

Helping your child to become a writer



Writing is an important part of our daily lives. It is, however, a difficult skill to learn and master. By getting a head start with some simple activities, you can help your child begin to develop their writing skills at an early age. By doing so you will be contributing to their future success.

Here, we provide some reasons that writing is an important skill for people of all ages as well as a list of suggestions that will help your child become a stronger writer.

Why is writing important?

Writing is practical.

Every day, we need to write in order to complete our tasks, whether we are filling out a form at the doctor's office or writing an important letter. These tasks require us to write clearly, and organize information effectively.

Writing is an important element of a student's education.

Whether students are writing by hand or on the computer, many assessments and exams require students to write short answers or longer essays as a way of assessing what they have learned. As students get older, they will be expected to show more sophisticated writing skills, and to complete more sophisticated tasks through their writing.



Writing can be an important element of an employee's job.

Employees in many kinds of jobs are required to write on a daily basis. Perhaps they are taking phone messages and doing administrative work, or writing research reports and newspaper articles. Whatever the task, their ability to do their job well may depend on their ability to write.

Writing is an important form of communication.

Writing letters and emails is a common way of keeping in touch with our friends, relatives, and professional colleagues.



Writing can be an important outlet.

Many people find writing to be therapeutic and a helpful way to express feelings that cannot be expressed so easily by speaking.

What can you do?

It's important to remember that writing can be as difficult a subject to teach and assess as it is to learn. Many students have trouble writing with clarity, coherence, and organisation, and this can discourage them from writing if they feel frustrated.

That's where parent involvement can make a big difference! Encouraging your child to develop strong writing skills at a young age, and to become a better writer as she gets older, can have a lifelong positive impact on their writing, and may make writing an easier and more enjoyable process.

To get you started, the Department of Education offers a number of ideas of things you can do help your child become a stronger writer. While many of these ideas apply to younger children, they can be adapted for older children as well.

Ideas for parents: how to help your child become a stronger writer

What you need:

- Pencils, crayons, or markers
- Yarn or ribbon
- Writing paper or notebook
- Cardboard or heavy paper
- Construction paper
- Safety scissors



Before getting started

Provide a place

It's important for your child to have a good place to write, such as a desk or table with a smooth, flat surface. It's also crucial to have good lighting.

Provide the materials

Provide plenty of paper (lined and unlined) and things to write with, including pencils, pens, and crayons.

Brainstorm

Talk with your child as much as possible about her ideas and impressions, and encourage her to describe people and events to you.

Activities for young children

Encourage the child to draw and to discuss her drawings

Ask your child questions about her drawings such as:

"What is the boy doing?"

"Does the house look like ours?"

"Can you tell a story about this picture?"

Show an interest in, and ask questions about, the things your child says, draws, and may try to write.

Ask your child to tell you simple stories as you write them down

Copy the story as your child tells it, without making changes. Ask them to clarify anything you don't understand.

Encourage your child to write their name

Practice writing your child's name and point out the letters in your child's name when you see them in other places (on signs, in stores, etc.). They may start by only writing the first few letters of their name, but soon the rest will follow.

Use games

There are numerous games and puzzles that help children with spelling while increasing their vocabulary. Some of these may include crossword puzzles, word games, anagrams, and cryptograms designed especially for children. Flash cards are fun to use too, and they're easy to make at home.

Turn your child's writing into books

Paste your child's drawings and writings on pieces of construction paper. For each book, make a cover out of heavier paper or cardboard, and add special art, a title, and their name as author. Punch holes in the pages and cover, and bind the book together with yarn or ribbon.

Day-to-day activities

Make sure your child sees you writing

Your child will learn about writing by watching you write. Talk with them about your writing so that they begin to understand why writing is important and the many ways it can be used.

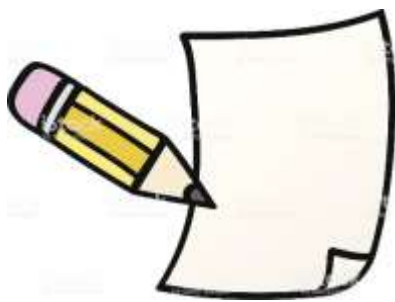
Encourage your child to write, even if they are scribbling

Give your child opportunities to practice writing by

helping them to sign birthday cards, write stories, and make lists.

As your child gets older, write together

Have your child help you with the writing you do, including writing letters, shopping lists, and messages.



Suggest note-taking

Encourage your child to take notes on trips or outings and to describe what they saw. This could include a description of nature walks, a boat ride, a car trip, or other events that lend themselves to note-taking.

Encourage copying

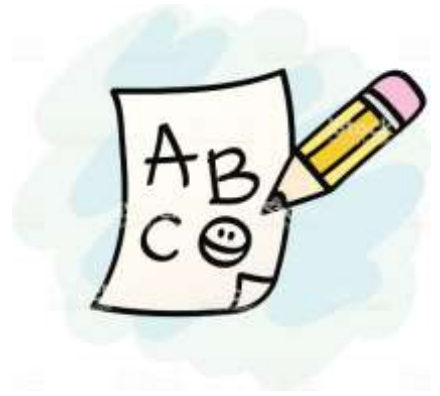
If your child likes a particular song, suggest that she learn the words by writing them down. Also encourage copying favorite poems or quotations from books and plays.

Encourage your child to read their stories out loud

As your child gets older, ask them to share their stories with you. Listen carefully without interrupting, and give them positive feedback about their ideas and their writing!

Hang a family message board in the kitchen

Offer to write notes there for your child. Be sure that your child finds notes left there for them.



Help your child write letters and emails to relatives and friends

These may include thank you notes or just a special note to say hello. Be sure to send your child a letter or card once in a while too so that they are reminded of how special it is to get a letter in the mail. Consider finding a pen pal for your child.

Encourage keeping a journal

This is excellent writing practice as well as a good outlet for venting feelings. Encourage your child to write about things that happen at home and school, about people she likes or dislikes and why, and about things she wants to remember and do. If they want to share the journal with you, read the entries and discuss them together.

Things to remember

Allow time

Help your child spend time thinking about a writing project or exercise. Good writers often spend a lot of time thinking, preparing, and researching before starting to write.

Respond to your child's writing

Respond to the ideas your child expresses verbally or in writing. Make it clear that you are interested in what the writing conveys, which means focusing on "what" the child has written rather than "how" it was written. It's usually wise to ignore minor errors, particularly at the stage when your child is just getting ideas together.

Praise your child's writing

Take a positive approach and find good things to say about your child's writing. Is it accurate?

Descriptive? Original? Creative? Thoughtful?

Interesting?

Help your child with her writing as she gets older

Ask your child questions that will help her clarify the details of their stories and assignments as they get longer, and help them to organise their thoughts.

Talk about the objective of what they are writing.

Provide your child with spelling help when she's ready for it

When your child is just learning how to read and write, they may try different ways to write and spell. Our job is to encourage our children's writing so they will enjoy putting their thoughts and ideas on paper.

At first, your child may begin to write words the way that she hears them. For example, she might write "haf" instead of "have", "frn" instead of "friend", and "Frd" instead of "Fred." This actually is a positive step in developing her phonemic awareness. Keep practicing with them, and model the correct spelling of words when you write. As your child gets older and begins to ask more questions about letters and spelling, provide them with the help she needs.

Practice, practice, practice!

Writing well takes lots of practice, so make sure your child doesn't get discouraged too easily. It's not easy! Give your child plenty of opportunities to

practice so that they have the opportunity to improve.

Read together

Reading and writing support each other. The more your child does of each, the better they will be at both. Reading can also stimulate your child to



write about their own family or school life. If your child has a particular favorite story or author, ask them why they think that story or that person's writing is special.

As you read and write more with your child, you will be building an important foundation and taking steps that will help your child to become a better reader, writer, and student. Your efforts now will make a difference — and it may be just the difference that your child needs to succeed!