

Write On! Help Young Writers Develop Their Skills

By Erika Scott, *parentzone.com*, March 2008

In this article:

- Writing Can Be Functional
- Writing Can Be Fun
- Writing Can Be Online

Solid writing skills are crucial to achievement in education. Learn how you can encourage your budding young writer.

The development of writing skills is critical in determining a child's academic success. Your child probably receives daily formal writing instruction in school—but when it comes to writing, the more practice the better! Help your child by incorporating some fun and interesting writing activities at home.

To inspire young writers, start by setting up a well lit table, desk, or office. Stock the area with a variety of different sized and colored paper, markers, crayons, and pencils. You may also include office supplies such as paper clips, a stapler, and tape. Enlist your child's help in preparing the writing area by taking a trip to a local office supply store and allowing your child to choose some of the materials he'd like to keep on his desk. Setting up such an area is motivational on its own, but if you're looking for some easy tasks to engage your child in, try some of the following suggestions.

Writing Can Be Functional

Teach your child the value of the written word by showing her what can be accomplished through writing:

- **Create lists:** As you write the grocery store list, engage your child by asking him to create his own list. His list can mirror yours or he may wish to list a few things he'd like to look for at the store. Making other kinds of lists can also be fun. Try making a list of your favorite animals, favorite foods, family members, or things that would be fun to do on the weekend. Provide your child with folders or envelopes in which he can keep and collect his lists.
- **Write thank you notes:** Not only do thank you notes encourage your child to be the gracious recipient of a gift or an experience, writing them can be a wonderful way to engage in functional writing. Ask your child to jot down a few things she likes about the gift. Once the note is finished she can decorate it with drawings, stickers, or other art supplies.
- **Post reminders:** In the morning rush to get ready for school, it is easy to forget items. Give your child a pad of Post-It notes so he can write himself reminders and post them in a place where he'll see them the next morning. This exercise also

encourages responsibility and independence.

- **Email family members:** Give your child a chance to keep in touch with distant family members by emailing them periodically. Help your child choose two or three family members she wishes to email and set her up on the computer to write a quick, friendly note or a detailed account of the latest news in her life.

Writing Can Be Fun

Not just for schoolwork, writing can be enjoyable and creative, as well! Try these tips for encouraging your child to write creatively:

- **Write a story:** Children love reading, listening to, and making up stories. Let your child's imagination run wild by creating fun and outrageous stories. Begin by challenging your child to brainstorm a list of interesting characters and a list of exciting settings. Then, talk him through his story ideas by establishing a solid beginning, middle, and end. You may choose to write these ideas down. Once you've brainstormed the story, set him loose with a pencil and paper. You can also mix and match the characters and settings to inspire other intriguing stories. Keep the list of characters and settings in a special folder for future inspiration.
- **Play a game:** Put a few small objects from around the house in a bag and encourage your child to write a description of the objects without naming them. For example: I am pink. I can be found on my own or on the end of a writing instrument. If you rub me, I will make things disappear. What am I? An eraser! Once your child has written the descriptions, gather other family members around to see if they can guess the object she's described.
- **Design a menu:** Challenge your child to design menus for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Pretend that your kitchen is a restaurant one night and choose one of his menus to prepare together.
- **Interview a relative:** Children are curious and love to ask questions. Ask your child if there's a relative she'd like to know more about. Brainstorm a list of questions to ask before making a call. Not only will your child have a chance to practice her writing, but she'll be able to form a more solid bond with the relative she chooses to interview. Your child may wish to use the information from the interview to write a biography about the relative.
- **Keep a diary or journal:** Take a special trip to a bookstore with your child to buy him a special diary or journal in which he can record his most private thoughts and experiences.
- **Keep an observation log:** Children are keen observers and often see things differently than adults do. Encourage your child to walk around in your backyard and sketch pictures of leaves, trees, flowers, or other objects in nature. Next to each sketch, ask your child to write down a few observations. What words best describe the object? What does the object remind her of? Where is it located? This activity can also be done at the local museum or an interesting venue in town. This

type of writing encourages the development of observational skills in addition to giving your child a chance to practice writing.

Writing Can Be Online

There are numerous fun and interactive websites designed to encourage kids to write for an audience. The websites listed below can serve as excellent alternative writing opportunities for your child. (As with anything related to the Internet, it is imperative that parents supervise children when they're online.)

- **Wacky Web Tales:** This wacky website offers kids the chance to choose a story topic, fill in a list of verbs and nouns, and click a button. Voila! A story appears with all of the words your child chose. A glorified mad lib, it is a fun way to think about writing. Find the site here: <http://www.eduplace.com/tales>
- **Kids' Castle:** This interactive website encourages kids to visit different areas of the Kids' Castle. In each room, children learn a little bit about the castle and its inhabitants. Each room or area poses a different writing prompt or activity. Kids can write diary entries, stories, or poems. They can also read entries that have already been created by other children. Find the site here: <http://www.kidsonthenet.org.uk/castle/>

In any writing experiences at home, aim to keep it fun. Don't worry about spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Allowing your child the chance to express ideas freely without laboring over the conventions of writing will help creative juices to flow. These at-home writing experiences are meant to be exciting and exploratory. Let your child's teacher worry about explicit writing instruction and enjoy your child as the emerging author he or she is!

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