turn Writing Directions Into a Game

Here's a fun game that will help all the players learn to express their thoughts clearly. On a piece of blank paper, have one player draw five squares. They can be in any arrangement and placed anywhere on the paper. Then have that person write a set of directions for how to reproduce the drawing. Now give the directions to another player. See if that player can recreate the first person's drawing.

### Write for a Variety of Purposes

Show your child that we write for many different reasons. Try these ideas:

- **Help your child find a pen pal.** Your child might exchange letters with an older cousin or a friend who lives in another state.
- **Have your child write a note** to let family members know when you go out together.
- **Give your child a journal** to record travels. Whether your child is going far away or just around the block, writing about activities and adventures will provide useful practice as well as a lasting reminder of fun times.
- **Help your child spread cheer.** Relatives and friends will appreciate a birthday poem, a thank-you note or a "feel better" joke written in your child's own words.



## Write a Sentence-a-Day Story

Encourage your child to write a story—one sentence at a time. Use a special notebook. Then encourage your child to write one sentence—but only one sentence—each day. It's helpful to set aside a regular time for this writing. Over time, your child will have written an imaginative and fun story.

## Use Pictures to Create a Story

Have your child look through old magazines or catalogs and cut out three or four interesting pictures. Now ask how those pictures could tell a story. Suggest numbering the pictures—1, 2, 3 and so on—to help organize your child's thoughts. Then your child can write a short story that tells what happened. For variety, rearrange the pictures to see if your child can create a completely different story.

## Write a Shared Story

Choose an exciting title for a story to write with your child. Try "The Mystery in the Grandfather Clock" or "Armadillo's Amazing Adventure." Write the title on a sheet of paper. Ask your child to write the first sentence, and you write the second one. Take turns writing sentences until the story is complete. Then, invite the whole family to listen while your child reads the story aloud.

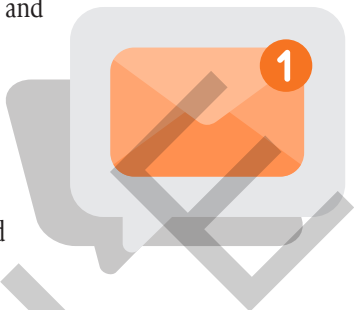
## Write Notes to Each Other

Sometimes, it can be hard to talk about what's on your mind. But if you and your child exchange notes, it may be easier to express thoughts and feelings. One parent and teen got in the habit of using notes when their relationship was going through the natural stresses of adolescence. The note exchange kept the lines of communication open—and the teen got extra writing practice!

## Go Digital

Most kids love to text and email, so exchanging messages is a great way to motivate your child to write. Ask grandparents and other relatives to write your child this way, too.

You might send links to interesting articles, blog posts and other reading material. Type questions related to the articles to encourage your child to write back.



## Give Your Child a Reason to Write a Persuasive Essay

Does your child want a later bedtime? A larger allowance? Permission to stay up later on weekends? Have your young writer put the request in writing. Your child will need to think of the reasons for making the change and back up those reasons with convincing arguments. After you receive the essay, you'll have time to think about your answer before responding.

## Preserve Family History

If you go on a family outing, ask your child to write all about it. Before a family gathering, encourage your child to prepare a list of questions to ask older relatives—descriptions of their childhood, memories of their school days and so on. Record these interviews. Later, your child can turn these recordings into a book of family history. This would be a treasured family heirloom, and a great gift for your child to give.

# Experts Recommend a Step-by-Step Writing Process

**W**hen faced with a writing assignment—anything from a short story to a report—your child can follow these six steps. And you can offer support along the way.

## Step 1: Selecting a Topic

Sometimes the teacher assigns a specific writing topic. Then this first step is as simple as making sure your child clearly understands it. In that case:

- **Read the assignment together.** Ask how the teacher explained it. Were any examples provided? Is there an assigned length for the project?
- **Ask your child to explain the assignment.** Talking about it can clarify the assignment in your child's mind.

If students can select their own topic, point out that it's best to write about something your child knows or likes to do. You can:

- **Try brainstorming together.** Talk about your child's interests or favorite activities. Suggest writing a list.
- **Offer suggestions:** sports, rock collecting, photography, talking with a grandparent, painting, reading mystery stories, baking cookies, playing drums. With your help, your child will have a lengthy list in no time.

Of all the ideas on the list, ask what seems most interesting. It probably won't be hard for your child to pick a great topic.

## Step 2: Prewriting

At this stage, your child is generating ideas and planning. Children need a clear idea of what they'll write. When your child is in the prewriting stage, you might:

- **Provide experiences related to the topic.** A visit to a museum or a walk in a nearby park can be rich with opportunities to see things related to the topic.
- **Read with your child.** Talk about what you've read and get your child to think about how words can convey ideas: "I love the way the writer describes the sound of the bat hitting the baseball, don't you?"
- **Be an active listener.** As your child is gathering ideas about a topic, encourage "thinking out loud." Sometimes, writers can clarify what they want to say by talking about it with a patient and supportive listener.





## Step 3: Organizing

Once the ideas are flowing, it's time for your child to start writing them down and getting them organized into logical order. Encourage your student to make notes and an outline. Teachers say it's nearly impossible to write an organized paper without a plan.

To have a successful plan, your child might:

- **Create a web.** Your child can write the assignment topic in a large circle in the middle of a piece of paper. Then your student should draw smaller circles around the big one, draw lines connecting them to the topic and write a fact or detail in each.
- **Put each idea or fact on separate index cards.** Then your child can arrange and rearrange them in different ways.
- **Make a written outline.** Your student can number related facts and ideas, or organize them using Roman numerals. An outline helps put things in logical order. Your child can consider organizing the information:
  1. **By time.** List a series of events in the order they happened.
  2. **By level of detail.** Start with general ideas and support them with specific facts.
  3. **By cause and effect.** Show how one thing leads to another—how one action causes a reaction.

## Step 4: Drafting

Now it's time to put words on paper. And while most of the work at this stage belongs to your child, you can offer support. Here are some things you can do:

- **Provide a quiet place** for your child to write, and access to supplies and tools like a dictionary and thesaurus.
- **Ask questions** that will help your child think more clearly about the task: What is your purpose? Who is your audience? (Your student will write a different letter to a relative than to the editor of the newspaper.)
- **Don't be concerned about spelling.** Wouldn't you prefer having your child describe that big gray animal at the zoo as "enrmus" rather than just "big"? Encourage your child to focus on getting ideas on paper—and worry about correct spelling when it's time for the final draft.
- **Help your child think about a big writing task** as a series of smaller parts. For a book report, your child might begin by writing one reason why the book was good. For a long paper, suggest starting with one paragraph. Bit by bit, piece by piece, the assignment will come together.
- **Respect your child's ability** to make the right choices while writing. And whatever you do, resist the temptation to take over the project.



## Step 5: Revising

In this stage, your child reworks, or edits, writing to make it clear and complete. Although most young writers want to skip this part, the process of revision is key to any written project. Writers sometimes say there's no such thing as good writing—there's only good *rewriting*.

Perhaps the best thing you can do is talk about the value of revising. Remind your child that famous athletes, actors or rock stars didn't get where they are by doing what they do once or twice. The pros are no strangers to repetition and hard work. And going back to make a written assignment better is a habit that will serve your child well throughout school—and life.

Listen while your child reads the piece aloud. Here are some ways you might respond:

- "The sentence or word that stands out for me is \_\_\_\_\_."
- "The part that's most interesting to me is \_\_\_\_\_."
- "I'd like to know more about \_\_\_\_\_."

Praise the parts of the writing you liked. Be as specific as you can: Is it accurate? Descriptive? Thoughtful? Does it say something interesting?

Encourage your child to talk about possible changes and the reasons to make them. Then leave the decisions up to your child.

Revising also includes proofreading to clean up the writing and correct errors in grammar, punctuation, usage, capitalization and spelling. It's important that children learn the importance of proofreading—just as they must learn to check their work in math or science.

To help your child during the proofreading process:

- **Encourage your child to use a dictionary.** Remember—there are some errors a spell-checker will not catch.
- **Help your child choose words that** are the best and most descriptive. Did the character *walk* across the room, or did he *plod*, *strut* or *march*?
- **Make sure your child follows** the rules for citing sources. Bibliographies are not places for creativity!
- **Have your child make the corrections.** That's one way to learn not to make the same mistakes again.

## Step 6: Publishing

This stage can help build your child's enthusiasm for writing. Here are some suggestions:

- **Help your child make the finished writing** look good. Find special paper or perhaps your young writer can use colored ink. Look for illustrations your child might include to make the writing come alive.
- **Provide ways to share the writing.** Mail a letter to a grandparent. Post your child's writing on a bulletin board or the family refrigerator. Or have your student read the writing aloud at the dinner table.
- **Find out about publishing opportunities** for your child. Many high schools sponsor a literary magazine. That's a great place to start. Or ask a teacher to recommend a writing competition. When you're in the library, look for publications that specialize in the work of young writers. See if your child would like to submit a story or poem. You can also ask the librarian to recommend an online publishing site for kids.

Getting a piece ready for publication encourages a writer to make the final edits that can turn the piece from something ordinary into something extraordinary.

# The Reading-Writing Connection

**A**vid readers are often strong writers. That's because children learn a lot about writing by reading stories and thinking about the choices authors make. When you and your child read together, talk about:

- **Character development.** What are the characters' personalities like? How do the characters change throughout the story?
- **Point of view.** Who is telling the story? Is it written in the first-person (using *I*, *we* and *me*), or in the third-person (using *she*, *he* and *they*)?
- **Setting.** Where and when does the story take place?
- **Word choice.** What interesting words did the author decide to use?
- **Techniques.** Is there a plot twist? A cliffhanger?

Suggest that your child try some of the authors' strategies in a piece of writing.



# Research Papers: What You Can Do to Help

Sooner or later, your child will be asked to write a research paper. A long paper can show what your child has learned about a particular subject. Your child should ask how long the paper must be. How should the research information be noted?

Here are some ways you can help:

- **Make sure your child allows plenty of time for each step of the writing process.** Teachers usually allow several weeks to complete a large assignment like this. Don't let your child put it off until the last minute.
- **Help your child choose a specific topic.** One problem many students have in writing research papers is that they choose topics that are too broad. Encourage your child to work with the teacher to limit the topic. Help your student choose something that can realistically be covered in the number of pages allowed.
- **Encourage your child to set up** a good system for taking notes.
- **Talk to your child about plagiarism.** Discuss the importance of giving credit to sources and the consequences of turning in work that isn't your own.



## Don't Write Papers For Your Child

**D**on't write or rewrite your child's paper. If asked to look over something your child has written, make suggestions or comments rather than correcting mistakes. You might say, "Try spell-checking again" or "This paragraph is a little unclear to me." Taking responsibility for the finished product and feeling ownership of it are important parts of the writing process.

Of all the subjects in school, reading and writing are the most important for academic success. By following the suggestions in this booklet, you can help your child be successful in school—and develop the writing skills that will be necessary throughout life.

SAMPLE

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