



HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S WRITING A PARENTS' GUIDE

How can I help my child?

If your child has been asked to produce a piece of writing, discuss the task and ideas before preparing to write. It can also help to 'sleep on it' - after a talk about the expected task and the sharing of ideas. Wait until the next day to put pen to paper. Ask your child what their 'Writing Target' is—they should know what it is, otherwise how will they know how to improve? (Usually targets are put in Literacy books) When sharing homework, ask your child to think about their writing target. What is it and have they achieved it in this piece? Stress the importance of rereading during composition to check for flow of ideas. Proof—reading their work aloud will enable them to hear whether the writing flows well and whether any words have been omitted, for example. Coming back to a piece of writing the following day can also help a child to freshly identify ways in which to improve their work. Then celebrate the writing and give lots of praise!

The Barriers to Writing

- ◇ Spelling
- ◇ Handwriting
- ◇ Composition - obtaining ideas
- ◇ Low Self-Esteem - not seeing ourselves as writers

It is extremely frustrating for children to have to battle with spelling and handwriting when they simply want to get their ideas down on paper. By helping your child to develop in these areas, you will be aiding the flow of writing, and enabling the use of a vocabulary rich language. (Consider being trapped into writing 'big' when you really wanted to write 'enormous' but didn't know how to spell the word.)

How can I help my child?

Spelling, Handwriting and Composition have already been covered but for low self-esteem, praising and valuing your child's writing is very important. If your child needs a lot of support when they write, it is even more important that you praise their contributions and show that you value their ideas by using them when working together to compose.



Elements of Writing

Writing is often viewed as a challenging curriculum subject as mastery of it involves developing skills in several areas. These areas could be seen as 'mini-subjects' within themselves:

- ◇ Spelling
- ◇ Handwriting
- ◇ Composition
- ◇ Punctuation

Spelling:

Phonics (the learning of the 'sound' of letters and letter combinations) is the basis of spelling. Recognising, using and blending sounds and learning sight words is vital to children's rapid spelling skills. Next comes learning spelling 'rules' (e.g. 'i before e except after c'). If your child finds spelling difficult, consider whether s/he needs to continue to work on his phonic skills. It does not necessarily mean that your child has a specific learning difficulty (such as Dyslexia).

How can I help my child?

Support your child by discussing their weekly spellings/ words or blends as well as helping them to learn the words. What sound, letter pattern or rule are they learning this week?

Handwriting:

How letters and words are formed on the page. We teach basic letter formation in with Phonics learning in Foundation and Key Stage 1. Joined writing is the natural progression from this. When children become 'independent writers', Printing (not joining letters) prevents 'flow' and the learning of how words 'feel' when they are written.. The presentation of their work is as important as the content. Practicing joined writing is a discrete lesson until upper key stage 2, but should not be necessary by year 5. Handwriting lessons usually 'double up' to include spelling blends or topic words.

How can I help my child?

If your child has been through Key Stage One at Wentworth Primary School, s/he will have been learning our handwriting model since being in the Reception class. Prompt and encourage him/her to use the correct letter formation when writing at home. Do some extra handwriting practice; you'll be amazed how quickly your child's handwriting and speed improves. (NB research has shown that by the age of seven, children have great difficulty changing the way they write and 'bad habits' become engrained.)

Composition:

Composing is the most important element of writing. Without ideas, there is nothing to write! Many parents express their concerns about their child's difficulty with spelling and handwriting (naturally), however it is writing composition which is the key to 'good writing'. For composition, children need to generate ideas, organise their thoughts and express them on the page - but for many children this is daunting. 'But I don't know what to write...' can be a common phrase uttered during homework time.

Obtaining Ideas for Writing:

From birth we are developing our children's ability to become writers. By interacting with our children: *talking; singing; going on visits; engaging in role-play; sharing books, reading stories etc.*, we are providing vital banks of resources into which children can dip when composing.

Making writing purposeful and valuable:

Children need to see that there is a reason for them to write. Both at school and at home, we need to be providing purposes for 'real writing'. Writing is a 'life skill', and whether this is composing on a PC or on paper, children need to see the value of putting the effort into producing the writing in the first place.

How can I help my child?

Think about situations at home that require something to be written:

- ◇ Shopping lists
- ◇ Invitations
- ◇ Thank You Cards / Letters
- ◇ Letters to relations /pen-friends
- ◇ Letters of complaint

These are a few ideas. Another way to help children see the value behind writing is to let them 'catch you writing' and explain why you are doing it. (Remember writing can be done for pleasure too!)

Punctuation:

Used to help make the meaning of written sentences clear and as the writer intended them to be read. This is often one of the key areas which prevent children from achieving higher National Curriculum Levels. It is not that punctuation has not been taught! More often than not, it is likely that a child simply does not pay enough attention to it. This is most frustrating. In upper Key Stage Two, many children are able to compose and spell at Level 4 (or 5), but their punctuation Level is only at Level 1 or 2. This obviously lowers their overall Writing Level. Using basic punctuation accurately is a very common writing target for many children.

How can I help my child?

After your child has produced their written homework, ask them to proof read their work to check whether they have used punctuation accurately. After they have done this, have a look at the piece yourself - is there any punctuation missing?





Writing at School

How we teach 'Writing' at school:

- ↓ Familiarisation with text type
- ↓ Analysing text
- ↓ Capturing ideas—talking/drama/role-play etc
- ↓ Teacher modelling
- ↓ Shared writing
- ↓ Supported writing
- ↓ Independent writing

Assessing Writing at school:

We assess children's writing against the following writing Assessment Foci (AFs):

AF1 Write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts

AF2 Produce texts that are appropriate to task, reader and purpose

AF3 Organise and present whole texts effectively, sequencing and structuring information, ideas and events

AF4 Construct paragraphs and use cohesion within and between paragraphs

AF5 Vary sentences for clarity, purpose and effect

AF6 Write with technical accuracy and punctuation in phrases, clauses and sentences

AF7 Select appropriate and effective vocabulary

AF8 Use correct spelling

Selected pieces from children's work are scrutinised using these criteria; strengths are highlighted and targets are set.

