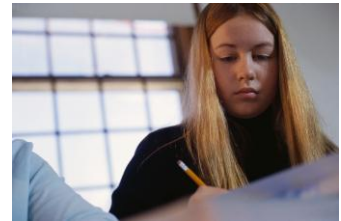




## OPTIONS CENTER EDUCATION TOPIC



### **Writing: Parents Can Help**

By: Tim Gillespie

Writing may be the most difficult thing your child can learn to do. Writers have more things to keep in mind than a juggler has bowling pins to keep in the air.

- The writer must generate words to express the complex thoughts and feelings that humans have.
- He or she must transcribe the words on paper
- Create complete sentences
- Organize the sentences into paragraphs
- Keep in mind the purpose of the writing and its audience
- Manage the content
- Figure out how to express the ideas clearly and colorfully
- Spell the words correctly
- Pay attention to the proper placement of commas and periods and capital letters
- Focus on many other details and rules.

Youngsters need a great deal of help in juggling all the learning involved in this complicated skill. As partners in the education of children, parents can do much in the home to support and encourage their children's success in learning to write well. Here are some ideas and suggestions for parents to try with their children.

### **Fill Your Home with Talk**

A child who is raised in an environment rich in words knows the power and joy of language.

- Talk with your child. Share your experiences, feelings, favorite stories, and memories.
- Listen when your child talks. Children must believe their words matter before they are willing to put them on paper.
- Encourage wordplay in your children--rhyming, role playing, and making up stories. These activities give children a sense of control over words.
- Provide a wide variety of experiences--trips to zoos, parks, museums, worksites, sport events, and concerts--to enrich children's background, knowledge, and vocabulary.

### **Support Reading**

Good writers are often good readers. Children who love books are usually hooked by the magic of writing.

- Read to your preschool child. Talk and ask questions about the books you read.

- Provide children of all ages with appropriate reading matter in the home. Take them to the library regularly. Give children's books and magazine subscriptions as gifts.
- Be a model. Let your child see you reading--the mail, a newspaper, a book, a recipe, or a set of instructions.

### **Provide a Writing Place**

Writing requires a certain environment for concentration, as well as specific equipment.

- Furnish sufficient writing workspace with adequate lighting for your child, whether a desk or a cleared-off kitchen table.
- Set up a daily silent study time for writing and other schoolwork for your child. Regulate TV viewing hours.
- Supply children of all ages with writing materials--paper, pencils and pens. Stationery, stamps, and dictionaries are good gifts for students.

### **Set an Example**

In the telephone and computer age, writing may seem like a lost and useless art to young people. Parents can help justify the need for learning to write well by showing children that writing is a part of their lives.

- Share your own writing with your children. Show them some personal, business, or consumer letters you write, as well as the responses you receive.
- Discuss with your child writing you do on your job--memos, purchase orders, business letters, or receipts. Children need to be convinced that writing has some application in the workaday world.

### **Communicate in Writing at Home**

You can turn your home into a writing center by making writing a regular household medium of communication.

- Organize a chalkboard or bulletin board for written messages for all family members. Ask children to leave notes telling where they are going, to write down telephone messages, etc.
- Allow your child to be involved in family operations that require writing--lists for shopping of all kinds, instructions for babysitters, directions for visitors to your house, plans for birthday parties, and notes for school.

### **Encourage Letter writing**

Children need encouragement from their parents to write letters. This kind of writing is highly motivating because children receive replies to good letters.

- Have your children write thank-you letters for gifts they receive.
- Let children write and send invitations to birthday or other parties.
- Encourage children to write and draw cards to send to relatives and friends for birthdays, holidays, and other special events.
- Promote all types of letter writing for your children--letters to the editor, letters for information on interests or hobbies, letters of praise or complaint to businesses.

## **Carry Out Writing Projects at Home**

If your child is at a loss for something to do, especially during the summer or other vacation time, suggest a fun writing project.

- Write down your preschool child's words. For example, ask the child to tell you about a drawing; then you write the words below it. This gives the preschool child a sense of the function of words and their power to organize personal thoughts.
- Play word games such as Scrabble and crossword puzzles. On trips, find the alphabet in license plates and tell riddles.
- Suggest ideas for special writing projects--younger children can make signs for their room or for a lemonade stand; older children can keep a diary, a journal, or a vacation notebook.

## **Offer to Help**

Take the time to work with your children on school writing when they ask for help.

- Be willing to talk through ideas with children before they start to write. During this important thinking phase, a sympathetic ear helps.
- Be a booster. Let your child know what you think is delightful and well done in his or her writing. Parental praise is a powerful factor in motivating children.
- Don't over-criticize. Point out some writing errors to your child now and then let the child rewrite the clumsy sentence or look up the correct spelling in the dictionary.
- Remember that good writing means more than mere "correctness." Focus on what your child is trying to say rather than on the mechanics alone.
- Be patient. Competence in writing develops slowly and with practice.

## **Work with the School**

Teachers need the partnership of parent. Your knowledge and support of the school program will be a major factor in your child's success.

- Learn about your child's classroom program. Find out what the teacher is trying to do in writing and ask how you can help at home.
- Discuss schoolwork with your children. Check to see if they have homework assignments.
- Have secondary schools urge all subject matter teachers, not only English teachers, to promote student writing in their classes.

To write well takes many years of hard work. Your understanding and encouragement can help your child immeasurably in becoming a skilled writer who enjoys the challenge of juggling all those words and thoughts on paper.