

Write More, Read Better!

Writing is a fantastic deal for your child. It's like getting two skills for the price of one! One skill is writing, and the other is reading. It's impossible to write without reading, too. This is why schools have "language arts." It means that reading and writing should never really be separated from each other, but should always exist under the same umbrella.

The reading-writing connection

How exactly does writing help reading?

Research has identified many ways that writing supports reading skills (and the other way around!). These include:

- **Stronger phonics.** When reading, your child needs to be able to make the sounds he sees. Writing prompts your child to listen to the sounds in words, and then to use his eyes and hands to get these sounds down on paper. This gives him the opportunity to learn the sounds by listening, by seeing and by doing!
- **Comprehension.** When your child draws a picture and writes a few words underneath it, he is learning that writing communicates his thoughts and ideas. The words he writes are his expression of what his picture is about. He has just created a summary and stated the main idea—two critical skills for reading comprehension.
- **Memory.** Many children find that reading first and then writing down what they can remember is an excellent way to study. Writing acts like glue—it makes the reading "stick" in your child's memory!



What kind of writing should my child be doing to get these benefits?

That's easy—any kind! Every bit of writing helps, even the scribbling your child did as a preschooler.

The writing your child does now will help prepare her for producing longer and more sophisticated pieces. Giving her opportunities to write at home will put her in the best position to meet this challenge. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Use writing for family communication.** Keep a family message board. Leave daily notes for your child and ask her to do the same for you. Help her make "to-do" lists. Keep paper and pencil near your phone and teach her to write down phone messages.
- **Give your child a notebook.** Encourage her to use it as a journal. She can write down notes about her day, as well as thoughts and feelings she has. Assure her that no one will read it without her permission.
- **Encourage social writing.** If your child is just starting school, have her sign her name to birthday cards and thank you notes. If she's older, encourage her to write a message to go with her signature.
- **Ask for a story.** Tell your child that you'd like nothing better on a birthday or holiday than a story she has written. Have a young child tell you a story. Write it down. Eventually she will be able to write down her own stories.
- **Turn stories into gifts for others.** Help your child make a book by pasting each page of her story onto construction paper. Have her decorate two pieces of construction paper to make a front cover and a back cover. Punch holes on the left sides of the covers and pages, and loop some yarn through the holes to tie the book together. Remind your child to list her own name as the author and illustrator of the book.
- **Be a model.** These ideas work for adults, too! Nothing will teach your child the value of writing as much as seeing you write every day.



How can I get my child to enjoy writing?

- **Start a writer's toolbox.** Include different kinds of paper, stickers, pens and pencils.
- **Encourage your child** to write about what she likes to do.
- **Challenge her** to make up new endings to her favorite stories.
- **Write stories together.** Take turns writing sentences in a "shared" story.
- **Avoid correcting her mistakes.** She should feel safe to try out new words and invented spelling.
- **Ask her "What if?" questions** to spark creative writing. What if oranges were purple? What if dogs could talk? What if everyone had the same name?



- **Paying attention to mechanics.** As your child gets older, spelling starts to become more important, as does capitalization, punctuation and the proper use of words. The older your child gets, the more clearly he needs to express himself. He can work on these skills by writing more than one draft and editing each time.

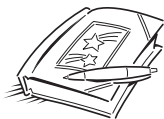
Always be an eager reader of your child's writing. Don't edit unless he specifically asks. Praise him for his effort and point out something you learned by reading what he wrote. Your interest is the best way to show your child the power of writing.

Putting good skills to use

What happens after my child has learned basic skills?

Around third grade, your child's teachers expect his reading and writing to rise to a new level. Instead of learning to read, he is reading to learn. Now he reads to gain knowledge and new ideas. As he gets older, he will use these skills to comment on what he reads and understand the author's purpose in writing. He'll need to advance his style by:

- **Using more sophisticated language.** Encourage your child to choose more vivid words. What tells you more: The players *went* on to the field, or The players *charged* on to the field?
- **Trying new reasons to write.** When an author writes, it is usually for one of three reasons—to inform, to entertain or to persuade. Have your child practice all of these.



1. **Informative writing** tells the reader something, like how elephants survive in the wild, or how to bake a cake.
2. **Entertaining writing** is usually creative, or includes humor—it's meant to bring a smile to the reader's face.
3. **Persuasive writing** wants to help the reader make up his mind. Which restaurant should he visit this weekend? Which candidate should he vote for?

Read about authors

If your child has a favorite author, find a biography about that person's life.



Learning what influenced an author may influence your child's writing, too. Here are some activities your child may enjoy:

- **Writing to the author.** This can be done via letter or email. Keep in mind that while some authors always respond, others cannot.
- **Imitating the author's style.** The author probably has a writing style your child can try—humor, short sentences or a certain point of view.
- **Writing a short essay about the author.** Maybe she can write her own biography about the author's life.

Recommended reading

Try using reading time to encourage your child to write. Choose books about writers, or books where writing and language are important parts of the plot. Here are some books your child will enjoy:

- **Dear Mr. Henshaw** by Beverly Cleary
- **Harriet the Spy** by Louise Fitzhugh
- **Mostly Michael** by Kimmel Smith
- **Punctuation Takes a Vacation** by Robin Pulver
- **The Wonderful O** by James Thurber