

Ideas for Parents: How to Help Your Child Become a Stronger Writer

Provide a place:

Your child needs to have a smooth, flat desk/table with good lighting.

What you need:

- Pencils, crayons, or markers
- Yarn or ribbon
- Writing paper (lined and unlined) or notebook
- Cardboard or heavy paper
- Construction paper
- Safety scissors

Brainstorm:

Talk with your child as much as possible about their ideas and encourage them to describe people and events to you.

Encourage the child to draw and to discuss their drawings:

Ask your child questions about their 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 just as your child tells it. Ask them to clarify anything you don't understand.

Encourage your child to write their name:

Practice writing their name and point out the letters in their name when you see them in other places. 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 their 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.

Make sure your child sees you writing:

They 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 she's scribbling:

Give them opportunities to practice writing by helping them 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 favourite poems or quotations from books and plays.

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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 they find 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 too so that they are reminded of how special it is to get a letter in the mail. Consider finding a pen pal for them.

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 they like or dislike and why, and about things they want to remember and do. If they want to share the journal with you, read the entries and discuss them.

Things to remember:

1) 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. Your child may dawdle, sharpen a pencil, get papers ready, or look up the spelling of a word. Be patient — this may all be part of their preparation.

2) 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.

3) 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?

4) Avoid writing for your child:

Don't write a paper for your child that will be turned in as their work, and don't rewrite your child's work. Meeting a writing deadline, taking responsibility for the finished product, and feeling ownership of it are also important parts of the writing process.

5) Help your child with their writing as they get older:

Ask your child questions that will help them clarify the details of their stories and assignments as they get longer, and help them organize their thoughts. Talk about the objective of what they're writing.

6) Provide your child with spelling help when they're 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 they hear them. For example, they might write "haf" instead of "have", "frn" instead of "friend", and "Frd" instead of "Fred." This actually is a positive step in developing their 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 the help they need.

7) 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 them plenty of opportunities to practice so that they have the opportunity to improve.

8) 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 favourite story or author, ask them why they think that story or that person's writing is special.

9) Your efforts now will make a difference!